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## ***Psychology and Aging: The First 20 Years***

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### **Abstract**

This article provides a review of the first 20 years of *Psychology and Aging*, the American Psychological Association's first and only scholarly journal devoted to the topic of aging. The authors briefly summarize its history, its contributions to the study of aging, and its broader status as a scholarly publication. One theme highlighted in our review is the diversity of content in the journal throughout its history. Another is the strong impact that articles published in the journal have had on both basic and applied topics in aging. Efforts to encompass the breadth of topics and methodologies in aging research while retaining excellent quality remain the exciting but essential challenge for *Psychology and Aging*.

### **Keywords**

20 years; journal overview; submissions; impact

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With this issue, *Psychology and Aging* has begun its 21st year of publication. As the current editor and associate editors of the journal, we are proud to have the opportunity to mark this land-mark event by providing a brief overview of the journal's history, its contributions to the field of adult development and aging, and its status among scholarly publications. Our overview is selective, and our assessments of contributions and status are admittedly somewhat subjective although, as will be seen, we do provide some supportive data. We begin with some comments on the general content of the journal.

One characteristic that has been central to *Psychology and Aging*'s mission from the beginning and remains so to this day is the representation of the broad spectrum of research on adult development and aging. In the words of M. Powell Lawton and Donald Kausler (1986) in their editorial in the first issue, *Psychology and Aging* has the daunting task of doing "justice to topics ranging from laboratory research in animal behavior, psychophysiology, or cognition through personality and social psychology to clinical and applied research" (p. 3). Because the research culture differs across content areas, this diversity of topical content is associated with similar diversity in methodology and theoretical orientation. In addition, to remain true to its broad mission over time, the content of the journal has to dynamically track the emergence of new research questions, methods, and theories and the waning of interest in old ones.

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Another central characteristic of this publication throughout its history is the commitment to publish research that meets the highest possible standards of scholarship and scientific rigor while at the same time demonstrating originality of theory and methods. That there is a possible tension between this commitment and the commitment to broad coverage, including that of emerging areas, was recognized at the initiation of this journal. In discussing scientific excellence, Lawton and Kausler (1986) noted that “[t]he importance of quality criteria may vary across areas” (p. 3). A specific example that they mentioned is the relatively lower importance that may be attached to a methodological flaw in a less-developed area compared with such a flaw in a wellresearched area. In other words, although strong, the commitment to the publication of methodologically rigorous research is nuanced in a way that reflects the diversity of content in the journal.

The goal of publishing the best available research across a very broad range of topics entails another critical commitment—that of ensuring that the journal has intellectual guidance from recognized experts in an equally broad range of areas. One critical part of attaining the necessary diversity of intellectual guidance has been the strategy of having the editor and associate editor(s) represent different areas of adult development and aging. Another has been the deliberate selection of editorial board members and a slate of ad hoc reviewers to represent all areas of the field, including new and cutting-edge research. Literally hundreds of individuals have contributed to the quality of *Psychology and Aging*'s content over its 20-year history through their conscientious and insightful reviews.

One further type of diversity in *Psychology and Aging* that we would like to mention is the geographical diversity of the authors, reviewers, and audience of this journal. In particular, our estimates based on data from the last few years are that approximately 30% of the authors submitting articles to the journal and 15% of the editorial board and ad hoc reviewers come from countries outside North America. These numbers suggest that there is a strong international interest in the study of adult development and aging and that this journal has an important role as an international outlet for top scholarship on the psychology of aging.

The remainder of this article consists of sections presenting additional information on the history of the journal and on its past and current status as a scholarly publication. We conclude that *Psychology and Aging*'s past and current state are characterized by strong contributions to the literature on aging and that these contributions are widely recognized by those interested in advancing understanding of the psychology of aging as well as by those using that understanding to promote the welfare of older adults.

