Submission and Acceptance: Where, Why, and How to Publish Your Article

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ABSTRACT Publishing in journals is important for hiring and promotion, and just as importantly it is a means for building scholarly community and advancing intellectual inquiry. In this essay, I provide suggestions for navigating the process of submitting article manuscripts to journals and making decisions regarding where to publish. These comments are directed at anthropologists, but many of the points made may be germane to scholars in other disciplines. [*anthropology, publishing, articles, submission*]

No matter how good your ideas may be and regardless of the quality of your research, your work will not have the influence it deserves unless you ensure it is published in appropriate journals. Publishing in journals is one of the most important considerations for hiring and promotion, including tenure. But publishing in journals is more than naked careerism or the pursuit of status: it is a crucial means for building scholarly community and advancing intellectual inquiry. The peer-review and editorial process found at nearly all top journals works to improve the quality of our written work and helps it speak to the broadest audiences possible.

Despite all these advantages, the process of submitting a manuscript to a journal may seem intimidating. Some graduate programs offer a "professionalization" course, but even in the relatively rare cases in which such courses exist, discussion of submitting to a journal may be perfunctory. Yet despite the risk of rejection that attends the act of submitting a manuscript to a journal, it is clearly a worthwhile endeavor.

I direct my comments below primarily at scholars finishing their dissertations, on the job market, or in a tenure-track position. However, they are largely pertinent to senior scholars as well. After tenure, the pressure to publish in journals decreases, and many senior scholars simply opt for less competitive venues. However, I have seen through my own work as editor-in-chief of *American Anthropologist* that the review process can provide welcome feedback for more established scholars and can help disseminate their work to new audiences. In this essay, I do not focus on the question of "how do I write a manuscript that will be accepted for publication?" because I have addressed that issue elsewhere (Boellstorff 2008a, 2010). Instead, I focus on what happens after you have written a manuscript that you think has a good chance of being accepted for publication at a top-notch journal. What do you do now?

SELECTING A VENUE

There exist a wide range of journals that publish anthropological research, and selecting a journal can seem daunting. I have several suggestions in this regard.

Journal Articles, Not Edited Volumes

First, "no chapters in edited volumes until tenure." This maxim may seem draconian and indeed could be reasonably modified to "very few chapters in edited volumes until tenure"—but the draconian phrasing is easier to recall and drives the point home. For junior scholars, it can be flattering indeed to be asked to contribute to an edited volume, particularly if the editor or editors are eminent figures to whom one might feel beholden (or at least at pains not to disappoint). In addition, some edited volumes gain wide circulation and are seen as benchmark publications in a field of scholarship.

Despite these temptations, in general it is best to decline invitations to have one's work published in edited volumes before tenure (with some caveats noted below). In obtaining tenure but also more broadly in terms of establishing the quality of one's research, peer-reviewed journals are the gold standard, particularly when reviews are blinded, because they are managed by a general editorial process. Edited volumes often originate from conference panels, research collaborations, or networks of scholars—all wonderful things, of course, but all of which limit who has access to being invited to contribute. Given that more and more scholars access publications online, it also bears noting that it is generally much easier to obtain journal articles via the Internet than chapters in edited volumes.

A key issue here is that although publishers will usually permit a few chapters in an edited volume to be previously

published material, the inverse does not apply: with rare exceptions, manuscripts submitted to peer-reviewed journals must not have been previously published elsewhere. Sadly, there have been cases where scholars have published what they see as their best material in edited volumes without fully realizing that by doing so they have eliminated the possibility of publishing that material in a peer-reviewed journal. As a result, the ideal sequence is for scholars to publish their work in top peer-reviewed journals and then have those articles reprinted in an edited volume. The difficulty with this is that many journals take two years or more to publish an article (when you factor in one or two "revise and resubmit" decisions as well as the production process once a manuscript is accepted for publication). Edited volumes can also take years to see the light of day but sometimes have a swifter production timeline. This is yet another reason why it is important for junior scholars to get a couple manuscripts into the review pipeline at appropriate journals as swiftly as possible on completion of the dissertation.

