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EDITORIAL

Your New Editor

At this writing it has been almost 6 months since I accepted the invitation to become the editor of *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly* (*APAQ*) and 5 months since I started becoming involved in editorial decisions. I thank the *APAQ* Editorial Board (EB) and Human Kinetics for their trust and faith in my ability to build on the work of my predecessors, important luminaries in the field of adapted physical activity. It is humbling and inspiring to be entrusted with the future of *APAQ* and to play a role in our important field of study.

I have three major purposes in writing this editorial. The first is to introduce myself to readers of *APAQ*. The second is to report on some preliminary observations about research submissions to the journal and how readers can address the issues I enumerate. Finally, I wish to share my vision for how to improve the quality and impact of *APAQ*.

I perceive myself to have an unusual background for an adapted physical activity scholar. I completed my PhD in sport and exercise psychology in 1992 under the guidance of Dr. Diane Gill at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. In that same year I started my present position at Wayne State University (WSU) and, with some chagrin, admit that I knew nothing about disability sport, adapted physical activity, or adapted physical education. Carol Mushett, a prominent disability scholar and advocate, who was also at WSU, was quick to cure me of my ignorance. Attendance at two week-long summer-camp disability sport competitions in Scotland and England and seeing the joy experienced by children participating in sport was an emotionally moving experience. At the same time I recognized that scientists in sport and exercise psychology, with some rare exceptions, had produced very little research involving individuals with disabilities and that there was clearly a need for development of the knowledge base in the area. The disability sport camp experience and the dearth of research were my dual impetuses to devote my academic career to studying disability sport and exercise psychology.

Prominent individuals in the field and involved in *APAQ,* such as Claudine Sherrill, Greg Reid, and Dale Ulrich, welcomed me and were, and continue to be, supportive. Over the last 25 years disability sport and exercise psychology has become my major line of research as I have tried to bring sport and exercise psychology into the world of disability. Simultaneously, I have also sought to bring disability sport and adapted physical activity into the sport and exercise psychology world. I often find myself straddling both areas as I publish and present in the disciplines' respective journals and conferences. Back in the early 1990s it was extremely rare to find an edited sport and exercise psychology text with a chapter on adapted physical activity or disability sport. Today it is quite common to see book chapters devoted to disability and very gratifying to see the discipline of sport and exercise psychology recognize the involvement of people with disabilities in sport and physical activity.

APAQ Challenges and Potential Solutions

Despite previous experience as an Editor (*Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*) and as an Associate Editor at four different journals, I have quickly realized that *APAQ* is unique. This uniqueness brings with it a series of challenges and opportunities to improve the well-being of the journal. As many readers know, *APAQ* publishes articles that span, to mention a few example disciplines, physical education, biomechanics, exercise physiology, sport psychology, and sociology. *APAQ* also publishes research that, broadly speaking, can be classified as both quantitative and qualitative in nature. The methods and philosophy of science behind each are different, although those differences tend to be exaggerated while similarities are often ignored (Martin, 2011). I have also noted that authors of submissions to *APAQ* come from a host of disciplines aside from those mentioned previously. For instance, researchers aligned with rehabilitation, medicine, health, recreation, and leisure, as well as experts in specific disabilities (e.g., spinal-cord injury), submit papers to *APAQ*. Finally, *APAQ* clearly has an international reputation, as authors come from countries spanning the globe.

This observation comes with some challenges for authors, reviewers, and editors of *APAQ*. For instance, researchers for whom English is not their native language are faced with the extra responsibility of soliciting English experts to help them write their articles. In 2016 we received submissions from authors in 26 different countries. Certainly the *APAQ* reviewers and EB and Human Kinetics professionals, often behind the scenes, are critical to getting manuscripts into good shape. Ultimately, however, it is the author's responsibility to make strong and good-faith efforts to ensure that their research efforts are well written. I should also note that many English-first authors, including myself, often have difficulty spinning a grammatically correct phrase. *APAQ* is not unique in facing the challenge inherent in poorly written papers (Jiwa et al., 2011). For example, 30% of the submissions to the *Australasian Medical Journal* contained major grammatical errors. Authors from backgrounds such as medicine are reminded that their submissions must adhere to the standards contained in the American Psychological Association publication manual. It is disheartening to send submissions back to authors when these guidelines have been completely ignored. The number of authors who appear to ignore the page-limitation guidelines offered on the *APAQ* Web site is also surprising.

Another observation that has become apparent to me, and a challenge I often face in my own research in the area, is related to sample size. It can be difficult in many research studies to recruit an adequate sample size. I recall early in my career going to multiple road races over a 3-year period to eventually obtain an adequate sample size for a study I was conducting on wheelchair road racers. While the causes of small samples are understandable, they are, nonetheless, a design weakness. One way to offset small samples is for researchers to get creative in their designs and conduct more research examining within-subject longitudinal change (e.g., Giacobbi et al., 2006).

