

## Trophy Hunting in the Shadow of the Castle Keep

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The two papers we reviewed in preparation for writing these commentaries showed in unhappy and graphic detail how poorly received our journal article writing is, even among researchers and practitioners in our own fields. The implications are unsettling: either one can apparently get by reasonably well without reading much of anything published in our fields, or there is nothing much happening in our fields to be of interest to our own educators and practitioners, or other outsiders. Each of these conclusions is disturbing, especially because most people involved in leisure, recreation and tourism fields are well-intentioned, socially-conscious folks who hope to make a difference in the world through their research, writing, and reading.

These unsettling conclusions are likely to tempt us into a bout of scholarly hand-wringing and intellectual soul-searching aimed at further assessing each other's motivations for reading or not reading, citing or not citing, journal articles. I tend to think this would be a useless endeavor. Rather than accept the initial, implicit assumption that "things are bad and getting worse," I would raise a different question altogether: why should we even expect that anyone would read our journal articles? Publication is never a guarantee of readership, except perhaps for romance novels, comic books, or family members' e-mails. I am thus inclined to offer an alternate perspective, grounded in sociological theorizing, to account for our lack of collective clout in academic and public life: maybe it is the publication of journal articles that matters most to us . . . not their reading. There is ample informal evidence to suggest that the act of reading journal articles is vastly under-appreciated. For example, vitae do not generally list the names of journals a person regularly reads. Only rarely does a search committee ever ask about a candidate's reading habits. No one ever requests at tenure time a list of journals to which the candidate subscribes. Even published literature reviews are often pro forma rather than insightful and invigorating. In my experience, colleagues rarely discuss journal articles in casual conversation (in fact, colleagues rarely even acknowledge that they've seen one's recent articles in print). If reading journal articles is a necessity, it appears to fall only within the job descriptions of graduate students, who are asked to read "the classics" in order to demonstrate mastery of materials that students apparently never need to read again.

I believe there is also a strong theoretical basis to support the idea that it is publication of journal articles, not reading articles, that matters most. Despite our inherent moral concerns for making the world a better place, I think we are encouraged by advisors who want to see us "succeed" to write

journal articles for reasons other than moving the field forward. We write because we know the system, we're good at it, it gives us pleasure to succeed, it displays our skills to our colleagues, and we are rewarded for it. The list of potential rewards is long, but certainly includes visibility, status, jobs, tenure, awards, appointments to positions, introductions to and accumulations of graduate students, funding for projects, and other benefits. This suggests an exchange theory of journal article writing. People do things for which they are rewarded, and publishing research results in academic journals is one of the best ways of obtaining rewards.

"No!," I can hear esteemed colleagues exclaim, "we write because we want to influence science or policy, or because we have something very important to say!" It is true that some academics are blessed with enthusiasm, moral concern, or passion, and write for other goals than to achieve the field's rewards. But, I would submit that the people who are most likely to do so are tenured professors (the ones who do this without tenure run the risk of having to find other careers). Tenured professors can afford the luxury of writing what they please, how they please, on whatever schedule they please. Indeed, their success in doing so (and, we might note, in being cited for their work) is at least in part a reflection of the extent to which they have been around long enough to have "learned the system" and are unencumbered by institutional restrictions that attend younger colleagues and graduate students. Tenured professors are also the ones whose voices carry significant weight in making all those decisions that affect the untenured, the unfunded, and the un-graduated. Citations are ephemeral; their collective weight is visible only to people who make a conscious effort to go looking for patterns. On the other hand, journal articles are substantive and tangible; they can be numbered, counted, and ranked. Journal articles are the test for inclusion into the academy of scholars. The process of writing articles for publication is a right of passage whereby newer or younger colleagues and graduate students are socialized into the normative order of research topics, methods, hierarchies of positions, as well as the "proper way of doing things." Published journal articles, in fact, are one of the most obvious indicators of acceptance into the community of scholars, and those who work outside of expected roles—those who have not put in their years in the apprenticeship system, or those who follow passions rather than career logic, or those who question the status quo (as the recent report about MIT women faculty shows)—are often, in public or private, in subtle or obvious, ways, chastised for not being team players, for not doing what is expected, for not following the rules, for not being serious scholars.

Occasionally, an odd character slips through, but the continuing pressure to keep writing and publishing journal articles ensures that academic scrutiny continues over time. No one is ever excluded from review—it's just that some have the status to be able to care about outcomes less than others. Sadly, the over-riding message is that what really seems to matter is not the extent to which one becomes scholarly—that is, well-versed and learned in the content of the field—but the presence or absence of one's own articles

relative to publications of others. In essence, journal articles are the trophies hunted with diligence and hung on the library walls and along the corridors and in the drawing rooms of that imaginary collegial castle through which academics parade, gazing and counting and evaluating. The more trophies you have, the better off you are likely to be or to become.

The recent proliferation of new journals in our fields supports this point: more journals mean more and more opportunities to publish, not necessarily to read. A journal, after all, is a regulatory institution. It offers opportunities in the name of advancing scholarship and informing practitioners, but it also keeps "deviant careers" in check through normative processes of influence and control. Journals legitimize a certain type of moral order, stratification, and organization to the universe of academic life. Authority is clearly vested in the positions of editor and associate editors, but continuity is sanctioned by the corporate body of scholars each time an article is submitted in the accepted style and accepted for publication. Thus does social structure persist. Moreover, thus do journal articles keep being published, and keep being unread.

What do all these worries about readership and numbers of citations mean for *Journal of Leisure Research* or *Leisure Sciences*? With all due respect to hard-working, well-intentioned colleagues around academia, I think the statistics have very little meaning. We will wring out hands for a bit, then will carry on, doing the same kinds of things as always. Keeping the system in working order, in equilibrium, is what it all seems to be about.

I end with an observation: I surely cannot be the only one who sees a number of ironies in this submission, the biggest of which might be that my written commentary is to be published in a journal where most people will not read it, and it is unlikely to ever be cited! Nevertheless, I submit these comments with some degree of hopefulness. We set this system up. We can change it if we wish to do so. If even one other person begins to wonder with me about why we do the things we do . . . well, who knows what new worlds we might create?