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## **Where Do Nonprofit and Civil Society Researchers Publish? Perceptions of Nonprofit Journal Quality**

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The field of nonprofit and civil society studies has grown tremendously in the past few decades, and scholarly journals have played a central role in this growth by facilitating circulation of research in the academic community. To date, only three nonprofit journals are indexed in the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) and, as such, have an impact factor. There are, however, far more journals serving the nonprofit and civil society academic community. Thus, focusing solely on impact factors is not necessarily suitable for creating rankings or assessing journal quality in this field. Indeed, doing so fails to capture most scholarly publication outlets that focus on nonprofits and civil society. Seeking to overcome shortcomings of relying merely on impact factors, this exploratory study uses survey data collected from nonprofit and civil society researchers in the United States and Europe to provide insight into which journals they perceive to be quality outlets for nonprofit and civil society scholars. Our findings reveal that, while the impact factor can be one indicator of journal quality, newer outlets without an impact factor are also perceived to be viable outlets for publication by scholars in the field.

Keywords: Journal Quality, Nonprofit and Civil Society, Perceptions, Stated Preference Ranking

The field of nonprofit and civil society studies has grown tremendously in the past few decades, which has prompted a number of scholars to argue that the state of knowledge production in the field has reached a point of maturity (e.g., Ma & Konrath, 2018). Scholarly journals such as *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* (NML), *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* (NVSQ), and *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Non-Profit Organizations* (Voluntas) have undeniably played a critical role in this growth and maturity. Indeed, these journals have facilitated and promoted the “circulation of literature on nonprofits in the academic community, which can help to form a scholarly identity of nonprofit studies” (Ma & Konrath, 2018, p. 1146).

Although many scholars would probably agree that having a robust set of quality journals is essential for the dissemination and accumulation of scholarly knowledge, it is surprising that less than a handful of studies have assessed the perceived quality of nonprofit and civil society journals. The three journals identified above are all indexed in the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), a multidisciplinary index containing over 3,000 social science journals and

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made available through Web of Science. The SSCI relies on the impact factor to compare the quality of journals vis-à-vis other journals in related fields.

There are several journals serving the nonprofit and civil society academic community, however, that do not appear in the SSCI. Thus, relying solely on the impact factor as the principal indicator of journal quality may not be suitable for this field. Indeed, many nonprofit and civil society scholars may consider non-impact factor journals to be high-quality outlets for their research. Seeking to overcome the limitations associated with the use of the impact factor as a measure of journal quality, this exploratory study uses survey data collected from nonprofit and civil society researchers in the United States and Europe to understand which journals these researchers perceive to be quality outlets in this field.

### **The Notion of Journal Quality**

Academic journals started to emerge toward the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. One of the earliest scholarly outlets was *The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, which was created in the mid-1660s (Andrade, 1965). Over the past 350 years, academic journals have become crucial in the natural sciences as well as in the social sciences as a means of disseminating scholarly work and research findings. According to Schaffner (1994), academic journals play a number of key roles in scholarly communities including building and communicating a collective knowledge base, validating the quality of research, and bringing coherence to scientific communities. Indeed, in most scientific fields, publishing articles in top-tier peer-reviewed journals (above other types of scholarly publication outlets) is considered to contribute to disciplinary knowledge (Seipel, 2003).

Publications in academic journals also play a vital role in the promotion and tenure process for many scholars (Gomez-Mejia, & Balkin, 1992; Seipel, 2003). Authoring articles published in high impact factor peer-reviewed journals tends to be considered the most credible evidence of scholarship. This often sends a strong signal of thought leadership and research competence—qualities that many departments, schools, and universities expect of their faculty members (Park & Gordon, 1996).

Journal quality and impact are factors often assessed based on how widely a particular journal is read, how often it is cited, and how favorability it is perceived by its associated scholarly community (Bradshaw & Brook, 2016). These factors are commonly quantified by an impact factor. A journal's impact factor is calculated as a count of all citations articles in the journal have received in the preceding two years. This count is then divided by the number of articles that the journal published during those years (Baum, 2011; Garfield, 1999). Originally intended as a means to sort journals according to their citation rates for the purposes of library catalog selection (Garfield, 1999, 2006), the impact factor is now predominantly used to classify journals and compare their relative importance.

Using the impact factor to rank journals does have some distinct benefits. Indeed, it can be seen by some as a tool to easily compare research performance (Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992). However, the impact factor was never intended for this use; unfortunately, it has been used in myriad unintended ways. For instance, the journal impact factor is frequently considered in hiring decisions, evaluations for promotion and tenure, grant awards (Adler & Harzing, 2009; Baum, 2011; Nkomo, 2009), and pay increases (Adler & Harzing, 2009; Baum, 2011; Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992). Thus, scholars frequently use impact factors when considering where to submit their manuscripts (Garfield, 2006). This has led some scholars to believe that the impact factor is “a powerful incentive in academia [that] has taken a role as the new currency for scientists [and, therefore] has the potential to deeply change the motivational forces of scientists” (Paulus, Rademacher, Schäfer, Müller-Pinzler, & Krach, 2015, p. 1-2). There have been instances, for example, where researchers have been known to modify their research

questions as well as their research designs in an effort to appeal to high-impact factored journals (Baum, 2011).

