

Intentional Insularity? Alternative Interpretations of Jackson's Analysis

Diane M. Samdahl
University of Georgia

I could refute any *one* of the findings in Jackson's paper. As I read through it I made a list of points—alternative explanations or interpretations—that could be imposed on the findings. Some of these points were acknowledged by Jackson in his own reflections on the meanings of these analyses. However, the most compelling feature of this paper, and one I could not refute, is the fact that the same patterns emerged again and again as the data were systematically examined from a variety of perspectives. Whether he looked at publications or presentations, analyzed by person or by authorship, Jackson's analyses repeatedly led him to the same conclusion.

It surprised me that I tried so hard to refute his findings. In many respects, his message of insularity parallels and extends my own work in this area (cf. Samdahl & Kelly, 1999). Perhaps I was feeling defensive at the unflattering image his data conveyed about the parochial nature of American leisure researchers. Jackson began his discussion by citing Valentine, Allison, and Schneider (1999) who suggested that North American leisure scholars are ethnocentric, then Walker's (2000) rejoinder that forced a distinction between Americans and Canadians. By elimination, and in conjunction with Jackson's own discussion, this leaves the United States standing alone in a shameful myopia.

But putting national pride aside, I feel there are other important considerations that must be examined before accepting Jackson's conclusions. His analysis is meticulous and his results are clearly presented, but the *meaning* behind those statistical patterns is open to debate. It reminds me of an important distinction between quantitative and qualitative research: With interviews you would be able to return to the participants using probes and member-checks to see if your understandings were correct; with statistics you are on your own to impute meaning onto numbers.

An important overriding issue that undoubtedly influenced Jackson's database, and a point he himself acknowledged in his summary remarks, is the uneven nature of opportunities for publishing or presenting in the United States and Canada. Looking just at 1995, the midpoint of the decade in Jackson's analysis, the four American leisure journals published over 100 articles; in contrast, the two Canadian journals published 42. Likewise, from 1994 to 1996 there were over 330 papers presented at the American leisure

Address correspondence to Diane M. Samdahl, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, 349 Ramsey, 300 River Road, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602-6555, USA; Phone: 706-542-4333; Fax: 706-542-7917; Email: dsamdahl@coe.uga.edu

research conferences; during that same period the Canadian leisure conference, which only occurs once every three years, had 77 presentations. Given that American and Canadian leisure researchers are comparably productive (Table 1), and that the United States offers significantly more opportunity for publications and presentations, it is hardly surprising to learn that Canadians are more likely to publish or present in the United States (Tables 2-7). Though Jackson pointed out this concern, he pushed it aside as less important than the striking patterns in the data. I argue that this concern might *explain* those patterns and that all interpretations should be filtered through this fact. We must be cautious giving any other interpretation to these results.

Another important point stems from the unique decade that is captured in Jackson's analysis. In the 1990s Canadian leisure research was just beginning to emerge with an international reputation. This decade saw the establishment of the first Canadian doctoral program that was solidly grounded in leisure studies. Most Canadian students came to the United States to earn their doctoral degrees, where they undoubtedly were socialized towards the American leisure research outlets. That background plus on-going collaborations might account for some of the Canadian presence in American journals and conferences. Does this mean Canadians were less parochial? Or were they simply using and extending the networks that circumstance had provided?

These tables also imply that co-authorships are more common among American leisure scholars than Canadian leisure scholars. For example, in Table 2 we see that 61% of Americans published in the American journals but they accounted for 91% of the authorships. Some of that difference is likely due to the presence of multiple authors on articles. The relatively larger size of faculties in the United States plus the presence of doctoral students with whom to collaborate created an increased opportunity for American researchers to co-author their work. The extent to which these factors account for the patterns revealed in these analyses is unclear but they undoubtedly influence the data on authorships presented at the bottom of Tables 2 through 5.

After documenting in Table 1 that researchers from each country were more likely to appear in journals and conferences within their own country, it would have been appropriate to redesign the remaining tables before analysis. The discussion associated with those tables clearly compares Americans and Canadians who published or presented *within their border*, *across their border*, or *both* but the current tables show this comparison in cells that are on the diagonal. Restructuring the tables to reflect whether or not researchers stayed within their own country would realign the columns so that large numbers were compared to large numbers and small to small. This would greatly reduce the reported Chi-squares and p-values (already inflated due to the large sample size). Admittedly, the patterns in these data are so striking that this correction would not negate the statistical significance in most tables. However, if the tables were revised as noted they would more clearly highlight similarities and encourage a more muted discussion of differences.

