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COMMENTARY

# The global impact of North American journal prestige: Understanding its effects on faculty life throughout the world

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In their focal article, Highhouse et al. (2020) present a thoughtful and thorough evaluation and discussion of journal prestige. Primarily through an extensive survey of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) members, they assessed the perceived prestige of many journals and investigated differences in these perceptions between psychology and business faculty members, as well as examining the views of researchers and practitioners. Despite the inherent interest and value in this information, it presents a somewhat limited, North American perspective. In particular, the focus remains mostly on journals edited by North American editors, written by North American authors, and containing primarily North American samples. In fact, the article makes no mention of the perspective of SIOP's international members, or of country, and it does not even describe the percentage of respondents from different areas of the world. Researchers have debated a potential American bias in psychology for years (Arnett, 2008; Webster et al., 2009). Below, we seek to broaden the discussion of journal prestige to incorporate the perspective of faculty working outside of North America. In all, we highlight how a North American view of journal prestige or "journal ranking fetishism," as some refer to it (Young et al., 2011), affects the lives of international faculty through tenure, promotion, research funding, and compensation policies and processes.

## North American bias

We applaud the authors for a job well done synthesizing their survey results but believe the findings could provide more value if they were discussed in the larger global context with an acknowledgment of cultural similarities and differences. Here, we present three issues that should be considered when generalizing these findings to the global community. First, the journals on this list, particularly the top tier ones, are mostly North American journals and published solely in English. This limits the inclusivity and understanding of populations outside of North America. Second, the reasons presented regarding why many trained psychologists flock to business schools often do not represent faculty in other countries where pay is based on rank and tenure, not discipline. Third, and consequently, industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology,

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outside of North America, is often housed in psychology departments due to the different foci of North American and non-North American psychology and management departments. These three issues potentially result in important differences and conclusions than those that were presented in the focal article.

### North American journals

North American bias is not a new challenge in academic contexts (Rousseau & Fried, 2001). In I-O psychology, the fact that seminal research in the field began in Germany and other parts of Europe makes this North American view of research puzzling, along with its reliance on English as the primary language of research (Brennan & Houde, 2018). Although many people would agree that there is a lot of high-quality research conducted in North America, the emphasis placed on high-tier journal publishing throughout the world has exponentially increased the amount of high-quality research coming from the rest of the world (Cascio & Aguinis, 2008). Ironically, one of the most well-cited management scholars of our time, Geert Hofstede (1980), was from the Netherlands, and almost 20% of the psychology/psychiatry category in the recent "Highly Cited Researchers" report is European (Web of Science, 2019). Recently, universities throughout Europe and Asia have attracted many of the top business and psychology scholars to head up departments and increase quality and prestige among their international colleagues. Altogether, as the number of objectively influential I-O scholars becomes increasingly international, so should our view of the prestige of journals from countries outside of North America and those published in other languages.

### Business school migration

Regarding the conclusions reached in the seminal article, these too are based primarily on a North American view of the field of I-O psychology. Yes, in North America, many psychology PhDs are moving to business schools. In part, this is due to business schools offering these faculty members two to three times their psychology department salary (Poteet et al., 2017). However, outside of North America, the situation is different. Salaries are often significantly lower and equally distributed across disciplines. When they are higher for certain disciplines, the salary gap is usually much smaller than in North America.

The preponderance of I-O psychologists working in psychology departments outside of North America is also due to the historical foundations of psychology and business studies. For the most part, psychology is rooted in the behavioral and cognitive tradition of Wilhelm Wundt (Titchener, 1921), whereas business schools first focused on practical applications and strategy (Friga et al., 2003). In Europe, in particular, the focus of many business schools is corporate social responsibility rather than topics more commonly researched by I-O psychologists (Thomas, 2012). In contrast, I-O psychology, outside of North America, primarily focuses on employee well-being and thus, it is most often housed in psychology departments.

