

# Inaugural Report 2022: Establishing and Operating the Journal for Advancing Sport Psychology in Research - Reflections from Inaugural Junior Editorial Board Members

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As the inaugural junior editorial board members of the *Journal for Advancing Sport Psychology in Research (JASPR)*, we represent the first group of students to be embraced into, and integrated across all levels of, the editorial board of a sport, exercise, and performance psychology journal. To shed light on our unique experience behind the curtain of an academic journal, we engaged in a process of group and individual reflection following our term. The goal of our reflective process was to identify and share our collective and personal experiences of establishing and operating *JASPR* from January 2020 to December 2021. By sharing transparent and vulnerable insights into our lived experiences as the inaugural junior editorial board members of *JASPR*, our reflections (a) provide emotional and informational support to neophyte researchers occupying the role(s) of author, editor, and/or reviewer, and (b) highlight the value of student-centered initiatives for the advancement of sport, exercise, and performance psychology. Our collective and personal experiences are consolidated into three reflective themes: respect in peer review, gatekeepers of knowledge, and imposter syndrome. These reflective themes are followed by four key takeaway points that are intended to be suggestions for neophyte researchers to effectively navigate the role(s) of author, editor, and/or reviewer in sport, exercise, and performance psychology.

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In training to become a competent professional, experiential learning is an effective method for developing knowledge of, and practice in, a discipline's craft (Kolb, 2015). This is certainly the case for neophyte researchers and practitioners of sport, exercise, and performance psychology, who engage in experiential learning to develop their knowledge of, and practice in, both scientific and applied pursuits (Cropley et al., 2007; McEwan & Tod, 2015; Sato & Laughlin, 2018; Sly et al., 2020). Among our discipline's scientific community, examples of valued experiential learning opportunities

include designing, conducting, and reporting research, and peer reviewing manuscripts for academic journals. A challenge faced by graduate students in our discipline, however, is that such experiential learning opportunities are often limited to those provided under the supervision of a primary dissertation or thesis advisor(s), and those experiential learning opportunities can be quite different from advisor to advisor (see Visek et al., 2021a). Depending on the ontological and epistemological position of the advisor(s), experiential learning opportunities might be plentiful for some graduate students but scarce for others. Experiential learning opportunities received by graduate students might further depend on external roles occupied by an advisor(s). For example, an advisor serving on an editorial board might invite their students to review manuscripts, offering these students additional opportunities to

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## ESTABLISHING AND OPERATING A STUDENT-CENTERED JOURNAL

develop knowledge of, and experience in, peer review. Why is this variability in affordance of experiential learning opportunities significant? We believe that variability in the amount and type of opportunities provided to students in graduate school will lead to vast differences in their readiness to be custodians of sport, exercise, and performance psychology upon graduation.

To tackle inconsistencies in experiential learning opportunities afforded to neophyte researchers in our discipline, there is a critical need for initiatives, independent of graduate students' advisors and programs, that offer education and mentorship in publication and peer review (for other arguments for the need for such initiatives, see Brustad, 1999; Holt & Spence, 2012). To address this need, faculty and student members of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) collaborated to establish the *Journal for Advancing Sport Psychology in Research (JASPR)*; see Hess et al., 2021). As a student-centered academic publication, *JASPR* provides neophyte researchers with extensive and varied opportunities to build knowledge of, and practice in, the art of research authorship, editorship, and peer review. This is accomplished through a mentored approach in which senior editorial board members (faculty) are responsible for guiding and supporting junior editorial

board members' (students) scholarly development within the journal's operating structure (see Visek et al., 2021a).

Following an invitation by the Editor-in-Chief (Dr. Monna Arvinen-Barrow, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee) and Associate Editor (Dr. Amanda J. Visek, The George Washington University), we, the inaugural junior editorial board members of *JASPR* (see Table 1), engaged in both group and individual reflection with the goal to identify and share our collective and personal experiences of establishing and operating *JASPR* from January 2020 to December 2021. By sharing transparent and vulnerable insights into our lived experiences as the inaugural junior editorial board members of *JASPR*, our reflections (a) provide emotional and informational support to neophyte researchers occupying the role(s) of author, editor, and/or reviewer, and (b) highlight the value of student-centered initiatives for the advancement of sport, exercise, and performance psychology.

