American Psychology Is Becoming More International, But Too Slowly:

Comment on Thalmayer et al. (2020)

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August 24, 2020

Word count: 998

Open data: <https://osf.io/gwux8>

Comment accepted for publication in *American Psychologist*. Please cite this reference:

Webster, G. D., Mahar, E. A., & Wongsomboon, V. (2020). American psychology is becoming more international, but too slowly: Comment on Thalmayer et al. (2020). *American Psychologist*.

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We have no known conflicts of interest to disclose.

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Abstract

Commenting on Thalmayer et al. (2020), we provide broader analysis of the national institutional affiliations of authors (2,978), editors (286), and consulting editors (2,652) from seven (vs. six) American Psychological Association (APA) journals that span over 40 (vs. 30) years. Using multilevel models, results showed that percentages of lead authors at American institutions decreased linearly and significantly and over time. Predicted mean percentages of American authors were 86% in 1978 versus 54% in 2018, a decrease of 37%. Percentages of editors and consulting editors at American institutions also decreased significantly; however the effect for consulting editors was also quadratic—the linear decline accelerated over time. Predicted mean percentages of American consulting editors at 10-year intervals (1980–2020) were 94%, 92%, 89%, 80%, and 69%. Our 2020 predicted mean of 69% American consulting editors was notably lower than Thalmayer et al.’s (2020) 2018 mean of 82%. In addition, higher-impact journals had more pronounced quadratic declines in the percentages of American consulting editors over time. American psychology continues to become more international, but not quickly enough. We concur with Thalmayer et al.’s (2020) policy proposals, especially that APA journals and their editors should actively pursue non-American associate and consulting editors.

Keywords: Cultural psychology, philosophy of science, publication trends, multilevel modeling, meta-science

**American Psychology Is Becoming More International, But Too Slowly:
Comment on Thalmayer et al. (2020)**

In their ten-year follow-up to Arnett (2008), Thalmayer et al. (2020) make a strong case for increasing international representation in psychology, which has been dominated by Americans. They examined change over time in percentages of American article authors, associate editors, and consulting editors in six American Psychological Association (APA) journals. They found 64% of recent (2014–2018) articles featured lead authors from American institutions versus 73% of older ones (2003–2007), a decrease of 12% ($\approx 1\%$ /year). They also found 81% of articles had American lead authors in 1988 versus 62% in 2018, a decrease of 23% ($\approx 1\%$ /year). American associate editors changed little—from 82% in 2008 to 81% in 2018. American consulting editors were similarly unchanged at 82% for both 2008 and 2018. Thalmayer et al. (2020) also found that samples of American participants changed from 68% (2003–2007) to 62% (2014–2018), a decrease of 8.8% ($< 1\%$ per year), suggesting that American psychology remains WEIRD (Henrich et al., 2010).

The present comment sought to update and extend Webster et al.'s (2009) original comment on Arnett (2008), which took issue with the narrow time span and journals chosen, showing that the outlook for international representation in APA journals was not quite as bleak. The present work examined whether these trends changed or remained stable during the ensuing decade (data: <https://osf.io/gwux8>).

Lead Authors Are Increasingly International

We examined the national institutional affiliations of lead authors of 2,978 articles published in seven APA primary journals at 10-year intervals from 1978 to 2018 (Figure 1). Following Webster (2009), we broadened Arnett's (2008) and Thalmayer et

al.'s (2020) sample of six domain-specific journals to include three domain-general journals—*JEP: General*, *Psychological Bulletin*, and *Psychological Review*. Consistent with Webster (2009), we dropped *Health Psychology* and *Journal of Family Psychology* because they weren't publishing in 1978.

We used multilevel models (publication years nested within journals) to estimate change-over-time slopes for each journal and the average journal (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Results showed that percentages of lead authors at American institutions decreased over time for the average journal ($b=-0.80$, $t(6)=-6.03$, $p<.001$, $R^2_{\text{pseudo}}=.79$; Figure 2). Predicted mean percentages of American authors were 86% in 1978 versus 54% in 2018, a decrease of 37% ($\approx 1\%$ /year). Although our sample's predicted mean for 2018 (54%) was lower than Thalmayer et al.'s (2020) mean (62%), both samples showed consistent decreases ($\approx 1\%$ /year) across different time horizons (30 vs. 40 years).

Editors and Consulting Editors Are Increasingly International

Using the same seven journals (nine including *JPSP*'s three sections), we also examined the national institutional affiliations of editors (including associate editors) and consulting editors (editorial board members) by adding a new 12-year-interval sample (2020) to Webster et al.'s (2009) earlier seven-year-interval samples (1980, 1987, 1994, 2001, and 2008) for totals of 286 editors and 2,652 consulting editors.¹

Using multilevel models, results showed that percentages of editors at American institutions decreased over time for the average journal ($b=-0.63$, $t(6)=-4.63$, $p=.001$, $R^2_{\text{pseudo}}=.50$). Predicted mean percentages of American editors were 100% in 1980 versus 79% in 2020, a decrease of 21% ($\approx 0.5\%$ /year). In contrast, Thalmayer et al.'s

¹ *Psychological Bulletin* had no formal consulting editors until 1993. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* (1994, 2001) and *Journal of Educational Psychology* (1987) listed no consulting editor's affiliation.