Adler and Harzing (2009) have also found that scholars may not elect to send their research to new and innovative journals that do not (yet) have an impact factor since publication in these outlets may not be valued by their departments, schools, and/or universities. Moreover, there has been a tendency to use journal impact factor rankings as a proxy for article quality. As such, “It has become common to refer to a scholar’s worth by saying that he or she has two AMJs [*Academy of Management Journal*]...without ever mentioning the content, quality of impact of the article itself, the implication is that the scholar must be good” (Adler & Harzing, 2009, p. 78). Doing so, however, leads to judgment errors since many influential articles are published in less highly ranked (or not ranked at all) journals, while many less influential articles are published in highly ranked (i.e., impact factored) journals (Aguinis, Cummings, Ramani, & Cummings, 2019; Singh, Haddad, & Chow, 2007)

Journal rankings based on impact factor and citation analysis, as described above, are classified as revealed preference rankings (Tahai & Meyer, 1999; Walters, 2017). This is the most commonly used method for ranking journals (Tahai & Meyer, 1999). Scholars have, however, identified a second approach—stated preference—which captures the preferences, perceptions, and choices of academic experts and scholars in a respective field (Bernick & Krueger, 2010; Tahai & Meyer, 1999; Walters, 2017). This approach “has gained recognition in the academy as a means of assessing journal quality because the resulting list reflects the cumulative opinion of active scholars who produce and consume research published in journals being ranked” (Serenko & Bontis, 2018, p. 749). Indeed, rather than relying on statistics generated through citations, this approach integrates the perceptions of research-active individuals in the respective field.

In theory, then, stated preference rankings should allow for the capture of other aspects of journal quality besides the impact factor. Stated preference rankings are used in fields with relatively small audiences as well as in fields with relatively poor coverage in mainstream citation databases, such as SSCI. In this article, we argue that the stated preference approach of ranking journals is likely a suitable (and more appropriate) method of evaluating journal quality in the field of nonprofit and civil society studies, as we describe below.

### **Nonprofit and Civil Society Journals: Previous Inquiry and Research Questions**

This study focuses on nonprofit and civil society studies, an interdisciplinary field that draws from areas such as political science, public administration, management, sociology, social work, and education (Ma & Konrath, 2018; Shier & Handy, 2014). Over the past three decades, the study of nonprofit and civil society has witnessed substantial growth in the academy (Brudney & Herman, 2004; Mirabella, 2007). As a result, there has been tremendous expansion in knowledge production in the nonprofit and civil society field, as indicated by the proliferation of scholarly articles (Ma & Konrath, 2018) and an ever-growing number of dissertations and theses related to these areas (Shier & Handy, 2014).

The number of journals targeting nonprofit and civil society studies has also increased substantially. Before 1990, there was only one peer-reviewed journal (*NVSQ* founded in 1972) devoted exclusively to nonprofit and civil society topics, e.g., voluntary action, citizen participation, philanthropy, and nonprofit management. Today, there are 61 journals worldwide that include terms such as “nonprofit,” “third” or “voluntary sector,” “philanthropy,” “civil society,” “social economy,” or “social movements” in their titles (Smith, 2013).

In addition to these journals devoted exclusively to nonprofit and civil society topics, Smith (2013) created a comprehensive list of outlets for scholarship in this area (what he refers to as *altruistics*). He found that there are more than 100 active and inactive generalist and specialized academic journals that publish research related to nonprofit organizations and civil society. Despite this proliferation of scholarly outlets, relatively few inquiries have sought to assess the quality of nonprofit and civil society journals. Indeed, beyond basic descriptive information, Smith's article does not include any discussion about journal quality.

Although Ma and Konrath (2018) recently utilized the core list identified by Smith (2013) to evaluate knowledge production in nonprofit and philanthropic studies from a thematic perspective, they were only able to focus on a small sub-set of the journals that Smith (2013) identified ( $n=19$ ). As noted by Ma and Konrath (2018), many of the journals were published irregularly and "deviate[d] greatly on quality" (p. 1142). Unfortunately, though, Ma and Konrath (2018) neither listed the names of the 19 journals nor engaged in an explicit discussion about differences in quality among these journals.

Brudney and Herman (2004) conducted a novel study comparing nonprofit and civil society journals and purposefully included a quality indicator. They asked 186 individuals who were subscribed to the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) and International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR) listservs to answer questions about (among other things) readability, relevance for practice and theory, utility, and perceived quality of the articles in three journals: *NVSQ*, *NML*, and *Voluntas*. Clearly, these three journals are key to any discussion about outlets for nonprofit and civil society scholarship; however, they are not the exclusive outlets for nonprofit and civil society research.

It is important to point out that although the study of nonprofits and civil society draws heavily from other fields and disciplines, nonprofit and civil society journals have not traditionally been included in research on journal quality in these areas. Particularly within public administration, which could arguably be considered most akin to the study of nonprofits and civil society (Mirabella & Wish, 2000), most studies of research and journal quality have failed to include any discussion of nonprofit and civil society specifically.

In one of the only studies to do so, Bernick and Krueger (2010) surveyed editors and board members of 39 public administration journals. They found that *NVSQ* ranked 23rd overall among these journals and *NML* ranked 35th overall. Aside from these two journals, *Public Administration Review (PAR)*, *Administration and Society (A&S)*, and the *Journal of Public Administration Research & Theory (JPART)* were the top-five outlets for nonprofit- and civil-society-related research. However, "a number of respondents indicated that they felt uncomfortable ranking nonprofit journals [...] because they did not consider themselves knowledgeable about the quality of [...] nonprofit journals" (Bernick & Krueger, 2010, p. 104).