### Research agendas

The representation of various areas within I-O psychology differs significantly across the globe. The representation of organizational health psychology, in particular, is much different in other countries than it is in North America. In Europe, for example, research on human relations and quality of work life has been common, beginning with the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, since 1947, and the Karolinska Institute in Sweden in the mid-1960s. In North America, scholarship on occupational stress did not begin until the mid to late 1960s with Katz and Kahn's (1966) groundbreaking work on role theory research and other work in the Social Research Institute at the University of Michigan. This preceded the inauguration of the National Institute for

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Occupational Safety and Health at the end of 1970 and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration soon after in 1971.

Importantly, funding for research often influences research foci in various countries and even the populations sampled within that research. By the mid-1990s, the priority placed on occupational stress and health began to decrease within the U.S. government, and so did the amount of research focused in this area. Although U.S. scholars did not lose sight of the importance of occupational stress and health, funding opportunities diminished in North America, while they grew in Europe. Similarly, in Western/Central Africa, the major funding focus is currently on personnel selection and occupational stress and health are consequently less researched (Glazer, 2013). It is important to note that reliance on funding also affects the populations sampled in different areas of research. In the case of organizational health psychology, research often involves non-North American samples since this focus is prevalent, and well funded, in other countries. However, in many other areas, this results in an overrepresentation of North American samples and a lack of information regarding similar relationships and mechanisms outside of North America (Henrich et al., 2010). In all, any discussion regarding journal prestige needs to also consider how differences in research around the world often reflect the funding available for it.

## Influence of journal prestige on international faculty

Maybe more important than a narrow perspective on aspects of journal prestige are the effects that this concept and resulting journals lists have on the work lives of international faculty. Although many uses and consequences of prestige are similar across countries, the lists used and the way governments and universities use these lists varies greatly outside of North America. As in many North American universities, (in)formal lists and citation counts often guide evaluation processes that include tenure and promotion. However, outside of North America, the lists can greatly affect compensation, job track, teaching load, and a variety of other job aspects. We discuss just some examples of these differences next.

### *Variety of lists of journal prestige*

As many international universities strive to compete with North American universities, they have slowly begun to create journal list rankings that are highly dependent on North American lists and sentiment, such as that presented in the focal article. This includes lists that are designed by individual departments and universities as well as those from government agencies and local associations. For example, the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA) and Excellence in Research for Australia use journal rankings to evaluate faculty (Young et al., 2011), whereas the Chartered Association of Business Schools in the UK and the French National Centre for Scientific Research have designed their own journal lists for faculty evaluation purposes. In many cases, these rely, at least in part, on the Thomson Reuters impact factor, and governments use these metrics to decide on funding and the competitiveness of faculty for various mechanisms and awards.

### *Implications on promotion and tenure*

In the UK, how the government uses these lists often affects the way faculty are employed and can even create a massive shake-up in employment practices immediately prior to a big evaluation year. This comes in two main forms: appointments that require little of a faculty member and massive evaluation-induced turnover. The former involves universities that employ faculty who have published several articles in journals that are high on the Chartered Association of Business Schools' list, with little to no expectation that they will engage with students and/or faculty at that institution. Many of these faculty members have full-time appointments at their

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"home" universities but benefit greatly from the financial benefits of this additional appointment. However, the schools often suffer dramatically because they pay faculty whose contributions to their institutions are otherwise limited. Additionally, when an evaluation year approaches, universities often engage in a sort of big game fishing expedition, trying their best to get productive faculty, as defined by the Chartered Association of Business Schools, to move to their school, even if for just the evaluation period. The reason for all of this is the ultimate ranking that each university receives and the prestige and funding that result from it.

In Spain, ANECA plays an especially important role in the livelihoods of faculty that are employed in public Spanish universities. Unlike in North America, faculty there must first navigate the arduous governmental process of obtaining accreditation equivalent to the level to which they desire promotion. Even then, there are no guarantees within one's department. For example, to obtain their first promotion (from Ayudante Doctor to Contratado Doctor), new faculty members must first apply to ANECA. Upon successful evaluation, they can then ask for a promotion from their current university. If they do not receive a positive evaluation from ANECA, the university will not promote them regardless of the internal value placed on them and the benefit they provide to the university.