As noted earlier, there are some minor caveats to my tenet "no chapters in edited volumes until tenure." A single chapter in an edited volume, particularly if the editors are seen as key figures in one's research community, certainly does not detract from one's curriculum vitae. (However, if this means that a manuscript that could have appeared in a top peer-reviewed journal has instead appeared in an edited volume, the decision may not have been the best trade-off.) What is of greater concern would be a tenure file that had three or four chapters in edited volumes but few or no articles in peer-reviewed journals. That can make it appear as if a scholar is only able to publish his or her work when relying on "insider" networks.

Another caveat concerns edited volumes for which the junior scholar in question is the editor or coeditor. Such an edited volume can help establish a junior scholar as a leader in the field, one who brings together colleagues in endeavors that advance intellectual conversations. However, managing the production of an edited volume is enormously time consuming: thus, because there are only so many hours in the day, it bears emphasizing that the time involved in bringing an edited volume to fruition is time taken away from working on one's own research. All things being equal, and barring some special set of circumstances, my recommendation is for junior scholars to hold off editing an edited volume until after tenure or to pair up with a more senior scholar to coedit the volume.

The "Journal Triangle"

Returning now to the primary topic of publishing in journals, the question "which journal should I pick?" looms large and can be a source of confusion to many junior scholars. There now exist many resources ranking journals that publish anthropological research.[1] It is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage in such rankings myself, and indeed I think a more important issue is that of coverage. For

the review process leading to tenure but also for ensuring one's general visibility as a scholar, it is crucial to demonstrate participation in a wide range of relevant scholarly communities.

As a convenient rule of thumb, I refer to the "journal triangle." My advice is that as soon as possible (and ideally within three to five years after obtaining a tenure-track position), junior scholars publish research articles in "general," "area," and "topic" journals. Allow me to use my own scholarly history as an example. My dissertation focused on the lifeworlds of *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians. Within five years of obtaining my Ph.D., I thus worked to publish research articles in general anthropological journals (in my case, this included *American Anthropologist, American Ethnologist,* and *Cultural Anthropology*). Publishing in "general journals" shows that your work is legible and useful to a broad range of anthropological interests. I also worked to publish research articles in area-studies journals (in my case, the *Journal of Asian Studies* and the *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*). Publishing in "area journals" shows that your work participates in area-specific conversations in anthropology and beyond. Finally, I worked to publish research articles in journals focusing on questions of sexuality (in my case, *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*). Publishing in "topic journals" shows that your work contributes to subjects of inquiry relevant to your research that cut across disciplinary and regional interests.

Hitting all three corners of the "journal triangle" in this manner is a far more effective way to build one's career than publishing only in one type of journal (and certainly more effective than relying on edited volumes). Put yourself in the shoes of a person who has been asked to write a letter in support of your tenure. How much easier it is to write such a letter when the author can simply point out "this person's work is being published and cited in anthropology, in an appropriate regional scholarly community, and in venues concerned with the person's topic of study." Tenure letters where a writer waxes effusively about the quality of a scholar's work but can point to few examples demonstrating the actual impact of the scholarship in question are far less convincing than tenure letters in which writers can contextualize their praise by reminding a review committee of the broad palette of venues in which the scholar has published her or his research.

Of course, I intend my notion of the "journal triangle" to be taken heuristically. For instance, I have conducted ethnographic research in the virtual world Second Life: for that scholarship, "area" and "topic" to some degree blur as I publish in venues like *Games and Culture* or the *Journal of Virtual World Research*. In addition, any research project addresses multiple topics (e.g., my Indonesia work is about globalization as much as it is about sexuality). However, the general goal remains valid: junior scholars should seek to publish in generalist anthropological journals, journals concerned in some sense with the area or region of study, and journals concerned in some sense with the topic of study.

More broadly, all scholars (but particularly junior scholars) should seek to place their work in the widest range of top-notch journals possible, because there is no better way to demonstrate that one is participating in a range of research communities.

UNDERSTANDING THE PEER-REVIEW PROCESS

Once you have decided where to submit your manuscript, you enter the peer-review process. Understanding how this process works can make the difference in your manuscript being accepted for publication or not. There are variations in how the peer-review process works for different journals but also sufficient commonalities that it is possible to distill some general guidelines.

Preparing Your Manuscript for Submission

Once you have selected a journal to which you would like to submit your manuscript, the first thing to do is look carefully at that journal's "guidelines for authors." At present, most journals have such guidelines on the journal's webpage. Even before initial submission, you may want to go back to your manuscript and make revisions based on an individual journal's guidelines, including rules regarding length and citation format.