The time is now ripe, then, to conduct a survey of those knowledgeable about nonprofit and civil society journals, i.e., researchers in the field. Therefore, we undertake an exploratory study utilizing a stated preference approach to assess researcher perceptions of nonprofit and civil society journal quality. In the study, we seek to explore two basic questions: 1) Which scholarly journals do nonprofit and civil society scholars perceive as the most relevant and viable outlets for their research? and 2) Of the identified journals, which are perceived as being most prestigious and of highest quality (top tier) and which are perceived as second and third tier?

## **Research Approach**

Taking a stated preference approach in this study has several distinct advantages (Walters, 2017). First, this study uses an alternative to impact-factor-based rankings of journal quality

since “many subdisciplines are underrepresented in the databases used to calculate the most commonly used, and supposedly ‘objective’ measure of journal ‘quality’—the ISI journal impact factor (which actually measures influence, not quality)” (Adler & Harzing, 2009, p. 80). Particularly, for the field of nonprofit and civil society studies, newly emerging journals without an impact factor (which many scholars tend to publish in) such as *Nonprofit Policy Forum (NPF)* and this journal, *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs (JPNA)*, do not have an impact factor.

Second, solely relying on the impact factor to rank journals or, by extension, the quality of an author runs the risk of assuming that only journals with high impact factors are publishing high-quality research and researchers (Adler & Harzing, 2009; Aguinis et al., 2019; Singh, Haddad, & Chow, 2007). Third, as Serenko and Bontis (2018) argued, “It is extremely difficult to deliberately influence the journal quality perceptions of a large group of independent scholars, whereas citations may be dramatically boosted in the short term by means of questionable practices such as forced citations or excessive self-citations” (p. 749). As such, the stated preference approach is considered more suitable for the purposes of our study, since developing a revealed preference journal ranking may not only be difficult to achieve (given the interdisciplinary nature of nonprofit and civil society studies), but it is also not desirable given the well-known limitations of these rankings.

To summarize, although the field of nonprofit and civil society studies has seen tremendous growth, including in the number of publication outlets, only a handful of journals have been captured in revealed preference rankings (Ma & Konrath, 2018). Moreover, journals publishing related research are ranked under different categories such as social issues, public administration, and/or management (Journal Citation Reports, 2018). This makes it difficult to assess their quality in comparison to nonprofit and civil society studies. Ultimately, this absence of a ranking leaves tenure-seeking nonprofit and civil society scholars in a bind, particularly since many of these scholars may work in departments, schools, and universities where journal rankings are used to assess the quality of one’s publication record. One added goal of this study, then, is to provide tenure-seeking faculty with evidence to contextualize their choice of publication outlets and to more persuasively make their case for promotion and tenure.

## **Data and Methodology**

Studying perceptions of journal quality is a fairly new endeavor in the field of nonprofit and civil society studies. Given the exploratory nature of the research questions that we ask, and following other scholars who have studied journal quality (e.g., Meggs, Greer, Bian, & Gustina, 2017), in this study we use a convenience sample drawn from three different groups.<sup>2</sup> The first group includes administrators of nonprofit degree programs that belong to the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC). This list of administrators was collected using contact information provided on the NACC website.

The second group includes North American nonprofit and civil society scholars. This list was obtained by identifying the leading nonprofit programs using the 2018 US News & World Report nonprofit management rankings. We visited each ranked program’s website to collect contact information and the names of relevant scholars. For the two groups, a total of 123 individuals were identified. We received a total of 63 responses from groups one and two (a 51.22% response rate).

We also included a third group, which consisted of a small number of European nonprofit and civil society scholars who were specifically identified by the authors. Individuals in the European group were also asked to share the survey link with others whom they deemed

knowledgeable about the subject. This sample consisted of 19 European nonprofit and civil society scholars, all of whom responded to the survey.

Before analyzing the data, we excluded 13 survey responses from the total sample. These responses were excluded due to missing data. Nine responses were excluded from the US samples and four responses excluded from the European sample. The final sample size, therefore, was 69. Data were collected in October 2018.

### *Survey Instrument*

Perceptions of journal quality were assessed by asking each respondent to think about journals that, in their opinion, serve as the most viable outlets to publish nonprofit and civil society research. Each respondent was then asked to write the name(s) of the journals and to classify each journal mentioned (on a scale of 1 to 3) based on how the respondent perceived the quality of that journal (1=top tier, i.e., most prestigious/high quality; 2=second tier, i.e., somewhat prestigious/medium quality; and 3=third tier, i.e., less prestigious/lower quality).

A few considerations went into the decision not to provide respondents with a predetermined list of journals. First, we wanted to avoid biasing respondents. Allowing the option to freely write may elicit journal mentions that are not part of a predetermined list (Walters, 2017). Second, since there is no dedicated ranking of journals in the field of nonprofit and civil society studies, compiling a list would have been challenging. Similarly, existing lists—such as the one created by Smith (2013)—may exclude new journals, may not be comprehensive with regard to coverage (Walters, 2017), or may be outdated (Ma & Konrath, 2018).

To determine whether there were differences between subgroups, we collected a range of demographic and background information. Specifically, respondents were asked about their gender (1=female, 2=male, 3=nonbinary, 4=prefer not to say), age (in years), tenure status (1=tenured, 0=untentured), main areas of research (1=nonprofit management, 2=governance, 3=human resource management, 4=fundraising/development, 5=marketing, 6=collaboration, 7=social entrepreneurship/social enterprise, 8=volunteering, 9=finance/economics, 10=philanthropy, 11=NGOs/international civil society, and/or 12=other), whether they served as an editorial board member of a journal (1=yes, 0=no), and whether they held an administrative role with regard to a nonprofit or civil society academic program within their school (1=yes, 0=no).

