

## **The Vitality Criterion: A New Standard of Publication for Journal of Adolescent Research**

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I am honored and delighted to begin my tenure as Editor of *Journal of Adolescent Research* with this issue. I actually took over as Editor from Gerald Adams in October 2002, but this is the first issue that contains papers for which I was the editor.

I wish to begin this inaugural issue with a statement of my editorial principles. It is important for prospective authors to know the criteria that will guide the evaluation of manuscripts while I am Editor, especially because my criteria are different than those that have been characteristic of *JAR* in the past.

Why would anyone agree to be Editor of a journal? It is a daunting amount of work—we receive about 150 manuscripts a year. There is a stipend in compensation, but it is “modest,” as in “less per hour than the average adolescent earns for working in a fast food joint.” All editors are, alas, certain to make far more enemies than friends; we are able to accept for publication only about 20% of the manuscripts we receive, and I have little doubt that everyone who submits a manuscript believes it merits publication.

For me, there was one key reason for agreeing to be Editor of *JAR*. I want to shake up the traditional journal format and create a new kind of journal for publishing adolescent research. I want to make *JAR* a journal known for content that is distinctively original, compelling, and creative. I believe there is a serious need in our field to question the reigning assumptions about what constitutes good science and open up the range of methods we use to investigate the questions that interest us.

I have long been frustrated by the narrowness of the methods used in papers published in academic journals on adolescence. Virtually all of the journals in our field almost exclusively publish papers using one kind of method: quantitative, questionnaire-based research. The occasional depar-

tures from questionnaire research tend also to be quantitative, such as experimental research or coded videotapes. Certainly, some of these papers have value, and there is a place for quantitative research in the repertoire of methods to be used in studying adolescents. What I object to is the nearly exclusive use of solely quantitative methods in journal articles on adolescents.

Of course, the emphasis on quantitative methods is hardly restricted to adolescent research. Quantitative methods are the dominant approach in the social sciences generally, including the disciplines in which most adolescent research takes place. We use quantitative methods because quantification is part of the scientific method. Quantification provides data that can be used to establish patterns, compare groups, investigate sources of variation, and conduct statistical analyses.

What we gain from quantification is clear. However, when the methods used in research are exclusively quantitative, something is lost as well. The unfortunate truth is that reducing people's lives to mere numbers often drains them of their vitality. The scientific credibility conferred by quantification is often pursued with such single-minded intensity that the humanity of the people being studied is lost by the end of the process. I do not believe that this is an inevitable consequence of scientific study but the consequence of a particular philosophy of science that assumes that the only true science exalts quantification as the sole standard of scientific value and invariably reduces the object of study to nothing but numbers.

This error is perhaps especially unfortunate in the study of adolescents. Many of us chose to study adolescence because it is such a fascinating time of life, and adolescents are such interesting and lively people. Yet it is hard to find evidence of that fascination and liveliness in reading most academic articles on adolescents. Their voices are missing; reducing them to mere numbers effectively silences them and drains them of what makes them most interesting. As the new Editor of *JAR*, I want to make the journal a forum where adolescents' voices are given prominence.

Let me make it clear that I am not advocating that we dispose of numbers altogether. What I would like to see is more papers submitted to *JAR* that combine quantitative and qualitative methods. Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches have their strengths and weaknesses. Quantitative approaches yield numerical data that can be used to describe patterns for large numbers of people but do not reflect the distinctiveness of individual experience. Qualitative approaches provide a vivid sense of individual experience but are more difficult to generalize to a larger population. I like to think of quantitative data as the bones and qualitative methods as the flesh. Both are required to make a whole human being.

This does not mean that every study published in *JAR* must have both quantitative and qualitative data. I do hope to see many papers that combine the strengths of the two approaches. However, I will also publish strictly quantitative papers if they are exceptionally original or address an important but overlooked topic, and I will publish strictly qualitative papers if they are done systematically and provide an especially vivid and insightful view of adolescents' experiences. We can construct our portrayal of the whole adolescent through a combination of papers. Each paper is asked only to provide one compelling part of this portrayal.

### THE VITALITY CRITERION

What I am looking for can be summed up in one word: vitality. I want *JAR* to reflect the true lives of adolescents. What we publish in *JAR* should be as lively, diverse, and vibrant as adolescents are.

There are three aspects to the vitality criterion. First, as noted, whenever possible, articles should include the actual voices of adolescents. One of the hallmarks of adolescence is that there is an advance in the capacity for self-reflection, and this makes it especially appropriate and important for articles to depict what adolescents say about their own experiences, behavior, and relationships. This is not a call for abandoning rigor but for combining rigorous methods with the voices of adolescents so that the articles published in the journal possess scientific credibility as well as vitality.