In an ideal world, all journals would have identical guidelines for submission, but this is not the case. For instance, most journals limit the length of submissions. Sometimes this is still measured in pages, but increasingly that limit is measured in word count. Journals can have word limits for initial submissions of 12,000 words or more, but most are in the 8,000–10,000 word range. In most (but not all) cases, that word limit is "all inclusive," meaning that everything is included in that word count—the main text as well as the bibliography, any footnotes or endnotes, any tables or appendixes, and so on. If you are using Microsoft Word, be sure you have the "include footnotes and endnotes" box checked when assessing your word count. Some journals will let slip by a manuscript that goes a little over the word limit, but in a spirit of fairness, many journals simply unsubmit manuscripts over the word limit and ask authors to resubmit once they have met the journal's requirements for submission.

Most journals prefer that the manuscript be submitted as a single file (e.g., do not separate out your bibliography as a separate document). However, most journals do request that images, figures, and tables be uploaded as separate documents; just make sure you are aware of their preferences.

Most top-ranked journals are "double blind"; this means not only that you do not know the names of the persons reviewing your manuscript but also that the reviewers do not know your name. In disciplines like anthropology, there is often a sense that double-blind peer review is a waste of time because reviewers can usually figure out who wrote a manuscript, but I can testify from my editorial experiences that with surprising frequency a reviewer will state confi-

dently that "so-and-so is the author of this manuscript"—and be in error.

If you are submitting your manuscript to a journal that employs double-blind review, it is your responsibility to "anonymize" the manuscript before submission; many journals will simply unsubmit a manuscript that has not been correctly prepared in this manner. Anonymizing or "blinding" a manuscript involves more than just taking your name off the title page. For instance, an anonymized manuscript should not include an "acknowledgments" section because this usually makes the author easy to identify; this can be added later should the manuscript be accepted for submission. If you cite yourself in the manuscript, you should replace a citation like "(Boellstorff 2006:234)" with "(Author 2006:234)," but then this citation should not appear in the bibliography at all. If you provide the title, publisher, and so on of a book or article you wrote, it would obviously be easy for any reviewer to ascertain your identity. Also be sure that your name does not appear in the document name: were I to upload a manuscript to a journal named "Boellstorff_submission.doc," that would likely compromise double-blinded peer review, and I might be asked to rename and resubmit the manuscript at the outset.

Submitting the Manuscript

Once you have prepared your manuscript for submission to a particular journal, it is time to take the plunge and go through the submission process. A few journals still only accept paper submissions sent through regular mail, and a few require hard copies and online submissions, but the vast majority of journals now accept submissions exclusively online. In a few cases, "online submission" simply means e-mailing your manuscript to the editor or a support staff at the journal, but online submissions now usually involve some kind of web-based submissions system. Deal with it: nothing is more annoying to editors and their support staff than authors who require handholding through the submission process. If you have the smarts to obtain a Ph.D. and conduct anthropological research, you should be able to navigate an online submissions system.

Most online submission systems require you to first register with basic information about yourself, including a workplace address and e-mail. In addition to actually uploading the manuscript, there will often be a series of questions for the author or authors. This often includes things like keywords as well as confirmation that the manuscript is not under consideration elsewhere (you should never submit a manuscript to more than one journal at a time), meets guidelines, and is based on research for which proper human subjects clearance was obtained. There is usually a place for authors to upload or type in a cover letter. At this stage, a cover letter is a good thing to do (it will reinforce your professionalism), but it should be very brief, simply stating that you are submitting the manuscript and are happy to answer any questions.

Online systems also typically provide authors with a place to list preferred and nonpreferred reviewers. It is wise to provide journals with a list of two to four preferred reviewers. Most editors (incl. myself) would never employ only preferred reviewers but have nothing against one of three or four reviewers being a preferred reviewer. Naming preferred reviewers saves journals time in terms of identifying scholars appropriate for reviewing your manuscript. Sometimes a preferred reviewer can be a sympathetic reviewer—a colleague or even friend—but I should note that surprisingly often this "preferred" reviewer has the most negative assessment of the manuscript.