In Romania, promotion also relies on the candidate's ability to produce scholarly publications deemed as prestigious. For example, one of the "minimal standards" specified by the National Ministry of Education and Research in Romania is that all candidates must be a "main author of original articles and/or reviews published in journals indexed by Web of Science." Tenure and promotion in Romania, therefore, relies on getting one's work published in journals with the highest impact factors. Another criterion for tenure and promotion, in Romania and many other European countries, revolves around citations (e.g., those indexed in Web of Science) and results in points that accumulate and increase one's chances of tenure and promotion. This is especially problematic given that psychology journals often have some of the lowest citation counts (and resulting impact factors), and articles from Asia, Australia, and Europe are cited significantly less often than are articles from North America (Haslam & Koval, 2010). Altogether, journal prestige presents many obstacles for aspiring scholars outside of North America.

### *Implications on workload distribution*

Departments also use these lists for internal decisions. In addition to tenure and promotion, journal prestige influences job track, teaching load, and additional compensation. Many of these purposes relate to a points system that relies heavily on perceived journal prestige. The way this often works is that each journal receives a specified number of points, based on prestige, and faculty members receive that number of points when they have a manuscript accepted in that journal. This is sometimes also based on the authorship order and/or the number of authors on the paper. These points determine teaching load and even job track, often based solely on specified cutoffs. For example, if *Journal of Management* is worth five points and one needs to obtain 10 points to have a teaching load equivalent to four classes per year, any given faculty member would need to publish two papers in that journal (or some combination of other points from other journals) to teach four classes next year. If *Journal of Management* was worth only four points, that faculty member would now have to teach more classes next year or publish three papers in the journal each year. Over time, these points can also affect whether a faculty member qualifies for a teaching versus research track and is similarly based on specified cutoffs that consider points accumulated over several years. Finally, each of these points and/or publications often carries a publication bonus that could be as little as a few hundred euros (e.g., in Romania) or as much as US$25,000 or more (e.g., in France and China). Since many international salaries are relatively low, one's annual income is highly dependent on this system and the resulting compensation.

## One size does not fit all

There is one clear take away from both the focal article and the international considerations that we have just elaborated—a single list, no matter how it is generated—is not relevant and productive for all I-O faculty members. What can result are negative outcomes for faculty, departments, and even entire universities. Whether it is a psychology department or management department, teaching-focused school or research-focused school, located in North America or somewhere else in the world, a single list or perception of journal prestige is problematic. Instead, departments should place greater emphasis on what helps them meet their own goals and take into consideration the desires and needs of the local faculty, the department, and the university.

Outside of North America, one of the biggest challenges that administrators face is the value to place on journals published in their native language. Since journal prestige is generally low for journals that are not published in English, universities and governments need a different way of viewing prestige at the local level. A common practice in many European schools is to intentionally add to the list at least a few well-respected journals from that country. Another option may be to reconsider how one uses prestige within the internal decisions of the school. Rather than give such emphasis to a certain list of journals, administrators and officials should place more effort on determining alternative quality metrics and standards from which to reward faculty. We do not mean to suggest that this is easy in any way. Instead, we seek to highlight international issues with prestige and give awareness to the differences across schools and countries.

## Conclusion

Journal prestige is a hotly debated topic in academic circles. Although there is likely no perfect way to determine or use prestige, it is important to understand that its relevance and use is quite different across the world and may inadvertently harm our colleagues' career progression. This harm is, in part, a reflection of the differences in how psychology and management departments, particularly in North America, operate, the research foci across the various departments and countries, the way in which prestige is operationalized, and the outcomes of prestige. For these reasons, it is necessary to open our minds to new ways of thinking about prestige and to communicate with our local and international colleagues to best understand how prestige fits in with our own personal goals and those of our institutions. In all, this requires a more representative and textured treatment of these issues and a more open mind to prestige alternatives that exist.

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