The second aspect of the vitality criterion is that articles must include a cultural context. Many articles currently published in journals on adolescence are based on American middle-class samples but draw conclusions about adolescents in general, with no mention of cultural context, as if adolescents anywhere are like adolescents everywhere. However, there is a growing awareness among scholars on adolescence that adolescent development can only be understood in the context of culture. Providing cultural context is crucial to portraying the vitality of adolescence because this context is the framework for their thoughts, beliefs, and behavior. Thus, as part of the new vitality criterion of *JAR*, all articles published in the journal must discuss the cultural context of the research questions asked, the population studied, and the results of the study. All articles must address the following question: In what way do the results of the study reflect the culture in which the adolescents live?

The third aspect of the vitality criterion is that scholars are encouraged to describe their research in a way that is lively, insightful, and even eloquent. It is a misguided view of science to think that an article must be dry, ponderous,

and stilted in order to be legitimately “scientific.” Writing articles in this way does not make them more scientific—it only makes them boring. Especially in the Discussion section, scholars are encouraged to think creatively and to use the results as a springboard for thoughtful and insightful reflections. Don’t let the data speak for you, and don’t assume the numbers (or even the voices) tell the whole story. Use the Discussion as an opportunity to tell us what you really think, based on what you have found.

### NEW FEATURES

Our goal is to make *JAR* an indispensable journal for people who study or work with adolescents. For me, the new Associate Editor of *JAR*, Niobe Way, and the new Editorial Board, the vitality criterion will be our guide toward the goal of producing a journal that people will look forward to reading with every issue and will invariably find to be a source of insightful and illuminating information.

In addition to theoretical and research papers, there are three other features that will be part of the new *JAR* and that we hope will add to the value and enjoyment of reading the journal. First, we plan to begin a new format called Editorial Essays, where one of the editors, someone from the Editorial Board, or an invited guest writes an essay on some topic related to adolescence or emerging adulthood. The essays will be based loosely on scholarly knowledge but will be more wide open than a journal article. There will be few or no citations, and authors of the essays will be encouraged to draw upon opinions, insights, and even personal experience.

The topics of the Editorial Essays could be drawn from current events, commenting on the developmental context when adolescents are in the news for involvement in something widely discussed. The topics of the Editorial Essays could also be historical reflections, commenting on how recent events or policies can be understood in light of previous events or past research. Policy discussions and advocacy are also welcome in the Essays.

A good model is the essays on natural history that were done for decades by Stephen Jay Gould. Gould managed to make the essays scholarly and informative as well as lively and enjoyable. They were taken seriously by scholars, but they were written in such a way that the general reader could read them and appreciate them. This is the high standard to which I hope to hold the Editorial Essays for the new *JAR*. I would like the writers of the Essays to be informed by their scholarly judgment and expertise in writing them but to be free to state what they really think without worrying about whether they can find a citation to show that somebody else said it first.

If the Essays succeed, they will not only be enjoyable to read, but they will inspire new research ideas in previously unexplored or neglected areas. Furthermore, they will encourage all of us to read outside our usual areas of interest. So much is published now on adolescence that I often get the sense that people rarely have the time to read anything outside their own specialty area (if that). The Editorial Essays, short and readable, will hopefully be widely read and have the effect of drawing us closer together as a community of scholars with at least some common knowledge.

A second format that will promote the goal of integrating us as a community of scholars will be book reviews. *JAR* has done book reviews in the past, but infrequently, and I hope to have them become a standard part of every issue. Including book reviews in every issue will be another way of giving us a common base of knowledge about what is going on in the field. I encourage readers of the journal to submit their own ideas for valuable and stimulating new books that should be reviewed.

A third feature of the new *JAR* is that it will now be opened up to include not only adolescence but emerging adulthood (ages 18-25). Occasional articles including samples in the emerging adulthood age period have appeared in *JAR* in the past, but I wish to make it explicit that the scope of the journal will include both adolescence and emerging adulthood.

As the originator of the term and the theory of emerging adulthood, the basis of my interest in including papers on emerging adulthood in *JAR* is obvious. However, I also believe that including papers on emerging adulthood will be good for scholarship on this age period and good for *JAR*. Currently, no journal exists that is devoted to the emerging adulthood age period, so there is a need for a venue where such papers can be published. Furthermore, a great deal of important and ground-breaking research is now taking place in this rapidly growing area of scholarship, so I will be pleased to have papers in this area contribute to the vitality of the new *JAR*.

## CONCLUSION

The vitality criterion is a new standard for scholarship on adolescence. I hope it will result in a journal that is provocative, engaging, and thoughtful. I hope, too, that the new features we are adding to *JAR* will enhance the journal as a center of the best scholarship on adolescence and emerging adulthood. I invite the readers of *JAR* to let me know how well (or not so well!) you believe the new ideas are working. I welcome your comments and suggestions, and I look forward to reviewing your best work for *JAR*.