### Our Reflective Process

Our reflective process followed a three-step procedure. In the first step, an initial group meeting was held to engage in group reflection on our collective experiences with *JASPR*. This initial group meeting culminated in generating a list of questions to guide individual

**Table 1.** *JASPR* Inaugural Junior Editorial Board Members

Name	Editorial Board Role	PhD Training	Degree	Research Interests
<b>Thierry Middleton</b>	Junior Editor-in-Chief	Laurentian University	PhD completed 2021	Cultural aspects of sport, performance, and physical activity; youth sport; psychobiosocial states
<b>Liam O'Neil</b>	Junior Associate Editor	Utah State University	PhD in-progress	Self-system; social interactions and relationships; motivation
<b>Travis Schedler</b>	Junior Associate Editor	The Ohio State University	PhD in-progress	Athlete & coach activism; queer development & empowerment
<b>Kylee Ault</b>	Junior Editorial Board Reviewer	Michigan State University	PhD in-progress	Education-based athletics; leadership & life skills development; sport policy
<b>Alex Oliver</b>	Junior Editorial Board Reviewer	Glasgow Caledonian University	PhD completed 2021	Metacognition; attention; self-regulation

reflection (see Table 2). These reflective questions helped each inaugural junior editorial board member to reflect on a common set of experiences. In the second step, we engaged in individual reflection on our personal experiences with *JASPR*, and wrote a short paragraph response to each question. In the final step, a follow-up group meeting was held to compare and contrast our individual reflections and produce key takeaways from our reflections to share with other neophyte researchers, and to our younger selves. This final step allowed us to quasi-inductively code our individual reflections to construct three major reflective themes.

### Our Reflections

Three major themes were constructed from the collective and personal experiences that developed from our reflective process. These themes were labelled: (a) respect in peer review, (b) gatekeepers of knowledge, and (c) imposter syndrome. In the subsections that follow, brief descriptions of these themes are presented and include collective and individual reflections on our experiences with *JASPR*.

#### Respect in Peer Review

Respect in peer review captures our collective objective to establish a culture of peer review based on care, diligence, and responsibility in exchanges among authors, editors, and reviewers at *JASPR*. To accomplish this objective, we needed to challenge common norms and practices of peer review. During our term, we specifically wanted to challenge the prevailing deficit-based approach to peer review and create a culture of reviewing that would focus on manuscript strengths in a challenging yet encouraging way. To illustrate, the role

of a manuscript reviewer is to pinpoint the strengths and limitations of a manuscript. In so doing, the manuscript reviewer can make an informed judgement on the scientific merit of a manuscript and present a commensurate recommendation for publication. Based on our collective experiences of manuscript submissions and reviewer feedback, we believe that the existing culture of how manuscript reviews are framed is problematic. As it stands, manuscript reviews often paint a picture of inadequacy by highlighting only shortcomings of manuscripts (i.e., deficit-based approach). A more constructive and developmentally appropriate manuscript review should paint a picture of opportunity by highlighting both virtues and shortcomings of manuscripts (i.e., strengths-based approach). To bolster neophyte researchers' engagement with, and development through, the peer review process (see Hiemstra & Van Yperen, 2015), we as the inaugural editorial board sought to use a strengths-based approach to peer review that could be reflected in all peer review communications (e.g., manuscript reviews, review syntheses, and publication decision letters). Thierry spoke about how providing strengths-based feedback required an intensive and purposeful approach to peer review:

As the Junior Editor-In-Chief, I (Thierry) empathised with how authors would feel when receiving rejection decisions. To soften rejection decisions, I worked with the Editor-In-Chief (Monna) to provide specific feedback with each rejection decision letter. In my opinion, receiving disappointing news about a manuscript can be made easier by providing both a clear justification for the decision and constructive suggestions for how the manuscript could be improved for submission elsewhere. Although providing specific

**Table 2.** Reflective Questions Answered by Inaugural Junior Editorial Board Members

Reflective Questions
1. What have you learnt about the state of humanity in peer review through your experiences at <i>JASPR</i> ?
2. How did expectation compare to reality in your role as gatekeeper of knowledge in sport, exercise, and performance psychology?
3. What have you observed about the nature of objectivity versus subjectivity in the peer review process through your experiences at <i>JASPR</i> ?
4. What have you come to understand about your role in guiding authors through the process of revising their manuscripts at <i>JASPR</i> ?
5. How has imposter syndrome impacted your experiences and involvement with <i>JASPR</i> ?
6. What have you learnt about the state of scientific education in the discipline of sport, exercise, and performance psychology through your experiences at <i>JASPR</i> ?

feedback with each decision letter was an intensive process, it ensured that an author received valuable feedback for improving their manuscript regardless of the final publication decision.