The most pernicious outcome of small samples can be found in the underpowered analyses of those studies. When multiple nonsignificant findings are reported, albeit with moderate effect sizes, reviewers and potential readers cannot know if the results are a function of the study being underpowered or if the null hypothesis truly reflects the phenomenon of interest. Authors are urged to conduct

a prior power analysis to determine an adequate sample size given their research design and, notably, to report the results of their power analysis. Linked to sample size and significance testing are effect sizes, and authors submitting to *APAQ,* as noted on the Web site, should not only report effect sizes but also *interpret* them (Ferguson, 2009).

During my short stint so far at the helm of *APAQ* I have also noticed that researchers rarely discuss missing data and how missing data were managed. Researchers and statisticians are giving the topic of missing data far more attention today than just 10 years ago (Little & Rubin, 2014). When various statistical tests are reported in a paper and the tests stem from varying sample sizes, it is clear that data are missing. Researchers submitting to *APAQ* should routinely describe the amount of missing data and how that "missingness" was managed.

Researchers should also discuss the validity and reliability of their data from a contemporary perspective. For example, "scales" are no longer considered valid and reliable. Validity is defined as "the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretation of test scores entailed by proposed uses of tests" (AERA et al., 1999, p. 9). Validity is not about validating a test but about validating the interpretations of test scores found in a specific sample in a given context (Zumbo, 2009; Zumbo & Chan, 2014). Qualitative researchers also face similar challenges and, despite the *APAQ* Web site's advice regarding qualitative submissions (e.g., Sparkes & Smith, 2014), it appears that some authors do not, or are unable to, to avail themselves of this information. These observations are designed to improve *APAQ,* and improving *APAQ* leads me to the next major purpose of this editorial.

A Vision

Improving *APAQ* and continuing its fine legacy require a focus on quality. Publishing high-quality research will ensure that *APAQ* remains the go-to resource for adapted physical activity scholarship. I would also like to see research submissions that represent creative thinking and push the boundaries of knowledge. Finally, I hope to extend *APAQ*'s reach and expose it as a reputable publication outlet to professionals from nontraditional kinesiology disciplines. Evaluating the quality of any journal is a difficult and, to some degree, a subjective task. Nonetheless, I will next articulate my vision of how to improve the quality of *APAQ* with a focus on reducing reviewing time and increasing the impact factor (IF).

Reducing Reviewing Time

My initial focus has been on reducing the duration of time from submission to decision. I hope to accomplish this by increasing the size of the EB and using the desk-reject option. I next explain both strategies in some depth.

Readers should understand the review process as described next as a context for how reviewing can often be slower than we would all like. Papers initially arrive at the editorial office (Human Kinetics) and are processed and sent to the Editor in Chief (EIC), who in turn assigns an Associate Editor (AE). In turn the AE sends out reviewer invitations. Delays, even reasonable ones of 1–2 days, can add up and cumulatively result in the review process not even starting until 1–2 weeks after the submitting authors click their computer mouse button to submit.

It is not unusual for AEs and the EIC to invite multiple reviewers before two are confirmed. Many potential reviewers decline to accept invitations, particularly if they are ad hoc reviewers who are unfamiliar with *APAQ*.

It is worth reminding readers that peer reviewers are unpaid, and in many cases their efforts go unrecognized in any formal sense. In the current climate of "academic capitalism," upper administrators in the academy often want professors pursuing research funding and not spending time reviewing. The critical role that reviewers play in the publishing process goes unrecognized by these administrators, and even among some frequently published authors who infrequently review. In one study of five biomedical journal reviewers, the major reason to decline reviewing was a lack of time due to conflicts with other professional obligations. One incentive expressed by respondents is an appointment to the EB of journals, which I will discuss shortly (Tite & Schroter, 2007).

Submission time to first decision is a critical stage in the review process and often the one submitting authors are critical of (Azar, 2004; Lotriet, 2012). In one study of 3,500 review experiences reported by submitting authors, 39% of the critical comments were about the lengthy review process (Azar, 2004). My goal for *APAQ* is to decrease the average time from an initial *APAQ* submission to first decision, as well as the average time to a final decision. Our discipline is relatively small, and in the current world of social media both positive and negative appraisals of the review process travel quickly. Long reviewing times can alienate authors and discourage future submissions. Authors are also culpable if they procrastinate in their revisions. Initial *APAQ* evidence for the start of 2017, while preliminary, is promising. The first 2 months of 2017 indicated an average review time of 13 days, not including data on desk-reject decisions.