To evaluate the extent to which, if at all, their departments and/or schools considered particular journals when making decisions on promotion and tenure, we also asked: “Is there a list of journals that your department/school considers when evaluating tenure decisions for these faculty?” Answer options were “yes” (coded as “1”) and “no” (coded as “0”). Respondents were, optionally, permitted to elaborate if lists were available.

Finally, we asked an open-ended question at the end of the survey: “Is there anything else you would like to share with regard to your perceptions of journal quality in the field of nonprofit and civil society studies?” Responses to this question were used to contextualize our findings, where appropriate.

## **Findings**

The average age of the respondents was 45 years (median=42.5; s.d.=9.09; min=30, max=70). About half of the sample was female (50.72%). One person preferred not to reveal their gender, and the remainder of the sample was male (47.83%). Approximately 58% of respondents were tenured; and, about 39% indicated that they served in an administrative role with regard to a nonprofit or civil society academic program. More than half the respondents (56.5%) indicated

they currently served as a member of a journal editorial board. Most respondents (58.8%) reported three or more main research areas, 23.5% reported having two main areas of research, and 17.6% reported having a single major area of research. The maximum number of research areas reported was six. Nonprofit management (with 50 mentions), NGO/civil society (with 28 mentions), and Governance (with 21 mentions) were the three most frequently mentioned main research areas (see Figure 1 for a breakdown of research areas).

In total, respondents mentioned 75 different journals.<sup>3</sup> The average number of journals mentioned was 6.48 (s.d.=4.45) and the median was 5 (the mean is considerably larger due to four respondents mentioning over 15 journals each). Forty-five journals received only one mention (60%). These statistics highlight how extensive the field of journals is that nonprofit and civil society scholars deem as viable outlets for publication. A full list of journals mentioned can be obtained from the authors.

Table 1 provides an overview of journals that were mentioned at least three times. The information in this table illustrates the perceived quality of the respective journals as indicated by the respondents. We supplemented Table 1 with information on the total number of volumes, number of issues published yearly, impact factor (where applicable), whether or not the journal is peer-reviewed, and whether or not the journal is open access. Journals are sorted by highest overall mention (i.e., in the “count” column).

*Voluntas* received the highest number of mentions ( $n=69$ ). This is closely followed by *NVSQ* with 68 mentions (98.6% of respondents) and *NML* with 62 mentions (89.9% of respondents). As indicated by the high total number of volume for these journals, they have been in operation for several years (several decades in some instances).

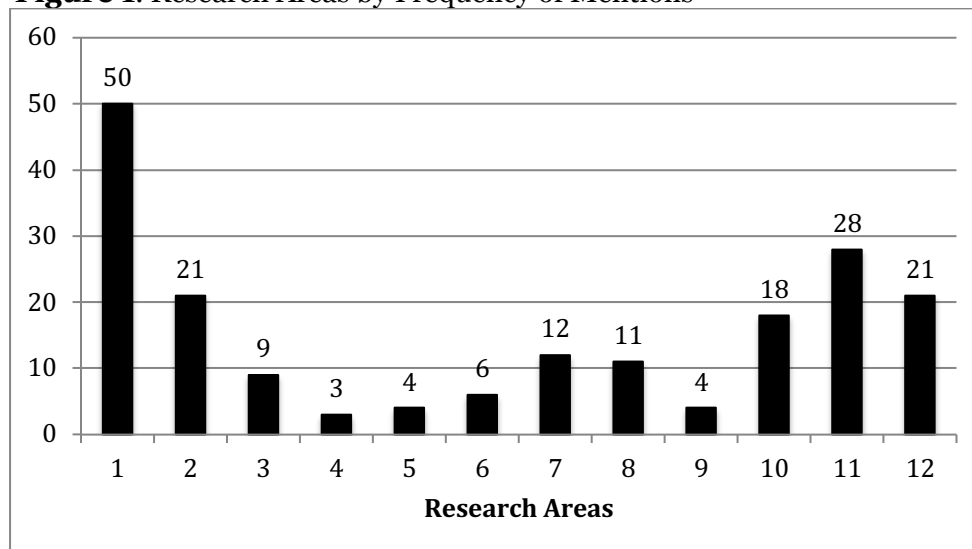
Respondents were almost unanimous in rating *NVSQ* as a top-tier publication outlet (98.53%), while responses for *NML* and *Voluntas* were more dispersed. Sixty-four percent of respondents rated *Voluntas* as a top-tier publication outlet, and 35% of respondents rated this journal as a second-tier publication outlet. *NML* was rated as a top-tier publication outlet by 55% of respondents, and 42% of respondents rated it as a second-tier publication outlet. Not surprisingly, these three journals are the only nonprofit and civil society journals, earlier mentioned, listed in the SSCI.

This first group of journals is followed by a second group that received fewer mentions. Indeed, this second group received between 17 and 24 total mentions (representing 24.60% to 34.80% of respondents). The journals in this second group are: *NPF*, *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership (JNEL)*, *Voluntary Sector Review (VSR)*, *JPNA*, and *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing (IJNVSM)*. This group of journals is quite diverse.

Indeed, it consists of a mix of open access and non-open access journals. Notably, however, journals in this group have not been around as long as journals in the first group. Moreover, none of the journals in this group has an impact factor.

