Essay

The Social and Psychological Costs of Peer Review: Stress and Coping With Manuscript Rejection

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Abstract
Research has evolved into a high-stake competition for journal space. This study examines the effects of peer rejections on individual scholars. I propose a transactional framework that organizes experiences with peer rejections into identity-related appraisal and coping phases. I consider two types of response options: peer rejections either as a threat or as a challenge to scholarly identities. I develop research proposition specific to socio-demographic, socio-linguistic, and social-cognitive antecedents of scholarly engagement. I test for main and interaction effects of peer rejections on data collected from 411 International Business scholars. Broadly supportive of my propositions, the findings highlight extensive social and psychological costs of peer-review mechanisms, most notably living with professional failure, resultant cognitive dissonance, and awareness of discriminatory clues. The systematic exploration of bifurcating scholarly work into "valued" and "less valued" contributions invites us to reconsider the way we interact as scholars, create knowledge, and build disciplinary capacities.

Keywords
peer review, social identity, scholarly publication, stress, disciplinary writing, careers

Introduction

Academics are judged primarily by their scholarly output (e.g., Holt & den Hond, 2013), particularly in research-intensive environments (Webb, 1994). Accordingly, publishing in top journals is commonly perceived to be the pinnacle of academic achievement (McGrail, Rikard, & Jones, 2006), with peer-reviewed publications being universally regarded as indicators of group membership and professional reputation (De Witte & Rogge, 2010; Miller, Taylor, & Bedeian, 2011). Research publication, however, is a high-stake competition for journal space (Anderson, Ronning, de Vries, & Martinson, 2007), with participation becoming indispensable for successful career trajectories (Raelin, 2008). Failure to secure this form of peer-group recognition can bring about perturbing results for those concerned: Some academics may find promotion elusive, while others may opt to leave the profession altogether, quite possibly abandoning promising work (Tytherleigh, Webb, Cooper, & Ricketts, 2005). The "publish or perish" mantra crystallizes the dichotomy of community expectations of continuous, high-quality research output on one hand (Bedeian, Taylor, & Miller, 2003) and the stark possibility of exclusion from the academic discourse on the other (Tannen, 2002).

Operating on the principle of triage, peer review plays a decisive role in filtering, directing, and even redirecting research (Horrobin, 1990). It regulates beliefs in what constitutes academic efficacy and, in effect, bifurcates scholarly work into "valued" and "less valued" contributions (Morton, Haslam, Postmes, & Ryan, 2006), ultimately ascribing scholars into in- and out-groups. In this sense, manuscript rejections signal a distinct mismatch between scholars' actual and expected social identity. Goffman (1963) defined such a disconnect as a cause of stigma. Indeed, in this article, I argue that manuscript rejections are an invidious source of stigmatization that pervades the entire academic community regardless of discipline.

In the quest for publication in top journals, scholars build their careers through an interplay of personal ambition, individual capability, and community expectations (Bedeian, 2004). In other words, their self-concept is shaped through social interaction and anticipation of others' reactions (Cooley, 1956). Yet, while success rates of journal submissions may have fallen well below 10% (Moizer, 2009; Trevino, 2008), negative evaluations are likely to affect all

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researchers at all career stages, and at all skill levels (Day, 2011). The academic community therefore comprises a large proportion of scholars that regularly experience manuscript rejection (Hargens, 1988).

The emotional and socio-psychological consequences of peer rejection may include the anxiety of being "found out" to be working below community standards (Graham & Stablein, 1995), worrying feelings of unfair treatment (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), and low self-esteem (Bandura, 1994; Watson & Friend, 1969). Concerns for the alignment of publication and promotion criteria and the impact this has on faculty, especially young scholars, are of course not new (e.g., Boyer, 1990; Thorsen, 1996). In addition, a growing body of literature attests to the deleterious effects of peer-review processes for non-native speakers (e.g., Flowerdew, 2008; Tietze, 2008; Tietze & Dick, 2009). In short, the divergence between community expectations and role realities are ego-threatening (Higgins, 1987; Sarnoff & Zimbardo, 1961). Many academics respond to these dynamics with impression management tactics (Newton, 2000) by "staging" professional success in anticipation of discriminating reactions (Ball, 2000). Concealing professional criticism further exacerbates stress (Ragins, 2008). Although scholarly identity can be threatened at both the individual and the social level, leading to disrupted self-actualization and community estrangement, academia rarely brings out into the open the issue of stress arising from negative peer-review experiences.

