



The internationalisation of the editorial process: a response to Keith Petrie

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[Petrie \(2007\)](#) challenged the editorial review process in our journals. He argued that the journals are American-centric, that our journals are biased against publishing non-US contributions, and have little or no non-US representation on our editorial boards. We share Petrie's view that health psychology is truly an international discipline and that substantial and broad international representation is crucial to scientific progress and to the journals we edit. However, we disagree with Petrie's claims of bias and find some of his claims and data about our journals to be in error or misleading.

Petrie states that "the status afforded non-Americans can be seen in the make up of the editorial boards" of our journals. It is true that most of the members of our editorial boards are from the United States. However, there is greater diversity than Petrie indicates. For example, Petrie claims that the *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* has "no non-Americans on its editorial board". In fact the *Annals* has five board members from non-US institutions as of this writing and has had for some time (Kerry Courneya, Jerry Devins, Blaine Ditto, Wolfgang Linden, Neville Owen). Importantly, in terms of manuscript reviewers the *Annals* called on and received external reviews from 49 non-US reviewers, for papers considered for the last volume (i.e., 3 issues) alone. Petrie states that *Health Psychology* also does not include editorial board members from outside the US. Since affiliations are not listed for *Health Psychology* editorial board members, it may be been easy to overlook the inclusion of Josh Bosch (University of Birmingham) and Andrew Steptoe (University College, London). Like *Annals*, *Health Psychology* makes regular use of reviews from a variety of countries.

Disagreement about numbers aside, the concern about editorial board member diversity and representation deserves some careful thought. *Health Psychology* is the official journal of the Division of Health Psychology of the American Psychological Association. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* (published by a predominantly European publisher, Springer) is the official journal of the Society of Behavioral Medicine. Each of these organizations has membership



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that is primarily American. Membership on the editorial board is typically regarded as service to these societies by their members.

We checked a few other international journals. The *Australian Journal of Psychology*, for example, has an editorial board made up exclusively of Australians. A review of recent contributions to the journal suggests that virtually all of the authors reside in Australia. Editorial boards from other society journals located in specific countries tend to include members who reside in those same countries. The Canadian journals, for example, include editorial board members and authors who are primarily

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Canadian. The problem is even more acute for non-English journals. German journals for example, focus on German authors and German editorial board members.

We are in agreement that we want to publish the best research from all over the world. Clearly we do not want to limit contributions to American or North American authors. High quality science is not restricted by international borders. We simply do not believe that there is discrimination against authors from other countries. In the case of *Health Psychology*, personal and institutional identity of authors is completely blinded in the review process. The editor does not know the identity of the author until the time a decision letter is created. Even in the preparation of the editorial decision, the editor and associate editors remain blinded to the affiliation of the author. Sometimes the method sections of articles reveal the country in which the research was conducted. However, we see no clear evidence of discrimination against international papers. In fact, reviewers are often attracted to studies that use subject populations that are different from our norm. Petrie reported his count of the proportion of papers published in our journals that were first authored by someone outside the U.S. However, without knowing the proportion of papers submitted by international authors, it is impossible to answer the central question Petrie's article raises. Is it indeed true that the rejection rate for international papers is higher than it is for US contributions? We believe the answer is, slightly. However, the reasons for rejection are typically based on methodologic concerns or judgment that the topic area is not appropriate for our journals. To more clearly quantify the possible differences in rejection rates, we examined the editorial disposition of the last 200 consecutive initial submissions for which decisions have been reached (as of 9/30/07) for the *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, one of the journals Petrie suggests may be biased toward non-American submissions. Of the last 200 non-solicited submissions to the journal, 135 (67.5%) of these papers were submitted by authors at American institutions while 65 (32.5%) were submitted by non-US authors. In terms of disposition, 78 of these same U.S. submissions (58%) were rejected outright (without opportunity for revision and resubmission) as compared to a slightly higher 41 (63%) of the non-U.S. submissions (note that these slight differences are for a journal in which blind review is not used).

In addition to the review of *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, we could not find much evidence to suggest that *Health Psychology* discriminates against non-US

authors. Robert Kaplan became editor of the journal in 2005, but papers he accepted did not begin appearing until March of 2006. Since that time 149 papers have been published and 44 of the published papers (or about 30%) have been contributed by non-US authors (30%). These authors have been from the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Italy, Israel, the Netherlands, Greece, China, Sweden, Finland, and several other countries. The real issue is that, because of space limitations, *Health Psychology* must reject nearly 90% of what is submitted. Understandably, many authors feel angered and discriminated against when their work is not accepted. However, foreign authors do about as well as US authors in their probability of having papers accepted.

Where do we go from here? We are proud to be the editors of the most widely circulated journals in our field. We would like nothing better than to have our journals grow even further as the international platform, not just the American platform, for high quality research. Further, we believe that the mission of our journals is to publish the best science, independent of where the scientific studies were conducted. We are not sure how best to achieve the goals of further internationalizing our efforts. Petrie's suggestion that our meetings be held in other countries may not be the best solution. There are international behavioral medicine meetings and we and other American journal editors and scholars do attend them. The organizations that sponsor our journals are American societies that depend primarily on meeting registration for revenue. The APA Division of Health Psychology, for example, meets as part of the American Psychological Association Convention. Placing that meeting in another country is an unlikely solution.

Making our journals the publication outlets for the best science in the world is indeed a worthy goal. While we believe each of our journals is making substantial progress, we also agree that there is more work to be done. We are pleased that hundreds of international authors have submitted and published their work in our journals and are confident that these numbers will continue to grow as we work to achieve a greater international presence for *Health Psychology* and the *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*.

References

- Petrie, K. (2007). The invisibility of international health psychology research. *The European Health Psychologist*, 9, 50-52.