## Previous Editors' Narrative History

To gain a personal perspective of the history of the journal from those who know it best, we interviewed the available past editors and associate editors of *Psychology and Aging*. In 1986, *Psychology and Aging* made its debut with M. Powell Lawton as editor and Donald Kausler as associate editor. Powell died in 2001 and has been fondly remembered by many in the field who benefited from his vision, leadership, and willingness to mentor junior colleagues who submitted work to the journal. Don recalls major contributions to the memory literature such as research initiating the search for ways of separating the storage component of working memory from the processing component and the discovery of greater variation in the magnitude of age-related deficits in certain aspects of memory. For example, implicit memory was found to be much less age sensitive than explicit memory. Don observed that articles published in the late 1980s and early 1990s stimulated interest in the effects of both physical activity and mental activity on memory. This foreshadowed cutting-edge research in this area today, for example, the influence of aerobic fitness training and

cognitive training on brain function and selective aspects of cognition of older adults (Colcombe et al., 2004).

In 1991, Timothy Salthouse took over the helm as editor and Margaret Gatz as associate editor. During his term as editor, Tim observed the increased awareness of the importance of reliability in any type of measurement, with an emphasis on basic research. Margy noted that there was a concerted effort to encompass all of psychology with a particular outreach to clinical neuropsychology. There were advances in the operation of the journal at this time with respect to computerizing the handling of manuscripts and reviews. A concerted effort was made to widen the scope of articles submitted to *Psychology and Aging* by recruiting members of the editorial board who were not primarily affiliated with aging and by increasing the representation of a wider variety of fields.

In 1997, Leah Light became editor and Mary Ann Parris Stephens became associate editor of *Psychology and Aging*. These editors recall an increase in articles written from a cognitive neuroscience perspective, for example, Cabeza's (2002) article on the hemispheric asymmetry reduction in older adults (HAROLD model), articles on longitudinal data analysis, and theories of social cognition and aging and emotion. Mary Ann noted that there was an increase in studies aimed at more applied problems along with more basic problems conducted in a more applied context. Again, these editors recognized the contribution of technological advances during their tenure, particularly e-mail. This form of communication allowed them to expedite reviewer assignments and reminders and to include a broader range of reviewers, especially international reviewers. The technological advances culminated into the current form of journal operation: the Journal Back Office (JBO).

Finally, although all of the editors and associate editors reported that their greatest source of frustration was delayed reviews, they mainly focused on the sources of satisfaction in editing the journal. The general consensus was that the greatest source of satisfaction was the pride in seeing good research published and cited, which ultimately contributed to the direction in which the field has continued. In addition, the editors enjoyed the fact that a number of young researchers who published in the journal were eventually prominent researchers in their respective areas. Overall, we want to thank the previous editors and associate editors for a job well done. It is a daunting task, and each and every one of them rose to the occasion. We would also like to add that our own experiences (we began handling new submissions at the beginning of 2003) are similar to those of our predecessors. The work is hard, but it is also very gratifying and, we think, important to the field.

## Trends in Submissions and Acceptance Rates by Year

In this section, we present a more data-oriented view of the history of the journal. Table 1 displays submission and acceptance rates for each year of the journal's operation. To us, there are two striking features of the data in this table. One is that although there certainly is variability in the number of new submissions and in the acceptance rates, there is little in the way of consistent trends over time. For example, looking at 5-year intervals starting with 1986, we find the following numbers of new submissions for 1986, 1991, 1996, and 2001: 171, 194, 172, and 173, respectively. All of these numbers are not only close to each other but also close to the 20-year mean and median. (Whether the 200+ submission rates of the last few years will continue remains to be seen—the more-than-200-submissions mark has previously been reached only to be followed by somewhat fewer submissions in subsequent years.) The data in Table 1 also make the point (our second striking feature) that the journal hit the ground running. That is, right from the start, researchers studying the psychology of aging found the journal to be a highly desirable outlet for their work (as will be discussed shortly, impact factor data tell a similar story).

An admittedly informal and selective analysis of the research areas represented in the journal also suggests constancies in the content of the journal over the past 20 years. As has already been discussed, *Psychology and Aging* has always strived to be broadly inclusive with respect to specific domains of adult development and aging, theoretical orientation, basic or applied thrust of the work, and methodology. As also has been mentioned, from the outset the journal always included an editor and associate editor from different areas, thus influencing the diversity of content. Accordingly, the earliest issues of the journal had articles on basic aspects of cognition (e.g., attention, perception, memory), intelligence and higher level cognition (e.g., everyday problem solving), personality and wellbeing, attitudes and interpersonal relations, and clinical and applied issues, among others. Although much of the research reported in these articles used experimental and quasiexperimental designs with extreme-group comparisons, other methodologies—survey data, correlational and longitudinal analyses of psychometric data, tests of clinical interventions—were also well represented. This diversity of topic and methods, as well as of theoretical orientation, has continued to this day. Furthermore, with the beginning of our term, *Psychology and Aging* expanded to include two associate editors to further ensure breadth and scope of the content represented in the journal.