Hence, my first strategy, which I am just starting to implement in order to decrease reviewing time, is to increase the number of members on the EB. Although not all EB members agree to review 100% of the time, their acceptance of an appointment to the EB is an acknowledgement that they will support the journal by routinely (within reason) accepting invitations to review. A larger EB will reduce reliance on ad hoc reviewers and, as a result, reduce review time.

The second strategy I have implemented is a desk-reject option. Authors put much time and effort into their submissions and, after finally submitting a paper, often experience a sense of relief and anticipate a break from that particular research project. Receiving a desk-reject decision within 2–4 days can be disheartening, and I have empathy for authors receiving one as a consequence. However, receiving a desk reject after a month, which is not uncommon for some journals, is extremely upsetting given that the authors have waited very long to receive news that the submission was not even entered into the review process. Hence, at *APAQ* desk-reject decisions have been made within 2–3 days, often in consultation with an AE or EB member and with the provision of an attendant rationale (e.g., fatal flaws, poor fit with the mission of *APAQ*). Desk-rejection decisions save time for both authors and reviewers, help mitigate reviewer fatigue, and reduce the frequency of instances where authors make several revisions and still are rejected. Reducing long review times and being responsive to inquiries is respectful toward authors submitting papers while also being positively associated with perceptions of journal quality (Zhang, Zhang, & Law, 2012). However, it is also a pragmatic way to potentially influence my second major goal for *APAQ:* increasing the impact factor.

Increasing the Impact Factor

As readers likely know, the impact factor (IF) is based on citations of articles relative to articles published. Before discussing the IF, I want to acknowledge that it is a flawed measure and has been roundly criticized (Brumback, 2009; Campbell, 2008). For instance, it was originally developed to compare journals but has since become an index used to judge authors (Garfield, 1999). For better or worse, however, it is a reality of the publishing world and a factor that plays a role in a wide variety of decisions including determinations on selection of potential publication venues, funding of research, and tenure and promotion determinations. Citations, a journal's rejection rate, and, as mentioned earlier, reviewing time are linked to the IF. In Aarssen et al.'s (2008) study of 60 journals, for example, the rejection rate and the IFs were positively associated (r = .74). Journals with low rejection rates had low IFs and journals with high rejection rates had high IFs. The *APAQ* rejection rate has held relatively steady over the last 5 years, ranging from 68% to 81% with a slight downward trend. *APAQ*'s rejection rate is comparable to those of other Human Kinetics journals (e.g., 2016: *Journal of Teaching Physical Education* 76%, *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 83%). Citations over the last 5 years have held steady (ranging from 611 to 692), as has the IF (ranging from 1.08 to 1.49).

The link between review time and IF can be elucidated by the following example. The 2-year *APAQ* 2016 IF is calculated based on the number citations to *APAQ* articles published in 2014 and 2015 divided by the total number of articles published in those same years. An article published in 2017 will only contribute to the 2-year IF for 2018 and 2019. Any citations to that article after that will not count toward a 2-year IF. It should be clear then that once authors become aware of a 2017 article in order to cite it, and have it contribute to the 2-year IF, they must have an article ready to submit. Then that article must get reviewed and published, all in less than 3 years for it to influence the 2-year IF. This scenario suggests that review time influences the IF (Garfield, 1999). Long review times and time to acceptance by journals will harm the IF. Conversely, quick review times and acceptance rates will help increase the IF. Various researchers have tested this hypothesis and have found support for it (Lievers, 2013). For example, in a study of 42 journals, including seven from a sport-science category, researchers found that time to acceptance and publication time negatively correlate with the 2-year IF. In general, journals with the quicker acceptance and publication times have stronger IFs than journals with sluggish acceptance and publication times.

Given the value of citations to the IF it is important to determine how to legitimately increase citations to *APAQ*. To date, critics of the IF have often discussed unethical and dubious practices such as the top-ten IF manipulation strategies (e.g., inflated self-citations) noted by Falagas and Alexiou (2008). However, there are legitimate ways to increase citations and the IF. Web sites such as Google Scholar list most research articles automatically. However, other Web sites require that authors list their articles. Hence, readers and authors of *APAQ* articles should make sure they list their publications on personal university Web sites and other popular sites such as academic.edu and ResearchGate. Exposing more readers and scientists to your publications increases the odds that someone might read, use, and cite your work, including articles in *APAQ*.

Conclusion

In ending I would like to reiterate that I am honored and grateful to lead *APAQ* for this 3-year editorship. Meeting the goals herein will depend to a large degree on the quality of papers that authors submit and the quality and timeliness of the reviews completed by EB members, AEs, and ad hoc reviewers. I thank all the constituents in our *APAQ* community of science in advance.

Jeffrey J. Martin, APAQ *Editor*

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