The third group of journals includes *Journal of Civil Society, Nonprofit and Public Sector Marketing (NPSM)*, *Public Administration Review (PAR)*, and *Public Performance and Management Review (PPMR)*. Journals in this group received nine to 14 mentions (representing 13.00% to 20.30% of respondents). The latter three journals, in particular, have been around for quite a long time. These journals have volumes of 30, 78, and 41, respectively. Among the journals in this third group, *PAR* is perceived as a top-tier journal (with 92% of respondents indicating so). However, only 12 respondents mentioned it as a quality publication outlet for nonprofit and civil society studies. This may indicate, then, that although nonprofit and civil society scholars believe that *PAR* is a top-tier academic journal, many of these scholars may not perceive it as an outlet suitable for their research (whether that be for

**Figure 1.** Research Areas by Frequency of Mentions



Notes: “1”=Nonprofit Management, “2”=Governance, “3”=Human Resource Management, “4”=Fundraising/Development, “5”=Marketing, “6”=Collaboration, “7”=Social Entrepreneurship/Social Enterprise, “8”=Volunteering, “9”=Finance/Economics, “10”=Philanthropy, “11”=NGOs/International Civil Society, and “12”=Other (e.g., Evaluation, Leadership, and Advocacy).

reasons relating to substantive focus or the likelihood that the journal is welcoming to nonprofit and civil society research).

Journals in the last group include *Foundation Review*, *Journal of Public Administration Research & Theory (JPART)*, *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research (ANSERJ)*, *Journal of Public Affairs Education (JPAE)*, *Nonprofit Quarterly*, *Community Development Journal*, *Human Service Organizations*, *Nonprofit Times*, and *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. These journals were mentioned anywhere from three to five times by respondents (representing 4.30% to 7.20%). These journals were also quite diverse in terms of their age, open access policies, and perceived quality.

We also asked respondents whether or not their department/school had explicitly identified certain journals to guide and evaluate candidates for promotion and tenure. Nearly three out of four (72.46%) respondents said no such list existed. Furthermore, of the respondents who answered “yes,” the basis for their department/school’s list of journals varied greatly. Some respondents indicated that the list was based on impact factor. Others indicated that the list was created based on rankings available in other disciplines; still others indicated that the list in their department/school was decided by that particular department/school. It is also worth noting that the presence of a list for promotion and tenure was more common among European respondents (53.33%) than among North American respondents (20.37%).

It is also important to note that Table 1 consists of a diverse range of journals that are both peer-reviewed and nonpeer-reviewed, open and non-open access, and with and without an impact factor. The majority of journals perceived to be viable publication outlets in the nonprofit and civil society studies field do not have an impact factor. In cases where journals do have an impact factor, the impact factor does not necessarily translate into respondent mentions. This is notable because publishing in impact factor journals is often an important factor in achieving tenure (Gomez-Mejia, & Balkin, 1992). Two of our open-ended responses captured the choices researchers face when considering where to submit their work for publication.



**Table 1.** Journal Mentions by Tier

	Journal Name	Count	% Top Tier	% Second Tier	% Third Tier	Total Volumes	Issues/Year	Open Access	Peer Review	2017 IF
Group 1	Voluntas	69	63.8	34.8	1.5	29	6	N	Y	1.273
	Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly (NVSQ)	68	98.5	1.5	0	47	6	N	Y	1.932
	Nonprofit Management & Leadership (NML)	62	54.8	41.9	3.2	29	4	N	Y	1.633
Group 2	Nonprofit Policy Forum (NPF)	24	8.3	58.3	33.3	9	4	Y	Y	n/a
	Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership (JNEL)	23	13.0	26.1	60.9	8	4	N	Y	n/a
	Voluntary Sector Review (VSR)	20	5.0	75.0	20.0	9	3	N	Y	n/a
	Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs (JPNA)	18	0	50.0	50.0	4	3	Y	Y	n/a
	International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing (IJNVSM)	17	17.7	52.9	29.4	23	4	N	Y	n/a
Group 3	Journal of Civil Society	14	15.4	46.2	30.8	14	4	N	Y	n/a
	Nonprofit and Public Sector Marketing (NPSM)	13	14.3	64.3	21.4	30	4	N	Y	n/a
	Public Administration Review (PAR)	12	91.7	8.3	0	78	6	N	Y	4.591
	Public Performance Management Review (PPMR)	9	55.6	44.4	0	41	4	N	Y	1.197
Group 4	Foundation Review	5	0	20.0	80.0	10	4	N	Y	n/a
	Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory (JPART)	5	100	0	0	28	4	N	Y	3.907
	Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research (ANSERJ)	4	0	75.0	25.0	9	2	Y	Y	n/a
	Journal of Public Affairs Education (JPAAE)	4	0	75.0	25.0	24	4	N	Y	n/a
	Nonprofit Quarterly	4	25.0	75.0	0	-	-	N	N	
	Community Development Journal	3	0	33.3	66.7	53	4	N	Y	0.750
	Human Service Organizations	3	0	66.7	33.3	42	5	N	Y	0.836
	Nonprofit Times	3	0	0	100	-	-	Y	N	-
	Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR)	3	33.3	0	66.7	-	-	N	N	-

Note: Only journals with three or more mentions are shown. Volume numbers presented are as of December 2018.