These experiences and views were also shared by both Junior Associate Editors:

We (Liam and Travis) worked with the Associate Editor (Amanda) to produce review syntheses that re-framed reviewer comments in a critical yet constructive manner. In doing so, it was our goal to create messaging that would be received by authors as critique of the manuscript rather than criticism of the person behind it.

Challenging the status quo was not without challenges. We often caught ourselves defaulting to what our experiences of peer review had been, rather than what we wanted it to be. Liam explained this internal struggle well in his reflection:

At the beginning of my term as Junior Associate Editor, I (Liam) sometimes struggled to break free of the deficit-based approach which had formed my default schema of peer review. In this period, I caught myself automatically producing review syntheses that highlighted only “problems” in manuscripts. It became clear that I needed to modify my schema of peer review to produce review syntheses that would encourage and motivate authors to go the distance in revising manuscripts. I am grateful for this experiential learning opportunity that helped me to identify and correct my approach to peer review.

Promoting a culture of respect in peer review, through editorial board members adoption of a strengths-based approach, is essential for a student-centered academic journal where authors are often submitting their first manuscript for publication consideration. The submission of a first manuscript for publication consideration is a major milestone in the development of any neophyte researcher. A first manuscript submission, as a first step toward manuscript publication, assumes a unique social meaning as a neophyte researcher’s initiation as an accepted and valued voice in the academy. The goal of peer review should be to strengthen that voice through critique – whether the manuscript gets accepted to that journal or not — rather than weaken it through criticism.

### **Gatekeepers of Knowledge**

Gatekeepers of knowledge represents our appreciation and respect for the enormous responsibility of editorial board members who serve as gatekeepers for a scientific discipline. We took seriously our role in vetting manuscripts before they were shared, or not shared, with the scientific community

and wider public. As gatekeepers of knowledge, it was our task to determine whether manuscript submissions met sufficient publication standards – evaluating each manuscript rigorously for its research design, execution, and reporting quality. This is of utmost importance in assuring readers that the published work is comprised of valuable and trustworthy knowledge. Many times, a manuscript submitted to *JASPR* did not meet sufficient publication standards. In such cases, our editorial board positions involved communicating disappointing news to authors.

A collective experience in being gatekeepers of knowledge was that arriving at and delivering publication recommendations and decisions was more difficult than anticipated. For Thierry, this was particularly prominent when making rejection decisions on manuscripts:

As the Junior Editor-In-Chief, the toughest decisions for me were rejection decisions of manuscripts that I felt had potential to be innovative but presented methodological flaws. For instance, there were manuscripts which presented research questions and findings that could have contributed new and interesting knowledge to the literature, but (a) used methods not suited to the research question or (b) recruited too few participants to have adequate statistical power.

At the Junior Associate Editors level, leveraging personal and professional views as gatekeepers of knowledge was also challenging at times:

As a Junior Associate Editor, I (Liam) wrestled with the boundaries of my position when it came to inserting myself into the “review conversation” occurring between author(s) and reviewer(s). I deliberated over how my presence, if not adequately positioned, might subvert the standards of double-blind peer review or silence the voice of an author. A question I often returned to in my role was: When I evaluate a manuscript and present my own concerns and suggestions to authors, to what extent am I introducing my own biases and subjectivity into the peer review process? In the end, I negotiated the boundaries of my position according to my own scientific convictions and consultation with the Associate Editor (Amanda). This allowed us to modify the boundaries of the position to meet the needs of submitting authors with varying degrees of mentorship from faculty advisors.