(2020) data showed no substantial change in percentages American associate editors, from 82% in 2008 to 81% in 2018. Thus, taking a longer historical perspective (from 1980 vs. 2008) shows that change is happening, but we believe that Thalmayer et al. (2020) would agree that our recent estimates of about 80% reveal an editorial landscape still disproportionately dominated by Americans.

Figure 3 shows percentages for consulting editors from American institutions over time. Using multilevel models, results showed that percentages of consulting editors at American institutions decreased over time for the average journal ($b_{\text{linear}} = -0.64$, $t(8) = -5.47$, $p < .001$, $R^2_{\text{pseudo}} = .69$); however, this linear effect was qualified by a quadratic effect ($b_{\text{quadratic}} = -0.015$, $t(8) = -2.75$, $p = .025$, $R^2_{\text{pseudo}} = .19$), showing that the predicted decreases accelerated over time (Figure 4).² Simple effects tests at 10-year intervals (1980–2020) showed that the simple linear slopes became more negative over time ($bs = -0.022$, -0.34 , -0.64 , -0.93 , and -1.23 ; $ps < .05$ except for the first slope at 1980). Predicted percentages for 10-year intervals (1980–2020) were 94%, 92%, 89%, 80%, and 69%. Thus, our 2020 predicted mean of 69% American consulting editors was notably lower than Thalmayer et al.'s (2020) 2018 mean of 82%. A post-hoc model contrasting the three general journals—*JEP: General*, *Psychological Bulletin*, and *Psychological Review*—with the other six showed no significant difference in the quadratic effect ($p = .427$), suggesting that these three did not exclusively drive mean quadratic trend, which did not vary significantly across journals ($\chi^2(8) = 10.42$, $p = .236$).

We also examined whether 2018 journal impact factors (log-transformed to adjust for positive skew) moderated these curvilinear effects. Journal impact marginally

² *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* bucked this trend, showing a slightly positive (U-shaped) quadratic effect based on its four time points, and *Psychological Bulletin*'s trend was truncated because it had no consulting editors until 1993 (see Footnote 1).

moderated quadratic change-over-time in the percentage of American consulting editors for the average journal ($b=-0.029$, $t(7)=-1.96$, $p=.090$, $R^2_{\text{pseudo}}=.33$; Figure 5). Simple effects tests at $\pm 1 SD$ from the mean log impact factor showed a linear decrease for lower-impact journals ($b_{\text{linear}}=-0.67$, $p=.012$; $b_{\text{quadratic}}=-0.0037$, $p=.648$), but a pronounced accelerating decrease for higher-impact journals ($b_{\text{linear}}=-0.43$, $p=.068$; $b_{\text{quadratic}}=-0.030$, $p<.001$). Thus, more-influential APA journals (e.g., *Psychological Bulletin*) may be recruiting more internationally representative consulting editors at an increasingly faster rate than other APA journals.

It's a Small World, After All

The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is weighing stricter visa policies for international students. If these policies are enacted, then American psychology will face headwinds in becoming more international. We endorse all of Arnett's (2008) and Thalmayer et al.'s (2020) policy proposals, especially that APA journals and their editors should (a) actively pursue non-American associate and consulting editors and (b) strive to highlight non-American research via special sections or issues, such as those on decolonizing psychological science (Adams et al., 2015) and underrepresented populations (Vazire, 2020). Our only disagreement with Thalmayer et al. (2020) is that significant change is happening—American psychology is becoming more international in APA journals. We agree, however, that the *pace* of internationalization is far too glacial and should be accelerated to improve research (van de Vijver, 2013) and teaching (Takooshian et al., 2016) via APA policy implementation.

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Webster, G. D., Nichols, A. L., & Schember, T. O. (2009). American psychology is becoming more international. *American Psychologist*, 64(6), 566–568.

doi:10.1037/a0016193

Figure 1. Percentages of American First Authors in Seven APA Journals as a Function of Publication Year

Note. J. = Journal. JEP = Journal of Experimental Psychology.

Figure 2. Predicted Slopes from Multilevel Models of Percentages of American First Authors in Seven APA Journals as a Function of Publication Year

Note. Thin gray lines reflect change-over-time slopes for individual journals; the thick black line reflects the average slope.

Figure 3. Percentages of American Consulting Editors (Editorial Board Members) in Seven APA Journals as a Function of Publication Year

Note. The x axis shows seven-year intervals between 1980 and 2008, but a 12-year interval between 2008 and 2020. *JPSP* (*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*) is a single journal with three sections and three independent sets of consulting editors. *J.* = *Journal*. *JEP* = *Journal of Experimental Psychology*. *JPSP* = *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. *ASC* = *Attitudes and Social Cognition*. *IRGP* = *Interpersonal Relations and Group Processes*. *PPID* = *Personality Processes and Individual Differences*.

Figure 4. Predicted Linear and Quadratic Trends from Multilevel Models of Percentages of American Consulting Editors (Editorial Board Members) in Seven APA Journals as a Function of Publication Year

Note. Thin gray curves reflect change-over-time for individual journals, including *JPSP*'s three sections (9 total curves). The thick gray curve reflects change-over-time for the average of all three *JPSP* sections. The thick black line reflects the average curve.

Figure 5. Predicted Linear and Quadratic Trends from Multilevel Models of Percentages of American Consulting Editors (Editorial Board Members) in Seven APA Journals as Functions of Publication Year and (Log 2-Year 2018) Journal Impact Factor

Note. “High” and “Low” correspond to ± 1 SD from the mean log journal impact factor.