*The highest quality journals are not necessarily those with the highest (or any) impact factor. For example, Nonprofit Policy Forum has no impact factor but publishes work by highly esteemed scholars and is the only journal focused on the intersection of nonprofits and public policy. The articles in NPF are, in my opinion, consistently high quality. (female, untenured)*

*The more practitioner-oriented journals like Nonprofit Quarterly, Stanford Social Innovation Review, and Chronicle of Philanthropy also serve as important outlets for scholars although publishing in these venues counts less toward tenure. (male, tenured, editorial board member, administrator)*

To further investigate whether the perceptions of journal quality differed for certain subgroups, we break down the top eight journals with regards to number of mentions (group 1 and 2 journals) by tenure status of the respondents (Table 2), main fields of research (Table 3), and service role (Table 4).

Table 2 presents findings comparing nonprofit and civil society scholars with and without tenure. In general, respondents with and without tenure agreed on the quality of the listed journals. However, a few differences are worth mentioning. *NPF*, a newer publication outlet in the field (see Table 1), was perceived as a top-tier publication outlet by 12.5% of both tenured and untenured respondents; however, further classification of journals into the second- and third-tier publication outlets restyled in differences between these two groups.

Whereas 25% of tenured respondents perceived *NPF* as a second-tier publication outlet, 62.5% of untenured respondents did. Similarly, while *VSR* and *JPNA* were perceived as top-tier publication outlets by at least 6.7% of tenured respondents, no untenured respondents rated these journals as top-tier. Interestingly, *VSR* was rated as a third-tier journal (60%) by untenured respondents, while tenured respondents rated this journal as a second-tier publication outlet (87%).

Table 3 presents perceptions of journal quality by the three most frequently mentioned areas of scholarly research: Nonprofit Management, NGOs/International Civil Society, and Governance. Since respondents were able to indicate multiple research areas, these categories are not mutually exclusive. From the results in this table, there are no differences in patterns among the three journals in group 1.

Journals in group 2 were rated differently depending on research focus. For instance, 28.6% of researchers who identified NGOs/international civil society as their main area of research rated *JNEL* as a top-tier publication outlet. None of the researchers who identified Governance as their main area of research rated *JNEL* as a top-tier publication outlet. This is an interesting observation since *JNEL*, among other things, focuses on leadership. We found similar trends for *NPF* and *VSR*.

Table 4 presents responses from program administrators and those serving on an editorial board for a journal in the field. There were 20 respondents serving as editorial board member on a journal. Eleven respondents were program administrators and 16 respondents indicated that they held both roles.

**Table 2.** Journal Mentions by Tier and Tenure Status

Journal Name	Tenure Status	Count	% Top Tier	% Second Tier	% Third Tier
Voluntas	Tenured	40	67.5	30.0	2.5
	Untenured	28	60.7	39.3	0
Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly ( <i>NVSQ</i> )	Tenured	40	97.5	2.5	0
	Untenured	28	100	0	0
Nonprofit Management & Leadership ( <i>NML</i> )	Tenured	35	51.4	45.7	2.9
	Untenured	27	59.3	37.0	3.7
Nonprofit Policy Forum ( <i>NPF</i> )	Tenured	16	12.5	25	62.5
	Untenured	8	12.5	62.5	25.0
Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership ( <i>JNEL</i> )	Tenured	16	12.5	25	62.5
	Untenured	7	14.3	28.6	57.1
Voluntary Sector Review	Tenured	15	6.7	86.7	6.7
	Untenured	5	0	40.0	60.0
Journal of Public Affairs Education ( <i>JPAE</i> )	Tenured	15	6.7	53.3	40.0
	Untenured	7	0	57.1	42.9
International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing ( <i>IJNVSM</i> )	Tenured	16	18.8	50.0	31.3
	Untenured	1	0	100	0

Note: Only the top eight journals (by mentions) are shown. Tenured and untenured respondents are mutually exclusive. One respondent did not state tenure status.

Similar to the previous findings, there were no notable differences in the perceptions of journals in group 1 (i.e., *NVSQ*, *NML*, and *Voluntas*) among these respondents. Interestingly, however, differences emerged regarding how these respondents perceived journals in group 2. On the one hand, editorial board members perceived *NPF* as being of higher quality than did program administrators. Administrators, however, regarded *VSR* as more prestigious than did editorial board members.

### Main Takeaways and Future Research

High-quality, peer-reviewed academic journals represent an essential outlet (albeit not the only outlet) for scholars to present and distribute their research. However, as we have illuminated in this exploratory study, what is considered a high-quality journal in the field of nonprofit and civil society studies is neither straightforward nor apparent. This exploratory study proposes a different avenue to identify viable publication outlets (Nkomo, 2009). Specifically, this inquiry asked nonprofit and civil society scholars in both Europe and North America to identify journals that they perceived to be the most viable publication outlets for their research. We then asked them to indicate how they perceived the quality of these journals.