My advice is to be much more wary of listing nonpreferred reviewers when submitting a manuscript—or in any other context. (Indeed, I take it as a point of pride that for my promotion to professor, I listed not a single "nonpreferred" scholar.) Unfortunately, there are cases where because of personal rivalry, collegial misunderstanding, or turf wars between different perspectives or theoretical approaches in a field of inquiry, an author feels that certain individuals would not provide a fair assessment of her or his manuscript. If this is truly necessary, however, I advise listing the fewest number of nonpreferred reviewers possible. A long list of nonpreferred reviewers can be seen as a "red flag" that the author is combative or simply lacks standing in his or her scholarly community.

The Art of Waiting

Once you have submitted your manuscript, you have no choice but to wait for a reply. Most editors do an initial screening of manuscripts; should that be the case and should the editor decide that your manuscript is not appropriate to send out for full review, they will probably send you a rejection letter within a week to a month.

Should the manuscript go out for full review, the editor will have to find some number of reviewers to assess your manuscript (usually from three to five, but sometimes as few as one or two, and sometimes as many as eight or more). Typically, about double to triple the number of desired reviewers must be asked before a sufficient number agree. Then the reviewers are provided some length of time (usually three weeks to three months) to prepare and submit their comments. Some reviewers can be months late in returning their reviews, at times forcing an editor to seek additional reviewers. Once all of the reviews are in, the editor must read your manuscript and the reviews, make a decision, and then respond to you, often by writing an editor's letter of some kind.

This process takes time. The swiftest these various steps can take place is about one month, but far more common is three to four months, and sometimes six months or more. Particularly for junior scholars, this waiting period can be unnerving—which is yet another reason why it is so important to try to get manuscripts submitted to peer-reviewed journals within the first three years post-Ph.D. As editor-in-chief of *American Anthropologist,* I have occasionally been contacted by authors with a missive on some variation of "I am going up for tenure this year; is there any way you can get a decision to me quickly?" Unfortunately, there is rarely anything I (or any editor) can do to force things along more rapidly, and in any case such a missive may indicate that the author in question has failed to get work into review sufficiently early in his or her career.

Even when questions of promotion are not pressing, it may happen that you feel you have been waiting an inordinately long time to hear back from a journal. If you do wish to contact the journal, my first suggestion is that you do your homework and use the journal's webpage to determine the administrative contact for the journal. Often this person will have a title like "editorial assistant." If no name is listed, the key thing to look for is the e-mail address for the journal—not the e-mail address of the editor. Only as a last resort should you ever contact the editor herself or himself. Some authors inexplicably think "going to the top" and sending an e-mail to the personal e-mail address of the editor will result in the swiftest response. This is inadvisable for several reasons, including the fact that it is usually administrative staff who handle the online submissions system on a daily basis and are best positioned to check on a manuscript. Another reason attempting to contact the editor directly is inadvisable is that many editors struggle to segregate their research and teaching from their editorial duties by avoiding use of their personal e-mail accounts for editorial work.

Usually, journal staff (incl. the editor) will not be able to give you a specific reason for a delay in obtaining a decision regarding your manuscript. The most common reasons for such delays are probably a reviewer failing to return comments or a backlog of manuscripts in the editor's own "to-do" queue. However, in some cases, an author query can motivate journal staff to hound tardy reviewers again or even to seek another reviewer. Overall, then, my advice to authors waiting for decisions is "be patient and work on something else" but also that after six months or so a discreet, polite query to a journal's staff—remember, not to the editor directly—is acceptable.

Dealing with the First Rejection Letter

On a handful of occasions, I have been happy to have provided an author with an "accept" decision after a first round of reviews. However, this has been extremely rare: like most top-ranked peer-reviewed journals, *American Anthropologist* has an informal in-house rule along the lines of "we never accept manuscripts on the first round." In other words, almost all manuscripts published in top-ranked peer-reviewed journals first received a "revise and resubmit" decision. To avoid misunderstanding, most editors are careful to phrase "revise and resubmit" letters so as to make it clear that, formally,

the manuscript has been rejected. It is emphatically not the case that if you do everything the editor asks of you in the "revise and resubmit" letter that your manuscript will definitely be published. However, responding to the first rejection letter appropriately can greatly increase the chances of your article eventually being accepted for publication.

