Editorial Perspective: The Contribution of the Manuscript-Review Process to Knowledge Development in Sport and Exercise Psychology

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The importance of quality research for the growth and advancement of knowledge in sport and exercise psychology is indisputable. Consequently, systematic attention is devoted in our graduate training to providing the types of learning and experiences that facilitate the development of competent researchers. There is another essential component of the publication process, however, that receives much less attention. Rarely do we discuss the importance of peer review, through the manuscript-review process, in shaping the course of knowledge development in our field. The purpose of this editorial perspective is to examine the nature of peer manuscript review and to discuss the roles and responsibilities of our reviewers in contributing to the continued scientific growth of sport and exercise psychology and to the professional development of our fellow researchers.

Peer review is essential to maintain the quality and credibility of our journals. Good manuscript reviews provide authors with an essential "third-party perspective" that sheds light on both the strengths and the current limitations of their work. This outside feedback should enhance the quality of a manuscript and can stimulate the author to consider additional possibilities for the conceptualization and design of research in a given area. Poor reviews can also have a variety of effects. When authors perceive that the potential contribution of their work is not recognized by the reviewers, or when they feel that the reviewers have not provided them with sufficient feedback, they are likely to experience frustration, confusion, and even bitterness. Such an outcome tends to stifle motivation and future creative efforts. I believe that it is important to consider both the favorable and the unfavorable potential outcomes that can occur in light of the purposes and goals of the manuscript-review process. First, however, I would like to briefly summarize the review procedure that the Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology (JSEP) uses, although the primary focus of this editorial viewpoint will be on issues in the review process that affect the quality of research in our field.

The Manuscript-Review Process

JSEP's manuscript-review process is fundamentally consistent with the system of manuscript reviews employed by American Psychological Association

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journals. First, the editor evaluates each manuscript submitted to *JSEP* to determine its appropriateness in relation to the mission and focus of the journal. In accordance with the publication niche of *JSEP*, theoretically based manuscripts that address psychological issues in sport and exercise are considered appropriate for the journal and subsequently sent out for blinded peer review.

Manuscripts are typically sent to two reviewers. Most commonly, one reviewer is a member of the *JSEP* editorial board with expertise in the manuscript's subject area. A second reviewer is chosen according to specialized expertise in the area of investigation, and his or her name is selected from a pool of guest reviewers that has been generated in relation to authored publications in *JSEP* or comparable journals. Our guest-reviewer pool comprises nearly 250 individuals and is continually updated to include individuals who have recently published in a particular content area in sport and exercise psychology. In some cases, the manuscript is also sent to a third reviewer. Third reviewers tend to be individuals who either have extensive knowledge in the area of investigation or who have specialized expertise that will be beneficial in evaluating the study's methodology or statistical analyses. Third reviewers might also be younger members of our field who have been recommended as reviewers to the editor but who have not yet reviewed extensively for *JSEP*.

Each reviewer provides feedback that will later be sent to the author and submits a confidential recommendation to the editor with regard to his or her opinion on the publishability of the manuscript. When all reviews are received, it is the responsibility of the editor, or associate editor, to make the decision on publication. This decision is based on three considerations: the reviewers' recommendations, the nature and magnitude of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the reviewers, and the editor's own evaluation, relative to other manuscripts submitted to *JSEP*, of the potential contribution of the manuscript to our body of knowledge. When a manuscript will be considered for publication, the authors are provided the opportunity to revise and resubmit it in accordance with the reviewers' and editor's recommendations. Depending on the nature of the requested modifications to the manuscript, revised manuscripts might be sent out for further evaluation by the original set of reviewers. Given the page limitations of the journal, the authors of only about 15% of manuscripts submitted to *JSEP* during any calendar year are afforded the opportunity to revise and resubmit their work for possible future publication. Given the relatively low acceptance rate for the journal, the great majority of manuscripts submitted will not be published in *JSEP*, and it is therefore imperative that authors receive instructive feedback about their work that might assist them in publishing the manuscript in another journal or that will benefit them in future publication efforts.

Appreciating the number of individuals involved in the review process helps provide insight into the magnitude of the reviewing operation. During 1998, a total of 271 manuscript reviews were completed by 21 editorial board members and 137 *JSEP* guest reviewers. Thus, in addition to the work of the authors of the published papers, 158 individual reviewers and three editors contributed to the content of this journal. Many manuscripts are remarkably improved between first submission and publication, and, in most cases, it is the reviewers' comments that have contributed the most to this improvement. The quality of the journal reflects directly on the collective efforts of all contributing individuals.