

Readership Is More Important than Publication Outlet

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When I worked at the University of Ottawa, Canada in the 1970s, I often traveled back and forth to the United States to visit family and friends. From Ed Jackson's study of where academics in Canada and the United States choose to published their work, we learn that the crossing of the intellectual border may be a rarer experience.

I must admit that on first reading Jackson's piece, I found little to get excited about. Despite the impressive database and meticulous analysis, I was not sure there was anything to be particularly bothered by, beyond the curiosity of looking at the data. But after a second reading, it seemed to me that Jackson's data and discussion raise or lead to some useful insights about whom we North Americans talk to and where we chose to publish.

Jackson discusses several explanations for the relative country-bound article submission decisions of North American scholars, although he makes a case that Canadians are more likely to publish in journals in the United States, than the other way around. There are several reasons for this pattern, some of which Jackson discusses and others which it seems to me are worthy of explication.

To me, the most important factor impacting publication preferences are beliefs about who has access to and reads each journal. How available is each journal in each country? If I am trying to achieve wide distribution of my thoughts and ideas, I want my manuscript to be in a journal that has the chance of reaching the widest possible readership. Thus, my manuscript submission decisions are based on who will be able to read the published piece: how available is each journal in Canada, the United States and elsewhere; and what journal databases abstract each journal. Several of the journals that Jackson reviewed are available and read in both the United States and Canada, but some more so than others. Some of the journals are included in journal databases that are regularly searched, others have less visibility.

Interestingly, I suspect Jackson, a well-published Canadian academic, chose to submit his article to the *Journal of Leisure Research* (JLR), rather than one of the five other North American journals he reviewed, because JLR has the largest subscription base and is considered by many to be the most prestigious of the journals on his list. The journal also has an editor interested in provocative submissions that will engender discussion and attract com-

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mentaries. There might have been one other journal from the six he reviews that would have commanded near the same level of attention, but I suspect *JLR* was the best and wisest choice.

Second, since all academics answer to an annual review process at their universities, reputation of the journal is also important. (Reputation is largely a subjective opinion. Please do not quote this as the justification for a flawed study of journal reputation!) Reputation is partly tied to potential readership, but is also related to the prestige of the articles published in a journal over time. I will initially send my manuscript to the most prestigious journal that publishes papers in the subject area of my manuscript. If the manuscript could be published in one of several journals, I would guess that a publication in *JLR* or *Leisure Sciences* (LS) would count more in the review process at many universities than one in the *Journal of Applied Recreation Research* (JARR). This may be a flawed assumption on the part of academic personnel committees, but I suspect one that guides many article submission decisions.

Third, as noted, most academics want to send their manuscripts to the appropriate subject-matter journal (although during my 22 years of journal editing, it is also clear that some people count prestige as the more important criteria and submit their manuscript to the wrong journal). Thus, I would not choose *Therapeutic Recreation Journal* or *Loisir et Societe* for a manuscript dealing with evaluation of after-school program outcomes. *Loisir et Societe* publishes a lot of special issues and thus, I would not choose that journal unless my paper fell within the parameters of a specific call for papers. (Publishing in special issues may guide a number of publication decisions that have nothing to do with origin country of the journal.) For my after-school article, I would probably send the manuscript to the *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* (JPRA). While JARR might be equally open to reviewing my evaluation piece, I am interested in having my article reach the largest number of practitioners and academics possible, thus JPRA would be my choice. JARR is less likely to be read in the United States while JPRA is more likely to be read in Canada. (My overall impression is that JARR is not widely known in the United States and would benefit from greater marketing). In addition, JPRA is an electronic journal, albeit recently, and in the future this will enable it to reach a broader audience. (As an aside, once all journals are electronic and all are indexed in the most popular search engines, where something is published may have far less impact than who actually reads a published article.)

Another striking result reported by Jackson is the low average number of publications by the academics included in his database. Even if we assume that a number of people are publishing in journals that are not on his list, the low overall rate of publication by a majority of academics over a ten-year period is more disturbing to me than the solitudes issue. Even if you say that the average person had only been in the field for five of the ten years Jackson covers, according to his data, only 91 people averaged the equivalent of one published paper per year.

Although not reported, it would be interesting to know what percent of the academics in Jackson's database are responsible for publishing 50% or

75% of the articles over the 10-year period he analyzed. Casual observation as a long-time journal editor and non-systematic sampling of publishing patterns of people interested in research and publishing would suggest that only a small percentage of people are publishing beyond tenure, and depending on the university where employed, some people do not publish very much before they get tenure. Different universities have different missions and workloads. Only a handful of universities in the United States and Canada have strong research missions and small enough teaching loads to enable the faculty to consistently publish.

Jackson also reports data about academics crossing the United States—Canadian border to make presentations at conferences. If we were to have complete cross-fertilization between the scholarly communities of the two countries, we would expect proportionate rates of participation by academics from the two countries in the Leisure Research Symposium and the Canadian Congress on Leisure Research. Jackson's data would suggest this is not the case. Again university reward systems, availability of travel funds and the differences in formats of the two conferences may account for at least some of the conference attendance patterns. In reality, the mixing of academics at conferences from the two (and certainly other) countries is probably a more critical issue than where scholarly papers are published. Cross-fertilization of ideas, in depth discussions, and critiques and analyses of each others work (and joining each other for a game of golf, racquetball or curling!), is much more possible in a conference setting. Finding ways to bring scholars from all countries together to share ideas would do more to advance the rigor and depth of leisure studies than trying to spread out what journals we publish in.

Another interesting issue that is worth looking at is the departmental membership and disciplines of published scholars. Cross-fertilization between disciplines and across different academic departments may in the end also be more critical than publishing across borders.

Finally, I will leave it to astronomers to verify or deny that the United States is the center of the universe. Whatever the conclusion, Jackson makes some interesting observations about how Americans view the configuration of the world of leisure research. If the small number of people that comprise the most productive group is only reading journals and talking to colleagues from their own country, there is a problem. However, my guess is that many of these individuals have reasonable contact and reputations with colleagues beyond their own borders. Their work is known and read outside their borders. They communicate via e-mail, through reading each others work, and meeting at conferences. For those less active, they may prefer to only present papers in their home country.

So, what does all this rambling add up to, and would it matter if it was published in an American or Canadian journal? The issue for me is who will read this, not necessarily the country in which it is published or presented, except to the extent that where it is published or presented impacts who reads or hears it. At the moment, the number of serious leisure scholars is relatively low, a more telling issue, than where they publish or present their

work. If I think back to my graduate school days, circa late 1960s, we were being told of the coming age of leisure research and the growth in the number of people interested in leisure issues. Interestingly, the number of scholars truly investigating leisure issues within the park and recreation field is still relatively small. My guess is that there are as many or more from other fields interested in the topic. How to increase the caliber, quantity and interrelationship of researchers interested in leisure is certainly worth thinking about, and Jackson's paper contributes to that discussion.