Our research utilized a stated preference approach. That is, we examined perceptions of journal quality rather than revealed preferences where respondents identify journals and rank them by impact factor (Tahai, & Meyer, 1999; Walters, 2017). By inviting nonprofit and civil society scholars to free write journal names instead of presenting them with a predetermined list, we are able to more accurately account for the journal outlets that exist within the field. Indeed, using this approach we are able to capture journals that may not (yet) have an impact factor as well as those that do not aim to achieve one (Serenko & Bontis, 2018). In general,

**Table 3.** Journal Mentions by Tier and the Top Three Main Research Areas

Journal Name	Main Research Area	Count	% Top Tier	% Second Tier	% Third Tier
Voluntas	NPM	50	70.0	28.0	2.0
	NGO/CS	27	77.8	22.2	0
	Governance	21	66.7	33.3	0
Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly ( <i>NVSQ</i> )	NPM	50	98.0	2.0	0
	NGO/CS	27	100	0	0
	Governance	21	100	0	0
Nonprofit Management & Leadership ( <i>NML</i> )	NPM	47	61.7	34.0	4.3
	NGO/CS	22	54.6	40.9	4.6
	Governance	19	63.2	26.3	10.5
Nonprofit Policy Forum ( <i>NPF</i> )	NPM	20	5.0	65.0	30.0
	NGO/CS	10	20.0	60.0	10.0
	Governance	7	0	57.1	42.9
Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership ( <i>JNEL</i> )	NPM	20	15.0	30.0	55.0
	NGO/CS	7	28.6	28.6	42.9
	Governance	5	0	40.0	60.0
Voluntary Sector Review	NPM	16	6.3	75.0	18.8
	NGO/CS	6	16.7	33.3	33.3
	Governance	10	0	80.0	20.0
Journal of Public Affairs Education ( <i>JPAE</i> )	NPM	14	0	57.1	42.9
	NGO/CS	6	0	33.3	66.7
	Governance	3	0	100	0
International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing ( <i>IJNVSM</i> )	NPM	14	21.4	64.3	14.3
	NGO/CS	5	0	80.0	20.0
	Governance	6	16.7	66.7	16.7
Journal of Civil Society	NPM	9	0	88.9	11.1
	NGO/CS	11	36.4	45.5	18.2
	Governance	4	0	75.0	25.0
Nonprofit and Public Sector Marketing ( <i>NPSM</i> )	NPM	12	25.0	50.0	25.0
	NGO/CS	3	33.3	0	66.7
	Governance	4	25.0	50.0	25.0
Public Administration Review ( <i>PAR</i> )	NPM	8	87.5	12.5	0
	NGO/CS	1	100	0	0
	Governance	2	100	0	0

Note: Only the top 11 journals (mentioned 12 or more times) are shown. Research areas not mutually exclusive;  $n=50$  respondents who identified NPM as their main research area;  $n=28$  respondents who identified NGOs/Civil Society as their main research area;  $n=21$  respondents who identified Governance as their main research area.

the journals identified in this study are, on average, newer and more specialized in substantive content area than are journals with an impact factor (Adler & Harzig, 2009).

Our findings indicate that nonprofit and civil society scholars' perceptions converge with regard to three journals: *Voluntas*, *NVSQ*, and *NML*. These journals are all well-established (*NVSQ* was established in 1972, while *Voluntas* and *NML* were established in 1990). As shown in Tables 3, 4, and 5, the relevance of these three journals holds across subsamples of tenured/untentured respondents, the top-three self-identified main research areas, and service roles. This finding, that these three journals are consistently at the top of each list, may not surprise scholars in the field, as these journals have long been viewed as core publication outlets for nonprofit and civil society scholarship (Brudney & Herman, 2004; Ma & Konrath, 2018).

**Table 4.** Journal Mentions by Tier and Service Role

Journal Name	Service Role	Count	% Top Tier	% Second Tier	% Third Tier
Voluntas	Administrator	27	66.7	33.3	0
	Editorial Board	36	66.7	30.6	2.8
Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly ( <i>NVSQ</i> )	Administrator	27	100	0	0
	Editorial Board	36	97.2	2.8	0
Nonprofit Management & Leadership ( <i>NML</i> )	Administrator	26	53.9	42.3	3.9
	Editorial Board	33	60.6	36.4	3.0
Nonprofit Policy Forum ( <i>NPF</i> )	Administrator	7	0	57.1	42.9
	Editorial Board	16	6.3	68.8	25.0
Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership ( <i>JNEL</i> )	Administrator	13	15.4	30.8	53.9
	Editorial Board	14	14.3	7.1	78.6
Voluntary Sector Review	Administrator	6	16.7	83.3	0
	Editorial Board	15	0	86.7	13.3
Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs ( <i>JPNA</i> )	Administrator	8	0	37.5	62.5
	Editorial Board	11	0	54.6	45.5
International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing ( <i>IJNVSM</i> )	Administrator	7	14.3	42.9	42.9
	Editorial Board	11	9.1	45.5	45.5

Note: Only the top eight journals (by mentions) are shown. Administrators and editorial board members are not mutually exclusive.

In addition to these three journals, however, we uncovered a wide variety of other publication outlets that scholars deem viable for their publications. Many of these journals come from neighboring disciplines such as public administration (e.g., *PAR*) or social work (e.g., *Human Service Organizations*). As noted by Smith (2013), the study of the nonprofit sector and civil society has significant breadth, which translates into an interdisciplinary field of inquiry. Indeed, our research reflects the multidisciplinary span of research areas among a majority of the respondents as indicated by the range of research areas listed (see Figure 1).

A notable finding in this study, though, is that aside from the top-three identified journals (*NVSQ*, *NML*, and *Voluntas*), nonprofit and civil society researchers perceive journals and their quality differently depending on their main area of research. We suggest, then, that future research investigate why such differences may exist.

Future research should also more intentionally incorporate other potential publication outlets. For instance, researchers studying social entrepreneurship may seek publication in journals such as *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* or *Social Enterprise Journal*, whereas those studying human resource management may submit their research to outlets such as *International Journal of Human Resource Management* or *Review of Public Personnel Administration*.