The preceding comments should not be taken to imply that submission patterns have been completely constant—although the basic content in the journal is similar to that of 20 years ago, there have been some shifts in the relative prominence of certain topics and methods. For example, submissions on health psychology, emotion, social cognition, and cognitive neuroscience of aging have increased from initially low levels to at least several per year in some areas to a steady influx in others by the late 1990s. Submissions on learning and memory have also risen somewhat over the years, although in this case from initially fairly high levels. Whereas there was relatively little research on applied/basic interfaces in the 1980s, by the late 1990s, there was a substantial rise in the sophisticated integration of applied and basic research (i.e., applied studies relying more heavily on basic theory for guidance). With respect to methodology, the journal has seen increases in reports of meta-analyses and of analyses of data from large-scale cross-sectional and longitudinal studies. A significant feature of the latter type of article is the increased use of sophisticated statistical and quantitative modeling techniques, including hierarchical regression analysis and structural equation modeling. In general, we believe that the content of the journal has adapted well to shifts in interest in different topics and to methodological developments while remaining true to its general mission of being a high-standard but inclusive publication outlet for researchers interested in the broad range of issues relating to psychology and aging.

## Impact of the Journal

This last section of our article focuses on the status of *Psychology and Aging*, particularly as reflected in citations of articles in journal. One of the two analyses we completed was an analysis of the impact factor scores created by *Journal Citation Reports* (Thomson Scientific, 2004). The other was an examination of highly cited publications in the journal. Citation analysis has a long history within psychology as a means of evaluating quality and impact of journals, prominent scholars, and universities (e.g., Garfield, 1972). Despite reservations (e.g., regarding the effects of factors other than quality and overly simplistic assessment; cf. Monastersky, 2005), citation analysis and impact factors continue to be used to analyze the prominence of other psychological journals (Quiñones-Vidal, Lòpez-García, Peñaranda-Ortega, & Tortosa-Gil, 2004).

Table 2 shows the impact factor scores for *Psychology and Aging*, and its relative ranking within the two categories used by the *Social Sciences Citation Index* (Thomson Scientific,

2005) over the past 20 years: developmental psychology, and gerontology and geriatrics. Impact factors were not calculated for the first 3 years of the journal's publication. As can be seen in the table, from the time of its inception, *Psychology and Aging* has been a top-tier journal in both fields, beginning as the 5th of 27 journals in the field of developmental psychology and the 2nd of 10 journals in gerontology and geriatrics. Over time, the journal's impact factor has risen from an initial figure of 1.5 to a current figure of 2.8, with minor fluctuations in this increasing trend over time. The relative ranking in its fields has remained high and in recent years, by the standard of impact factor, *Psychology and Aging* has been the preeminent journal in the area of psychological aging. In the 2004 figures, *Psychology and Aging* ranked behind *Journal of Gerontology: Biological/Medical Sciences*, *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, and *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, journals that are more biomedical in their emphasis. In developmental psychology journals, those with higher impact factors emphasize child development.

Through an analysis of citations completed in November 2005, we identified the most highly cited articles in the journal to date. Thirty-six articles had been cited over 100 times. Rather than presenting all of these articles in rank order of citation, we viewed it as most useful to categorize the most cited articles by research area. As shown in Table 3, we arranged the 20 most cited articles into six categories: attention and perception, clinical aging, intelligence, memory, social and personality, and stress and coping. Examination of these highly cited articles shows the diversity of the field of psychology and aging and the wide range of research areas, ranging from basic to applied scholarship, that the journal has included. The five most widely cited articles in the journal's history came from the areas of stress and coping, clinical aging, intelligence, and attention (Haley, Levine, Brown, & Bartolucci, 1987; Teri et al., 1992; Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley, & Novacek, 1987; Lindenberger & Baltes, 1994; Kramer, Humphrey, Larish, Logan, & Strayer, 1994), illustrating the diversity of highly cited works published in our journal.