While many of Jackson's results speak clearly for themselves, there are a few findings he did not discuss that might contradict his interpretations. For example, in Tables 5 and 6 Jackson pointed to the fact that Americans represented a smaller percentage of authors in Canadian journals and conferences than their overall percentage in the sample. While true, it is unclear why he chose to emphasize that comparison rather than to directly discuss the table percentages like he had done for other analyses. When looking at the percents that Jackson passed over, we see that Americans account for half of the authorships in the two Canadian journals and almost half of the authorships at the Canadian conference. Rather than supporting Jackson's contention that Americans are less likely to adopt an international orientation, these same tables might be used to document a strong and significant presence of American scholars in Canada. In fact, we might wonder if that number could have been even higher except for the actions of Canadian editors and conference chairs who needed to guarantee a visible presence of Canadian scholarship in those Canadian venues.

The final concern I will raise, and perhaps the most important point given the unequivocal nature of the statistics, has to do with the attribution of meaning to these facts. Each of the points above offers an alternative explanation for why the patterns emerged as they did. There are more American outlets, Canadian research was establishing an international presence at the beginning of that decade, Canadian scholars were likely to have studied at American universities, and so forth. We cannot know the extent to which these factors are responsible for the patterns this analysis has revealed. But over and above that, without trying to explain how these patterns came about, we must be cautious in our attribution of meaning. Jackson claimed that these data speak for themselves but I disagree. Statistics do not provide the ultimate answers to our questions; they simply reveal relationships that are given meaning via the language we use to describe them.

I look then at the language in Jackson's discussion of these findings. By concluding that Americans have a stronger *preference* for publishing and presenting in their own country we are led to believe that these patterns result from individual choices, that country and nationality are salient in making those choices, and that the final decisions reflect either a *parochial* or an *international* orientation of the individual. Indeed, this might be true. However, other explanations are equally compatible with these results including the broader historical and social explanations described above. But even remaining within the social psychological paradigm, one might argue that these data reflect individual choices that are not based on nationality but rather are based on a rational assessment of the merit of publishing or presenting in America. The Canadian journals are less likely to be found in American libraries (perhaps raising another accusation of parochialism but one that cannot be attributed to the individual) and were not included in databases such as the Social Science Citation Index that made one's work visible to those outside our field. The *Journal of Leisure Research* and *Leisure Sciences* have earned status as the premier leisure research journals in North America (at least as evaluated by many promotion and tenure committees).

And during the 1990s the American leisure conference was more likely to attract a large number of respected North American leisure scholars, offering opportunities for collegiality and networking that undoubtedly influenced people's decision to present at that conference. Jackson mentioned some of these effects but did not attribute enough significance to them. It is clear that the patterns in these data, even if due to individual choices and personal orientations, do not *necessarily* reflect ethnocentrism or parochialism as Jackson concluded in his discussion.

Jackson is to be credited for pointing out many of these alternative explanations. However, by mentioning them in passing but not using them to inform his conclusions Jackson showed a personal preference towards accepting parochialism as the cause of these patterns. In his final discussion Jackson ignored the extensive presence of Americans in Canadian journals and conferences and pushed aside other factors that conceivably could have shaped these data, and argued instead that Americans are not interested in crossing borders. On many levels it is difficult for me to argue against that for I believe it is true. However, I do not accept these data as evidence of that point. To be fair, Jackson made equally critical remarks about Canadians' worldview but again it is hard to validate those remarks based on the data in this manuscript.

It is with some embarrassment that I note, upon rereading what I have written, that my remarks exhibit a very similar bias. Whereas Jackson saw differences and interpreted them as reflecting the narrow parochialism of Americans, I saw those same differences and have tried to argue that they are *not* due to the superior international orientation of Canadians. Jackson and I looked at the same data but filtered our interpretations through very different lenses, and thus we were led to quite different conclusions.

These data excite me because they address issues I think are important to our field and force us to become more introspective about the nature of our work. These data frustrate me because their powerful and consistent patterns cannot be ignored but neither can they be easily explained. And these data upset me in a surprising show of defensiveness as I react to a Canadian critique of Americans. Though I disagree with the meanings Jackson imputed to the patterns in his data, I am glad to see this contribution and the ensuing discussions it will generate about a potentially controversial aspect of our field.

References

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