
Commentary

An Examination of Differences Between Academics and Practitioners in Frequency of Reading Research and Attitudes Toward Research

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Introduction

A concern often raised by leisure services practitioners and academics is that a large number of articles published in professional journals and magazines are not being read or put into practical use, particularly those articles with a research focus. In order to explore this often-discussed issue, a study was undertaken in the spring of 1997.

Methods

The study sought to determine who reads leisure-related periodicals and why they read them. The study also examined respondent attitudes toward the publication and dissemination of research in the field of parks, recreation, and leisure services. A 41 item instrument was developed, which included items about reading habits, attitudes toward the publication and dissemination of research, and demographic items. Two hundred names were randomly selected from the NRPA database and the survey was mailed to those individuals. One set of reminder post cards was sent one week after the initial mailing.

Results

Of the 200 in the original sample, 71 completed surveys were returned for a response rate of 35.5%. The respondents included 71.8% practitioners and 28.2% "professors who do some research" (other possible role choices for academics were researcher, and professor/do no research). The respon-

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dents were heterogeneous for years of experiences and age, with roughly an even distribution across these variables.

To determine who reads which periodicals, respondents were asked about their professional reading habits. The results of this question are seen in Table 1. As one might suspect, professors who do some research (academics) read the research-based journals more frequently than did practitioners. The *Therapeutic Recreation Journal* was the most frequently read of the research journals and *Parks and Recreation Magazine* was the most frequently read periodical overall.

The reported reading habits of practitioners and academics differed. For example, t-tests revealed that academics were significantly more likely than practitioners to read *Journal of Leisure Research*, *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, *Leisure Sciences*, and *Leisure Studies*, the *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance* and *Camping Magazine*. Practitioners and academics were equally likely to read *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, *Parks & Recreation Magazine*, and their state association journal.

In addition to the frequency of reading specific journals, respondents were also asked about the type of material read within the periodicals. The results of this item are found in Table 2. Academics reported that they read research articles more frequently than other types of journal material, while practitioners were more likely to read practice-based articles. When survey respondents were asked to comment on why they read some material over other types of material, 57.7% indicated that they read only that material that had some direct application to their work place (e.g., program ideas, "how-to" information about dealing with conflict, product information that directly related to an upcoming purchase), 15.5% stated that what they read was dictated by their personal interests and time constraints; 12.7% of re-

TABLE 1
Frequency of Reading Selected Periodicals (Percents)

Journal	Never/Rarely			Sometimes			Often/Every issue		
	All	Prac	Acad	All	Prac	Acad	All	Prac	Acad
JLR	64.2	85.4	10.5	17.9	12.5	31.6	17.9	2.1	57.9*
JPRA	75.4	90.0	36.8	15.9	8.0	36.8	8.7	2.0	26.3*
L Sciences	74.3	94.0	25.0	15.7	6.0	40.0	10.0	0.0	35.5*
L Studies	86.4	95.9	58.8	7.6	2.0	23.5	6.1	2.0	17.6*
TRJ	61.8	65.3	52.6	19.1	18.4	21.1	19.1	16.3	26.3
Parks & Rec	7.0	3.9	15.0	26.8	27.5	25.0	66.2	68.6	60.0
State journal	33.3	32.0	36.8	14.5	16.0	10.5	52.2	52.2	52.6
JOPERD	71.0	81.6	45.0	15.9	14.3	20.0	13.0	4.1	35.0*
Camping	82.6	87.8	70.0	8.7	8.2	10.0	8.7	4.1	20.0*

*significant differences between academics and practitioners at $p < .05$.

TABLE 2
Mean Percentage of Types of Materials Read

Type	All	Practitioners	Academics
Practice-based	31.25	36.94	16.58*
Research	24.96	14.45	52.05*
News stories	16.93	18.53	12.79
Product information	10.60	12.79	4.95*
Overviews	10.13	11.85	5.79*
Book reviews	5.54	4.65	7.82*

*significant differences between academics and practitioners at $p < .05$.

spondents read information in periodicals to keep up on news in the profession; and only 5.6% indicated that they were interested in new research findings.

Survey respondents were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with a variety of statements related to the publication and dissemination of research. These 25 items were rated on a five point Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. For the present analysis, responses were collapsed into two categories—agree and disagree. Neutral responses were deleted from the analysis. Table 3 presents the results from the attitudinal items.