Examination of the highly cited articles illustrates the ways in which *Psychology and Aging* has been a part of the development of innovative theoretical perspectives, the application of psychological theory to applied issues, the advancement of work on family caregiving and dementia, and a home for major reviews that synthesize important areas of research. Examples of theoretically oriented articles include Carstensen's (1992) article on socioemotional selectivity theory, research from Baltes and Lindenberger on the relationship between sensory and cognitive functioning (Baltes & Lindenberger, 1997; Lindenberger & Baltes, 1994), and Kramer, Humphrey, Larish, Logan, and Strayer's (1994) article on aging and inhibition. The last-mentioned article makes the important point that related cognitive mechanisms (in this instance, in the areas of attentional inhibition) may show variation in cognitive decline. A similar point is made by the Jennings and Jacoby (1993) article in the memory category. Also in the memory category, the articles by Craik, Byrd, and Swanson (1987); Hashtroudi, Johnson, and Chrosniak (1989); and Dywan and Jacoby (1990) deal with a topic, source memory, that is central to understanding of age differences in memory accuracy. Owsley, Ball, Sloane, Roenker, and Bruni's (1991) work applying research on visual/cognitive functioning to the area of vehicle accidents involving older adults is an example of the application of theory and research to an important applied problem. Family caregiving theory and related research on individual differences in adaptation to caregiving has also been a prominent theme (Haley et al., 1987; Schulz & Williamson, 1991; Vitaliano, Russo, Young, Teri, & Maiuro, 1991), including the publication of an article introducing an instrument for measurement of memory and behavioral problems in dementia that has become widely used (Teri et al., 1992). Important review articles included Newmann's (1989) article on aging and depression and the meta-analysis by Kite and Johnson (1988) examining attitudes toward older and younger adults.



One limitation of examining the most highly cited articles in the journal is that more recently published articles have had fewer years to accumulate citations. All of the highly cited articles shown in Table 3 were published before 1998. To examine more recently published articles that are already widely cited, we focused on articles published between 1998 and 2002. The five most highly cited articles from this time period include a study of the effects of aging on brain activity during cognitive performance (Cabeza, 2002) with 98 citations; an article on intellectual engagement as a predictor of cognitive decline (Hultsch, Hertzog, Small, & Dixon, 1999) with 78 citations; an article on individual differences in rates of change in cognition (Wilson et al., 2002) with 71 citations; an article on the effects of divided attention in younger and older adults (Anderson, Craik, & Naveh-Benjamin, 1998) with 66 citations; and an article on repetition priming in normal aging and Alzheimer's disease (Fleischman & Gabrieli, 1998) with 62 citations. Although all of these articles are focused on cognitive aging (in contrast to highly cited articles from early years of the journal), many of these articles are noteworthy for their relevance to applied concerns in aging and linkages to areas outside psychological research.

## Summary and Final Comments

*Psychology and Aging* had an impressive start and has been an important outlet for psychological research on aging focused on diverse topics. Through its first 20 years, its editors have done an admirable job of attracting and publishing outstanding research that has proven to have a major impact on the field. The continued challenge is for the journal to serve its very diverse constituencies and to publish the best work in psychological aging across the full spectrum from basic to applied research. We are proud to have been a part of this evolving story of the only APA journal devoted to the topic of psychological aging.

In closing, the journey of *Psychology and Aging* has barely reached its young adulthood. With each new year of publication, promising new areas of research are identified, and our knowledge base and theoretical understanding of the aging process are continually expanding. Thus, even more important than appreciating our past accomplishments is relishing the excitement of our propitious future.