As the Junior Editorial Board Reviewers, we (Alex and Kylee) felt unique pressures with the responsibility of being gatekeepers of knowledge:

As a Junior Editorial Board Reviewer, I (Kylee) also found making publication recommendations difficult, in part, due to being blind to the evaluation of other reviewers and being unsure if my recommendations

matched those of the others. Although my publication recommendations might have been different than those of other reviewers, I needed to trust my training, embrace my ability to provide a decision with sound rationale, and feel content with it. In many ways, learning to believe in the value of my review decision was challenging, yet empowering. It also took time for each of us Junior Editorial Board Reviewers (Alex and Kylee) to develop our own sense of what is “the publishability threshold.” Our early evaluations of manuscript submissions were anchored in the student-centered objectives of *JASPR*. For me (Alex), becoming aware of that anchor was pivotal in developing my understanding of, and confidence in identifying the publishability threshold for *JASPR*. Although I did not want to abandon the philosophy of *JASPR* being student-centered, I needed to partly free myself of that anchor to ensure only manuscripts of the highest quality were progressing toward acceptance. One way I navigated this discrepancy, was through the lens that *JASPR* is more than a repository of extracts from dissertations and theses. As with any other reputable academic publication in our discipline, manuscript submissions to *JASPR* must contribute to the advancement of sport, exercise, and performance psychology. That is to say, reviewing for this journal should not be approached as an assessment of student work but an assessment of research contribution(s) to the literature. We, Alex and Kylee, believe strongly that having awareness of our evaluative decisions and our publishability threshold expanded our toolbox as manuscript reviewers.

Being purposeful and reflective in navigating the challenges of our roles as gatekeepers of knowledge was critical to our early adjustment to, and later development in, our respective editorial board positions. Our collective experiences have illuminated that subjectivity is an inherent part of peer review (e.g., what represents a critical flaw?). This subjectivity is a by-product of the experiences, knowledge, preferences brought by editors and reviewers to the peer review process (Holt & Spence, 2012). Through considering our own subjectivity as editors and reviewers, we have come to better understand and carry out our duties and responsibilities in peer review.

### **Imposter Syndrome**

Imposter syndrome represents our collective thoughts and feelings of self-doubt in our competence, despite counterfactual evidence. Imposter syndrome was an obstacle we each faced in the process of adjusting to our roles as the inaugural junior editorial board members of *JASPR*. Our feelings of insecurity and intimidation were driven by worrying thoughts that

we may not be up to the task of handling manuscript submissions and publication decisions. Ultimately, our experiences of imposter syndrome impacted our engagement and performance in carrying out the duties of our respective positions.

As Junior Editor-In-Chief, my (Thierry) experience of imposter syndrome related to my background and expertise in qualitative research methodologies. This, at times, left me at a disadvantage when conducting intake reviews for manuscripts using certain quantitative research methodologies. Although I have some experience using statistics, I did not feel as comfortable or confident in making decisions related to these manuscripts compared to reviewing manuscripts using a qualitative approach. Fortunately, as with other obstacles faced by myself and my junior editorial board colleagues, the support provided by our editorial team often helped improve my confidence in handling these manuscripts – whether that was through being able to view their carefully written critiques and/or through critical discussions in which I was reassured of the value I provided through my own unique perspective.

As Junior Associate Editor, I (Travis) noticed that actively seeking out feedback was helpful in my role. There were times that I felt incompetent and unprepared to compose review syntheses of specific manuscripts – whether it be manuscripts that featured topics, methodologies, or analytical strategies that I had limited knowledge of or experience in. However, an important part of our roles was to recognize our own limitations and leverage these moments as opportunities. Rather than let my feelings of imposter syndrome fester, I collaborated with the Associate Editor (Amanda) to learn more about these topics, methodologies, and analyses. This allowed me to provide higher-quality review syntheses that could better assist author(s) in strengthening their manuscripts.

