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Editor's Corner: Thank You for My Wonderful Years With the Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs

RECENTLY, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia referred to his strong views about the importance of words by labeling himself a “snoot.” I’m not sure that this is a word I would have chosen, and I know that he and I have some strong differences on social policies, but the Justice and I apparently share a passion for the English language. We both believe that it is worth the effort to find the most effective and precise way to express oneself.

That passion applies to several other things I love: teaching, research, and health care issues. Contributors to this journal have long tolerated my emphasis on writing in a way that reaches out to the broadest audience of readers, avoiding jargon, selecting an appropriate and easily understood title for their articles, and making the extra effort to use the most precise wording. An example of the latter is how the term *abuse* is used regarding substance use disorders (e.g., are we talking about DSM-based abuse, referring to abuse and/or dependence, or are we indicating use of a substance, misuse of that drug, or something entirely different?).

To me, the beauty of precision in the use of language and expressing thoughts doesn’t end with prose and poetry but also applies to how we write in scientific journals. What better way could there be to combine my love of science and literature than to edit a journal that works in my main field of study?

My relationship with what is now the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* began in 1973 soon after finishing my psychiatry residency as I worked on a manuscript eventually published in what was then the *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol*. This was also the first time I interacted closely with a journal editor, in this case Mark Keller (another lover of words), as we negotiated the optimal ways to describe the background and results of an article relating to comorbidity between alcohol use disorders and antisocial behaviors. Over the next decade, I was fortunate to have had a total of 7 articles published in the journal.

In January 1984, two close friends and respected colleagues, Jack Mendelson and Nancy Mello, assumed the roles of co-editors of what had then become the bimonthly *Journal of Studies of Alcohol*. To my delight, they asked me to become a field editor for the journal, a role that subsequently evolved into an associate editor’s position. By observing Jack and Nancy, I learned a great deal about the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* and how to deal with the

challenges of searching for the optimal balance between the needs of the authors who submit their work, the reviewers of those manuscripts, and the financial requirements of the journal and its parent organization while, at the same time, serving our readers and trying to help advance our field.

Mendelson and Mello stepped down as editors in 1991 and were succeeded by John Carpenter of the Rutgers Center of Alcohol Studies through 1994, when I was asked to take the helm. I jumped at the chance, not knowing that I would keep this job for almost 21 years. Anything I accomplished during my time as editor of what is now the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* is a tribute to many people. This includes Rob Pandina, who let me make the editorial decisions as he negotiated the challenges of keeping the journal financially afloat while dealing with the board for the Center of Alcohol Studies and the leadership of Rutgers University. Over the years, I’ve also been blessed with superb associate editors that have included Howard Blane, Dick Deitrich, John Helzer, Ed Riley, Kathy Bucholz, Sam Kuperman, and Brian Borsari on the science side, as well as Valerie Johnson, Fred Rotgers, and Paul Stasiewicz for book reviews. My assistants at the University of California, San Diego, have been a mainstay of my work, dating back to Stacey Tipp in 1994 and currently Marcy Gregg. With a team like this, how could I fail?

In an Editor’s Corner piece in July 1994, I set out some goals for the future of what was then the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*. Through hard work and a bit of luck, we were able to make progress on many of these, including emphasizing the highest quality papers; working toward a useful balance of epidemiology, social issues, and psychological topics while expanding our mission to include more biological themes such as genetics; decreasing the time from submission of articles through the initial review decision and on to publication; giving each submission an initial quick review to promptly notify an author when the chances of acceptance are slim and it is best to submit elsewhere rather than wait for a full review; developing a procedure for brief articles of more preliminary or more focused research topics; expanding the mission to cover both alcohol and other drugs (we became the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* in 2007); developing more user-friendly approaches for submissions (our new website); working toward a better international balance for articles published in our journal;

and improving the accessibility of our articles through implementing structured abstracts. In the interim, the number of articles submitted each year increased from less than 150 in 1994 to more than 500 annually.

This has been a rewarding and challenging 21-year run as editor. With more than a little help from my friends, I have always seen my major job as serving both the authors who submitted their work to us and our readers in as fair and balanced a manner as possible. However, there is still a lot to do, and this is a good time to hand the journal over to someone else to take to the next level. The selection of Tom Babor offers the journal some unique opportunities. Tom has a rich background as an editor through his work with the journal *Addiction*, where he observed firsthand one of the best editors our field has ever known, Griffith Edwards. He also is a founding member and a driving force for the

International Society of Addiction Journal Editors, which places him in a unique position to keep up with the latest developments in journal editing. In addition, I believe Tom shares my devotion to clear communication and the optimal use of words, and it would be hard to find anyone in science more committed to fairness and to the highest possible ethical standards. The journal is most fortunate to have found him as their new editor.

I feel equally fortunate to have been associated with this journal for more than four decades. It has been a truly grand time!

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