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**Table 1**

## Submission and Acceptance Rates by Year

Year	New Submissions (No.)	Accepted	
		%	No.
1986	171	34	19
1987	180	61	33
1988	184	66	35
1989	160	56	35
1990	202	69	34
1991	194	72	37
1992	176	57	32
1993	220	79	35
1994	156	64	41
1995	137	49	35
1996	172	56	32
1997	189	15	7
1998	180	63	35
1999	198	53	26
2000	177	67	37
2001	173	42	24
2002	179	74	41
2003	216	54	25
2004	209	59	28
2005	(250) <sup>a</sup>		
Mean	182.8	57.3	31.1
Median	180	59	34

<sup>a</sup>Estimate based on number of new submissions in 2005 as of mid-November

**Table 2**

Psychology and Aging: Social Science Citation Index Impact Factors and Rankings, 1989-2004

Year	Impact factor	Rank	
		Psychology,developmental	Gerontology
1986	No impact factor		
1987	No impact factor		
1988	No impact factor		
1989	1.519	5 of 27	2 of 10
1990	1.444	5 of 28	2 of 12
1991	1.551	5 of 27	3 of 12
1992	1.622	5 of 26	3 of 12
1993	1.507	6 of 29	2 of 11
1994	1.824	7 of 32	2 of 11
1995	1.857	6 of 36	3 of 16
1996	1.883	7 of 39	3 of 18
1997	1.946	6 of 49	3 of 26
1998	1.808	8 of 48	2 of 26
1999	2.664	5 of 48	2 of 25
2000	2.308	8 of 49	2 of 23
2001	2.019	9 of 47	3 of 23
2002	1.991	9 of 49	5 of 24
2003	3.074	6 of 51	3 of 23
2004	2.837	6 of 49	4 of 24

**Table 3**

## Highly Cited Articles in Psychology and Aging by Topical Area

Topic area	Author(s)	Year	No.citations	Article title
<i>Attention &amp; perception</i>	Kramer et al.	1994	184	<i>Aging and Inhibition: Beyond a unitary view of inhibitory processing in attention</i>
	Owsley et al.	1991	142	<i>Visual/cognitive correlates of vehicle accidents in older drivers</i>
<i>Clinical aging</i>	Teri et al.	1992	209	<i>Assessment of behavioral problems in dementia: The Revised Memory and Behavior Problems Checklist</i>
	Newmann	1989	146	<i>Aging and depression</i>
<i>Intelligence</i>	Lindenberger & Baltes	1994	194	<i>Sensory functioning and intelligence in old age: A strong connection</i>
	Baltes & Lindenberger	1997	151	<i>Emergence of a powerful connection between sensory and cognitive functions across the adult life span: A new window to the study of cognitive aging?</i>
<i>Memory</i>	Parkin & Walter	1992	174	<i>Recollective experience, normal aging, and frontal dysfunction</i>
	Jennings & Jacoby	1993	159	<i>Automatic versus intentional uses of memory: Aging, attention, and control</i>
	Craik et al.	1990	155	<i>Relations between source amnesia and frontal lobe functioning in older adults</i>
	Craik, Byrd, & Swanson	1987	131	<i>Patterns of memory loss in three elderly samples</i>
	Hashtroudi, Johnson & Chrosniak	1989	127	<i>Aging and source monitoring</i>
	Dywan & Jacoby	1990	127	<i>Effects of aging on source monitoring: Differences in susceptibility to false fame</i>
<i>Social &amp; personality</i>	Carstensen	1992	155	<i>Social and emotional patterns in adulthood: Support for socioemotional selectivity theory</i>
	Kite & Johnson	1988	140	<i>Attitudes toward older and younger adults: A meta-analysis</i>
	Ryff	1991	132	<i>Possible selves in adulthood and old age: A tale of shifting horizons</i>
<i>Stress &amp; coping</i>	Haley et al.	1987	212	<i>Stress, appraisal, coping, and social support as predictors of adaptational outcome among dementia caregivers</i>
	Folkman et al.	1987	206	<i>Age differences in stress and coping processes</i>
	Brandtstädter & Renner	1990	163	<i>Tenacious goal pursuit and flexible goal adjustment: Explication and age-related analysis of assimilative and accommodative strategies of coping</i>
	Schulz & Williamson	1991	157	<i>A 2-year longitudinal study of depression among Alzheimer's caregivers</i>
	Vitaliano et al.	1991	129	<i>Predictors of burden in spouse caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer's disease</i>