As a Junior Editorial Board Reviewer, I (Kylee) found it helpful to ask questions and ask for feedback after completing reviews to ensure that I was doing well in my role as a reviewer. At the start of my term, it was challenging to differentiate between feelings of imposter syndrome and recognizing that quality reviewing is a skill to be refined. I learned to lean into the confidence of the other editorial board members to assure me that my reviews were meeting their standards, even when I was unsure of myself. For one specific review, I was uncertain if a comment I had made was helpful and appropriate or should be left out of the review. Instead of sitting in uncertainty, I raised my doubt at an editorial board meeting and was reassured with advice from our faculty mentors (Monna and Amanda). This provided relief to my

momentary feelings of incompetence. Ultimately, the experience reminded me that periods of imposter syndrome are bound to occur and that asking questions and sharing my uncertainties validated my decisions and helped me grow scholar.

From our experience, harnessing periods of self-doubt to guide purposeful reflection and learning can result in meaningful strides toward growth as a neophyte researcher. As inaugural junior editorial board members, we were not the only stakeholders of the publication process harbouring such feelings. Submitting authors and invited reviewers likely experienced similar periods of imposter syndrome or intimidation at times throughout the publication process – especially in their first experience submitting a manuscript for publication consideration. In such instances, submitting authors should remember they offer valuable insights that can contribute to the literature.

### **Key Takeaways**

The following four key takeaway points developed from our reflective process. These key takeaway points are intended to be suggestions for neophyte researchers to effectively navigate the role(s) of author, editor, and/or reviewer in sport, exercise, and performance psychology.

#### **Do Not Seek Perfection**

Through our handling of numerous manuscript submissions, we have learnt there is no such thing as a perfect recipe for doing science. All research studies have distinct features that present their own set of challenges. In wrestling with the complexities and nuances of research questions, there are bound to be mishaps, setbacks, and/or stones left unturned in designing, conducting, and/or reporting studies. This is a natural part of science and is the reason for outlining boundary conditions of research in the strengths and limitations section of a manuscript. This does not mean that we should not strive to produce high-quality research (i.e., excellencism), but that we should avoid getting bogged down in the pursuit of producing flawless research (i.e., perfectionism; Gaudreau, 2019).

#### **Be Authentic and Honest**

We have also learnt that there is no exact recipe for being an editorial board member. It is neither possible nor pragmatic to have expertise in every strand of science. Being forthcoming about areas of both ample and limited competence will put you on a path to success as a gatekeeper of knowledge. Equally, regardless of aptitude and readiness to be an editorial board member,

challenges will be encountered, and mistakes will be made. In those instances, it is important to be true to your own humanistic and scientific convictions.

#### **Make Time for Reflection**

We live in a fast-paced society and work in the high-energy environment that is academia. Slowing down and taking the time to reflect on difficult moments in your journey can generate novel and creative solutions to problems, as well as reveal unexplored pathways to growth (Ellis et al., 2014). To this end, we encourage neophyte researchers to be reflective scholars. A reflective scholar invests not only in their personal and professional development, but in the advancement of the scientific discipline of sport, exercise, and performance psychology.

#### **You Are Not Alone**

Being a reflective scholar is not solely an individual exercise. We believe reflection is best carried out in partnership with trusted and supportive mentors and peers (for more details, see Hemmings, 2022). We recognize that asking questions and revealing personal struggles can be uncomfortable. It requires making oneself vulnerable which can serve as a barrier to disclosure. Yet, having a sense of curiosity and humility about scientific endeavors, and seeking out the help of others when needed, is necessary for continued development as a neophyte researcher (Raabe et al., 2019; Watson et al., 2009).

### **Final Words**

In this scholarly narrative, we reflected on our experiences as the inaugural junior editorial board members of *JASPR*. In sharing both our group and individual reflections, we hope to have (a) provided emotional and informational support to neophyte researchers occupying the role(s) of author, editor, and/or reviewer, and (b) highlighted the value of student-centered initiatives for the advancement of sport, exercise, and performance psychology. We are indebted to the journal, and our faculty editorial board members (Monna and Amanda), for the diverse experiential learning opportunities we have received in editorship and reviewing. We hope submitting authors and invited reviewers too have benefitted from experiential learning opportunities provided by the journal in authorship and reviewing. We are optimistic that *JASPR*, as a novel and innovative student-centered initiative to education and mentorship in publication and peer review, will continue to provide rich experiential learning opportunities to

neophyte researchers of sport, exercise, and performance psychology in the near and distant future.

### Author Note

All authors contributed equally to the preparation and writing of this article and should be considered co-first authors.

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