A series of ANOVAs was employed to determine differences between academics' and practitioners' responses to the attitude items. A test-wise alpha level of .05 was selected. A Bonferroni correction to address the probability of inflated family-wise error was considered. However, due to the increased probability of a Type II error that would result from using such a conservative a correction with this sample size, a decision was made to retain the .05 test-wise alpha level.

There were significant differences between academics and practitioners on only three of the items. There were no significant differences based on other demographic variables (years in the field, age, sex) on any of the items. The significant differences were found on "Research articles are easily understood by practitioners," where more academics disagreed with this statement than practitioners. More academics than practitioners agreed that, "Practitioners should be more involved in the conduct and publication of research," and that "It is acceptable to publish research for the sake of sharing complex information without application to practice."

Discussion

While many questions remain unanswered by the present study, two conclusions seem warranted. First, a large percentage of academics and practitioners do not read research journals. Between 61% and 86% of all respon-

TABLE 3
Attitudes Toward Writing and Publishing

Attitude	% Agree	% Disagree
1. In general, the purpose of publishing is to advance the profession.	71.4	10.0
2. People in academia do not read enough practitioner-oriented articles; they focus on research too much.	39.4	12.1
3. Practitioners should read research to stay current in the field.	57.7	7.2
4. It is not worth my while to publish in nonrefereed journals.	30.9	49.1
5. Research articles are easily understood by practitioners.	5.6	60.6*
6. It is important for all research articles to include a section about implications for practice.	82.9	5.7
7. In general, the purpose of publishing is to bridge the gap between research and practice.	51.4	14.3
8. Practitioners do not know how to apply information found in professional journals.	34.8	33.3
9. People who publish write more for academics than practitioners.	65.2	4.3
10. Practitioners do not read enough professionally-related journals.	41.8	17.9
11. In general, the purpose of publishing is to aid practitioners in solving local problems.	25.7	41.4
12. Research articles are easily applied by practitioners.	7.1	55.7
13. All those in recreation, parks, and leisure have a responsibility to read and understand research-based articles.	52.9	12.9
14. All published articles should have some applicability to the practice of the profession.	74.6	9.9
15. In general, the purpose of publishing in research journals is to advance the knowledge base of the profession.	76.8	7.2
16. Academics have a responsibility to write for practitioners.	48.5	20.6
17. In general, the purpose of publishing in practitioner-oriented journals is to advance the knowledge base of the profession.	75.7	4.3
18. Not enough academics are writing for general readers.	59.7	4.5
19. The problem with practitioner-oriented articles is that they are not based on theory.	7.8	56.3
20. Practitioners should be more involved in the conduct and publication of research.	53.6	13.0*
21. It is not important for practitioners to be able to understand research articles.	18.6	74.3
22. It is perfectly acceptable to publish research for the sake of sharing complex information without application to practice.	31.4	44.3*
23. I feel that I contribute to the field of park, recreation, and leisure services through my publications.	77.1	11.4
24. I see evidence of my published ideas in practice.	53.3	3.3
25. Writing practical and applied articles helps keep me connected to the field.	71.4	8.6

*significant differences between practitioners and academics at $p < .05$.

dents rarely or never read a research journal. These numbers are greatest among practitioners, with 65% to 96% reporting that they never read the major research journals. Why respondents read research journals so infrequently is unclear. Some respondents indicated that a lack of time limited their reading to overviews and articles of specific interest.

Second, the information gathered from the attitude items presents an interesting array of contradictions and differing viewpoints. For example, respondents agreed that published findings should advance the profession, bridge the gap between research and practice, and specifically advance the knowledge base of the profession. However, they disagreed that one of the purposes of publishing is to aid practitioners in solving local problems. While respondents did not believe that the purpose of publishing is to solve local problems, 83% did believe that all research articles should have an "implications for practice" section. Further fifty-six percent of respondents believed that research is not easily applied by practitioners, yet 74% believed that practitioners should be able to understand research.

These two conclusions provide empirical evidence for the widely-held and long-existent anecdotal discussion of the researcher-practitioner gap. The key question that looms is this, "Does the gap matter?" Is the body of research literature significantly diminished by the lack of involvement by practitioners? Is the world of practice significantly diminished by the existence of a non-influential body of research literature? These questions may well deserve additional attention.