The peer-review process consists of both evaluative (i.e., competition) and social situations (i.e., confirmation of group membership), and it is therefore intimately interlinked with identity formation (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Due to the universal acceptance, and indeed authority, of peer-review processes (De Rond & Miller, 2005), one may very well wonder, "How precisely do scholars cope with the stress of having their work rejected?" With a few exceptions (e.g., Bedeian et al., 2003; Humphrey & Moizer, 1995; Starbuck, 2003), the dominant focus of stress-related research on peer-review practices has been on managing incentives, productivity issues and, more recently, the opportunity costs of peer review (Jennings, 2006). The paucity of research on the emotional challenges for scholars in this context is indeed perplexing (Day, 2011).

In line with the burgeoning literature questioning the value of peer-review processes (e.g., "What's Wrong With Science," 2013), this study directs attention away from its well-documented functional consequences to those scholarly experiences—real or imaginary—of stigmatization and subsequent coping. As peer review is an inherently human phenomenon (Bedeian, 2004), it seems reasonable to suggest that a singular focus on its "mechanics" is insufficient fully understand the social incentives underpinning the strategic development of scientific disciplines. Much speculation surrounds the rejection rates of internationally recognized journals and the best way to explore the emotional impact of peer-review

mechanisms is to provide empirical evidence of how members actually experience scholarly interaction. The context for this research is International Business (IB) Studies.

One core problem of understanding the selectivity and specialization of knowledge is the taken-for-granted assumption that peer-review forces disciplines to evolve and improve. Such an assumption overlooks the socio-evaluative threats and deleterious effects associated with performative pressures in academia. Shared faith in this research-facilitating system acts as the essence and the driver of disciplinary culture. This is so deeply embedded in academic rituals that it serves as an unconscious compass for scholarly behavior, including the construction of "valued" and "less valued" scholarship. That the disclosure of failure remains somewhat of a taboo in academia, therefore, is perhaps not surprising (Leslie, 1990).

The purpose of this article is to challenge conventional wisdom about the effectiveness of peer-review mechanisms. Social categorization is critical for organizational stability (B. E. Ashford & Mael, 1989); by borrowing theoretical insights from social psychology, the article contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of interpretative processes involved in peer-review mechanisms, as well as the conceptual landscape of academic disciplines that flows from it. I examine two hitherto under-researched components: (a) the cumulative effects of peer-review processes on individual scholars and, by extension, on scholarly interaction and (b) the contrasting experiences of native and non-native speakers of English. Building on the seminal works of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Berjot, Girault-Lidvan, and Gillet (2012), I integrate Social Identity Theory (SIT) and the related transactional model of coping, applying these to the peer-review setting. Specifically, I investigate the scholarly appraisal of negative peer feedback and, based on this, the extent to which it can be categorized as either a threat or a challenge to scholarly identity. Peer-review shapes scholarship, and I speculate that some scholars thrive under the bifurcating mechanism of peer review, whereas others do not. I therefore go on to explore causes and consequences of these different appraisals, namely, in the areas of self-efficacy, linguistic competence, and academic background.

The social and psychological costs of hidden stigma can be immense (Smart & Wegner, 2003), and this article offers insights into the processes of how scholars cope with such stressful episodes. Beyond the immediate implications for the design of research systems and the consequences for managing the evolution of disciplinary domains, this study should provide scholars with a greater understanding of (a) the impact of symbolic rejection on individual scholars and (b) variations in reactions to peer feedback. The most intriguing aspiration of this study, therefore, is to uncover asymmetries between the long-revered practices of peer review and the resultant emotional and behavioral consequences this produces within the scholarly community.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. First, I present a conceptual framework explaining the transactional stress model in an academic setting with an emphasis on antecedents, appraisal, and coping with peer rejection as a potential threat to identity. Next, I develop research propositions that pertain to conflicting scholarly responses to negative feedback. Based on this, I describe the procedures used to test the proposed effects of rejection for scholarly identity, perceived disapproval, and possible stigmatization. From the basis of the two fundamental appraisal options—of peer rejection being perceived as either a threat or a challenge—I expect distinct variations in scholarly coping strategies to emerge. I then present and discuss my findings. The article concludes with implications and offers directions for future research.