First, take heart and do not take criticism personally. Particularly for junior scholars who have recently completed their graduate training in a department that (ideally) provided largely positive feedback, the experience of negative criticism can be jarring. Most editors work hard to cast their comments in the most constructive and supportive manner possible, and many also redact reviewer comments in cases where the reviewer makes overly dismissive or ad hominem comments (which in my experience is rare). Nonetheless, comments regarding the shortcomings of your work can be difficult to take. One way to reframe criticism is to think "how is it that the reviewers have misunderstood my argument, and how can I modify my manuscript so as to minimize to the greatest degree possible the chance that other readers will make this misinterpretation?"

Second, do not resist: do everything the editor and reviewers recommend. Many editors will synthesize reviewer comments in a separate editor's letter that includes specific recommendations for revision. Other editors simply forward reviewer comments with at most a short paragraph of synthetic comments. In any case, you should revise your manuscript in such a way as to take these comments into account. You may not like some of the suggestions: for instance, you may feel your review of relevant literatures is sufficient, while the editor asks that aspect of the manuscript be expanded. In this case, what you like should take a back seat to the editor's recommendations. There are two reasons for this. First, if you do everything the editor suggests, it makes it more likely (although still not guaranteed) that your revised manuscript will be accepted for publication. Second, in retrospect it is usually clear that the editor and reviewers in question have identified legitimate weaknesses in your analysis, ones that readers themselves would find compromise the manuscript's effectiveness.

Thus, the best thing to do is sit down with the reviewers' comments and the editor's comments (if any) and draw up a plan for how you will revise the manuscript so as to take these comments into account. It will occasionally happen that reviewers will disagree: one will say "you need more historical background" while another will say "you need to trim down the historical background." In such cases it is your responsibility to find a way to navigate the conflicting recommendations: in this example, for instance, the answer might be "I need a more effective historical background." Some editors provide authors with an expanded word limit for their revised manuscript: under my editorship, for instance, *American Anthropologist* typically raises the word limit for revised and resubmitted manuscripts from 8,000 to 9,500 words. Even in such a case, some trimming down of the existing argument may be necessary to incorporate the needed revisions. Other editors provide authors with no additional word limit at all; in such circumstances, the author must simply find ways to edit down the existing manuscript so there is space for needed revisions.

I noted earlier that the cover letter accompanying an initial submission can be quite succinct. In contrast, the cover letter accompanying a revised and resubmitted manuscript should be more extensive. In addition to thanking the editor and reviewers, it should provide a roadmap reminding the editor of the main points for revision and demonstrating how the author has revised the manuscript so as to address these concerns (with page numbers identifying where in the revised manuscript the various improvements can be found). This makes it much easier for the editor to begin the review process for the revised manuscript.

Editors are occasionally able to render a decision of "accept" or "reject" (or even another "revise and resubmit") based on their own reading of the revised manuscript. In most cases, however, editors put the revised manuscript through another full review process before making a decision. When this happens, editors often attempt to obtain at least three reviews, including at least one from an original reviewer and at least one from a new reviewer. Because this process obviously takes time, it is in your interest to have the shortest possible turnaround between receiving a "revise and resubmit" decision and resubmitting a revised version of the manuscript in question. If you can send in your revised manuscript within two to three months, you will receive a decision that much more swiftly. Even if your manuscript is eventually rejected, your efforts will not have been in vain, as you will be left with a substantially improved manuscript which you can submit to a different journal (Boellstorff 2008b).

CONCLUSION

I hope that these suggestions will help head off uncertainty and confusion regarding the world of journal publishing. Submitting manuscripts to journals can be scary, but it is a crucial way to support your career and also to move scholarly conversations forward. There are, of course, many other venues and modalities for intellectual work in anthropology and beyond, but journals do play a vital role. Understanding how to submit your work to a journal will help you prepare more effectively, increase your chances of success, and make the entire process more useful—not just for your career but also for your own intellectual growth.

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NOTE

1. See http://www.aaanet.org/publications/list-of-journals.cfm for a helpful list of journals that publish anthropological research. It is beyond the scope of this article to address the question of "open-access" journals versus journals requiring various forms of subscription, but I note in passing that questions of access and ownership are extremely important and in need of much greater discussion (Boellstorff 2009).

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