To date, we lack a good understanding of the decision-making processes leading faculty to seek publication in a specific journal. Learning more about the publication decision-making process may provide us with more information about how and why the use and relevance of

research findings differs across subfields. It may also be the case, however, that certain schools (e.g., business schools) encourage publication in content specific journals, whereas public affairs schools may not have such a preference.

Our findings also show that tenure status does likely play a role in perceptions of journal quality. Given the relative absence of explicit lists showcasing preferred journal outlets, tenure track faculty may have difficulty in deciding where to submit their publications. Indeed, if tenured faculty perceive some outlets as being of higher quality while untenured faculty do not, it is uncertain how faculty on the tenure track can know whether its research is appropriate for certain outlets. This is a particular issue for tenure-track faculty members of interdisciplinary schools, where performance, promotion, and tenure evaluations are made by tenured faculty with different scholarly backgrounds and foci.

This issue becomes further complicated if some of the publication outlets perceived by tenured faculty as being of higher quality lack indicators (such as an impact factor score). Thus, gaining insight into what senior (i.e., tenured) faculty consider to be high-quality journals is important to junior faculty seeking promotion and tenure, since, given the relatively small size of the field of nonprofit and civil society studies, senior faculty members are likely to serve as external reviewers in their promotion and tenure. However, it may be the case that tenured faculty—for their own research—seek out these publication outlets because they apply different selection criteria for journal submission than junior faculty. It may also be the case that untenured faculty perceive peer-reviewed journals with an impact factor as necessary for their career advancement (Adler & Harzing, 2009).

As a final point, our study should provide useful information for administrators and departments. The findings here should help both administrators and departments to contextualize the choices that their faculty have when considering where to send their manuscripts in this field. Administrators wanting to develop publication guidelines for junior (and senior) faculty can draw upon this research to better guide their faculty. This would certainly be more preferable than having junior faculty rely upon anecdotal testimonies and informal guidance.

## **Conclusion and Limitations**

Many studies exploring perceptions of journal quality have used predetermined lists that respondents are asked to rank (Catling, Mason, & Upton, 2009; Meggs et al., 2017; Serenko & Bontis, 2018). In order to be able to rank journals from a list, however, it is important that respondents have familiarity with the journals that are listed (Walters, 2017). Since the field of nonprofit and civil society studies is interdisciplinary in nature we were not in a position, nor was it our intention, to create a comprehensive list for ranking nonprofit and civil society journals. Moreover, we did not want to bias respondents by (unconsciously) excluding journals from such a list. Still, we encourage future researchers to build on our findings and take steps toward building such a comprehensive list fully incorporating the diversity of publication outlets in the field.

Because researchers on the tenure track are generally evaluated by the quality of their publications (Gomez-Mejia, & Balkin, 1992), publication in nonpeer-reviewed outlets may not count much toward promotion and tenure. However, we find that nonpeer-reviewed outlets, for example, *NQ* and *SSIR*, are considered (at least by some respondents to our survey) quality outlets in the field of nonprofit and civil society studies. One interpretation of this finding is that publishing in nonpeer-reviewed journals may provide the opportunity to have an impact on practice in more tangible ways. Thus, we propose that the field should begin having more discussions about what is meant by “impact.” Impact is multidimensional; and, research

findings can influence other academics as well as those outside of academia (Aguinis, Suárez-González, Lannelongue, & Joo, 2012).

Although promotion and tenure processes have clear criteria to evaluate scholarly impact when it comes to having an impact on other academics (e.g., frequently measured in number of publications in top journals as well as number of citations), impact outside of academia is not well assessed and rewarded (Aguinis et al., 2012). A discussion about what impact means for the field must involve multiple stakeholders from within and outside of academia including scholars, educators, administrators, and those impacted and/or seeking to practically apply findings from the scholarly community.

We believe that major membership associations—such as ARNOVA and ISTR—can play important roles in these discussions. After all, these institutions are meant to be platforms for, among other things, debates about where scholars can have the greatest impact on society and how their work can be valued by their institutions.

This exploratory study comes with several key limitations that should be noted, especially with regard to the sample, which only included a small number of European scholars. Future studies should focus on drawing from the listservs of membership associations, similar to Brudney and Herman (2004). This will allow researchers to obtain a more comprehensive sample of respondents. Moreover, the stated preference approach of capturing perceived journal quality used in this study can be prone to bias (Tahai & Meyer, 1999). For instance, scholars may give preference to journals they are familiar with (Walters, 2017) as well as journals that influence their personal research interests (Serenko & Bontis, 2018). Future research, therefore, should include measures of familiarity to disentangle and control for the influence of personal research interests.

Finally, our analyses were descriptive in nature, and we acknowledge the limitations of this method. We were not able to test hypotheses, nor can we make generalizations beyond the discrete group of nonprofit and civil society scholars surveyed in this study. Still, our purpose has been to take important first steps toward understanding perceptions of journal quality in the field of nonprofit and civil society studies. To nonprofit practitioners and others outside of academia, the notion of journal quality may seem irrelevant. However, to nonprofit and civil society academics—doctoral students and junior faculty, in particular—having a better understanding of what is perceived as a high-quality journal is a matter that cannot be understated.

## **Notes**

1. Both authors contributed equally.
2. Before collecting data, the university's Institutional Review Board reviewed this study and classified it as exempt from Human Subject Review.
3. Six entries had ambiguous abbreviations and were excluded.

## **Disclosure Statement**

Marlene Walk is currently the current issues in practice (CIP) editor for *JPNA*. Other than this, the authors declare no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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