
EDITORIAL POSTLUDE

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Aliterates' Scholarship

About once a week, the editor receives an e-mail that the author probably considers a submission to *JCA*. I call them my spam submissions; I no longer open the attachments and rarely do I reply. They are usually from overseas, with an often-repeated terse cover note in something approaching Pidgin English: "I hear much of you publication. Pleas consider this submission manuscript for you journal" (sic). My problem is not the language abuse. As a person who is only monolingual, I have the highest regard for people who are able to speak or write in a second language, no matter how weak their proficiency. Yet even allowing for the typist's paraphasia that afflicts everyone who has ever sent an e-mail, the senders must not have heard much of the journal, since they had not followed the most basic directions of the manuscript guidelines at our Web site that do not have a process in place for e-mail submissions.

We accepted less than 20% of the manuscripts properly submitted in the past couple of years. Yet as I compose letters to authors, or as recent doctoral graduates ask me about the hot topic areas they think the editors would prefer to see for new papers, it is easy to start thinking of the spam submissions.

After all, the hopeful authors for whom English literacy is not among their talents are not the most vexing difficulty we face. It would be nice if more so-called scholars of consumer interests were as willing to read academic journals as much as they like to collect data on the latest hot topic. Unfortunately, and too often, it becomes painfully apparent to both the editor and our reviewers that the authors appear unwilling to read.

Some just don't read *JCA*, or so I must think. We get a number of papers that are bench rejected without editorial review, simply because the paper is inappropriate for the journal. These are most often broad consumer psychology or marketing management papers, surveys or experiments focused

on how consumers act in the marketplace, with research questions and implications for business managers. I presume that they see the word “consumer” in the journal title and note that the editor is in a marketing department, so they send us the unaltered paper that was first rejected at *Journal of Consumer Research, Psychology and Marketing*, or *Journal of Advertising*.

And yet, even for some manuscripts that appropriately deal with consumer issues, reviewers’ notes to the editor implicitly wonder if the author is illiterate. Relevant literature is often listed but not integrated, then apparently ignored in planning the research or interpreting its meaning. The cited publications are presented in a near checklist form of who said something or other on a related topic, more often than not overlooking many key papers that could have strong implications for the research conceptualization.

My desire is to borrow a line often credited to the late Truman Capote who denigrated another author’s new book by saying, “This isn’t writing, it’s typing.”

Faculty are to be scholars and educators, but you don’t create scholars by directives for the faculty to publish articles. Deriding most academic research of every discipline, Page Smith (1990) repeatedly described many articles as written by people seeking to “do research,” rather than any scholarly or academic drive. That is unfortunate but possibly true.

As former teaching-oriented schools start raising research expectations on faculty, or as the historic polytechnic schools outside the United States are converted into universities, faculty who never did more than run classes must now oversee academic research programs to retain their jobs. Even before I was *JCA* editor I was sometimes invited to give a seminar on academic publishing for some of these newly pressured faculty. I would always start by saying, “What journals are you interested in reading?” They were not prepared for the question. They would come to the meetings because they were looking to write and publish and no one had said that the first step was to read academic literature on a regular basis.

But then, the problem is more fundamental than new research requirements on the research inexperienced. Even the weakest of low-prestige schools always have had their share of committed scholars (Caesar 2000). Even the best of schools have had people with a knack for publishing journal articles while not reading the papers they cite.

A scientist noting that the national pressure for grade inflation results in science graduates who do not possess a basic understanding of his work was not surprised—or should not have been surprised—to find applicants for graduate student positions in his lab to be science ignorant (Rojstaczer 1999). By a parallel process, illiterates have existed among undergraduates

for many years and faculty feel their presence is growing (e.g., Ramsay 2002), with those same grade inflation pressures ineluctably resulting in the less than scholarly able to get any type of degree. Over the years I have met Journalism majors who do not like to write, or English majors who do not like books, so we should not be surprised to find aliterates with doctoral degrees.

With the proliferation of journals and Internet databases to find materials, people gather literature like gathering a harvest, with a reference list generated even though the articles often are not read. Citations are made of other citations, complete with incorrect spellings of names if they were in the original list. Additional citations are gratuitously tossed in because the author is afraid that a journal referee might not see his or her favorite article listed in the references. Of course, this problem is not new, nor is it created by the Internet, though it could be credited with exacerbating the problem.

The job of a professor once meant “thinking for a living,” but with modern pressures for output, measurements of productivity and other counting what research was done, there is no longer time at a research university to simply discuss ideas or for faculty to have intellectual discussions that do not lead to published research articles. Ideas are too abstract, and no one can measure what is thought.

The basic concern for deciding which articles are published should be “What did this study add to our knowledge and understanding about an interesting and important question?” Research is not merely data collection. Fortunately, more and more *JCA* manuscript referees are asking this question of the authors, yet there remain a plethora of manuscript submissions for which the authors did not see this as an important item to address. Or worse, the authors feel that data collections should become important just because no one has done it or that it is inherently interesting just because there exists a plethora of citations of those who also studied it. Maybe no one has done it because it isn’t interesting; prior studies could have mined the area unto death.

What types of articles would we like to see submitted to the journal? We’d like to see more thinking by people who actually read their references and less writing in search of an article composed about the latest data pile. And when you read the articles published such as in this issue, you can see that we get many that are quite interesting.

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