Conceptual Framework

SIT suggests that individuals seek to achieve or maintain group membership (Brown, 2000), as "an extension of the self-concept" (Brewer, 2003). Personal and social identities are reciprocally intertwined (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and scholars are likely to derive self-esteem through an affiliation to a relevant academic community (e.g., Horn & Cross, 2013). Disciplines, therefore, not only provide intellectual legitimacy (Lee, Sugimoto, Zhang, & Cronin, 2013) but also act as social institutions with mechanisms of socialization, relationships, and sanctions (e.g., Becher & Towler, 2001). Peer review is the most visible mechanism of such social categorization (Hogg & Terry, 2000) and establishes academia as a high performance and identity-inducing environment (Bergstrom, 2007). It exposes scholars to evaluative settings (e.g., Miner, 2003), which have been shown to be particularly conducive to threats to social identity (Stout & Dasgupta, 2013).

Seen from the perspective of SIT, participation in the academic discourse is an admittance seeking, identity maintaining, or identity enhancing activity (Hambrick & Chen, 2008) that is based on conforming to domain-specific norms. Threats to scholarly identity are likely to increase with the degree of incongruence between community appraisal and self-conception (Zanna & Cooper, 1976), and the accumulation of negative feedback over time (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Effort expended regulates achievement expectations (Arvey, 1972), especially in environments committed to high performance (Van Knippenberg, 2000). By inference, if performance is considered more or less malleable (Bandura & Wood, 1989), then collective representations concerning the causes and effects of failure (Weiner, 1985) further augment in-group and out-group categorizations (Hegarty & Golden, 2008). From this follows that not meeting expectations is attributed to either incompetence or lack of self-discipline. In other words, performance and social identity coalesce in the academic environment, and not meeting community expectations puts scholars at risk of stigmatization (Paetzold, Dipboye, & Elsbach, 2008) with potentially crippling effects on tenure and promotion prospects. After all, organizations usually reward success (Cannon & Edmondson, 2005), thus the inadequacy to adhere to normative expectations is likely to exacerbate threats to personal and social identities. No wonder scholars go to great lengths to project a positive (self-)image.

Peer review is a detached process, and manuscript rejections are ubiquitous (Starbuck, 2005). Author–editor–referee tensions can result in a stressful experience (Bedeian, 2004; Tannen, 2002), not least because of continuous identity-related feedback loops (Burke, 1991). If in-group status is predominantly gained through demonstrations of competence (Tajfel, 1978), negative peer evaluations convey devalued identities (Graham & Stablein, 1995). We may therefore regard peer review as a form of symbolic interaction, whereby generalized views of the academic community guide personal and professional identification (Hirschauer, 2010). The less that scholars emulate idiosyncratic community standards (i.e., in terms of a publication track record in "accepted" outlets), the less likely the actual or symbolic membership of one's particular peer group will be (Mahoney, 1977). In spite of its hidden status (Pachankis, 2007), the resultant identity threat is a powerful stressor (Berjot & Gillet, 2011; Berjot, Altintas, Lesage, & Grebot, 2013).

Contexts that affect self-conception, both in terms of personal identity (being distinct) and social identity (membership status, career trajectory), deserve particular attention (e.g., Burke, 1991), precisely because social-evaluative threats, that is, threats to self-concept or social status, are especially stressful (Dickerson & Kemeny, 2004) and distinct from non-stigmatizing factors (e.g., overwork, dysfunctional work environment). The psychological costs involving social disapproval include disclosure disconnects (Ragins, 2008), self-fulfilling prophecies (Jussim, Palumbo, Chatman, Madon, & Smith, 2000), or self-limiting behavior (Major & Gramzow, 1999). More broadly speaking, identity-related threats increase anxiety and have detrimental effects on well-being and performance (Crocker & Major, 1989). This raises an important question of how scholars deal with stressful situations in which personal and social identities are at stake.

The model of stress and coping with identity threats (Berjot & Gillet, 2011; Berjot et al., 2012) organizes SIT and stress theories into one consistent framework. Expanding the seminal work of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), Berjot and colleagues have devised a process oriented framework that captures (a) antecedents (personal, situational, stigma characteristics), (b) the cognitive appraisal phase (threat and challenge, personal and social identities), and (c) coping responses (protection or enhancement of identity). The crucial aspect of the model of stress and coping with identity threats is that it specifies how individuals might respond to rejection. Starting from the premise that identity threats are symbolic, the model articulates response mechanisms to
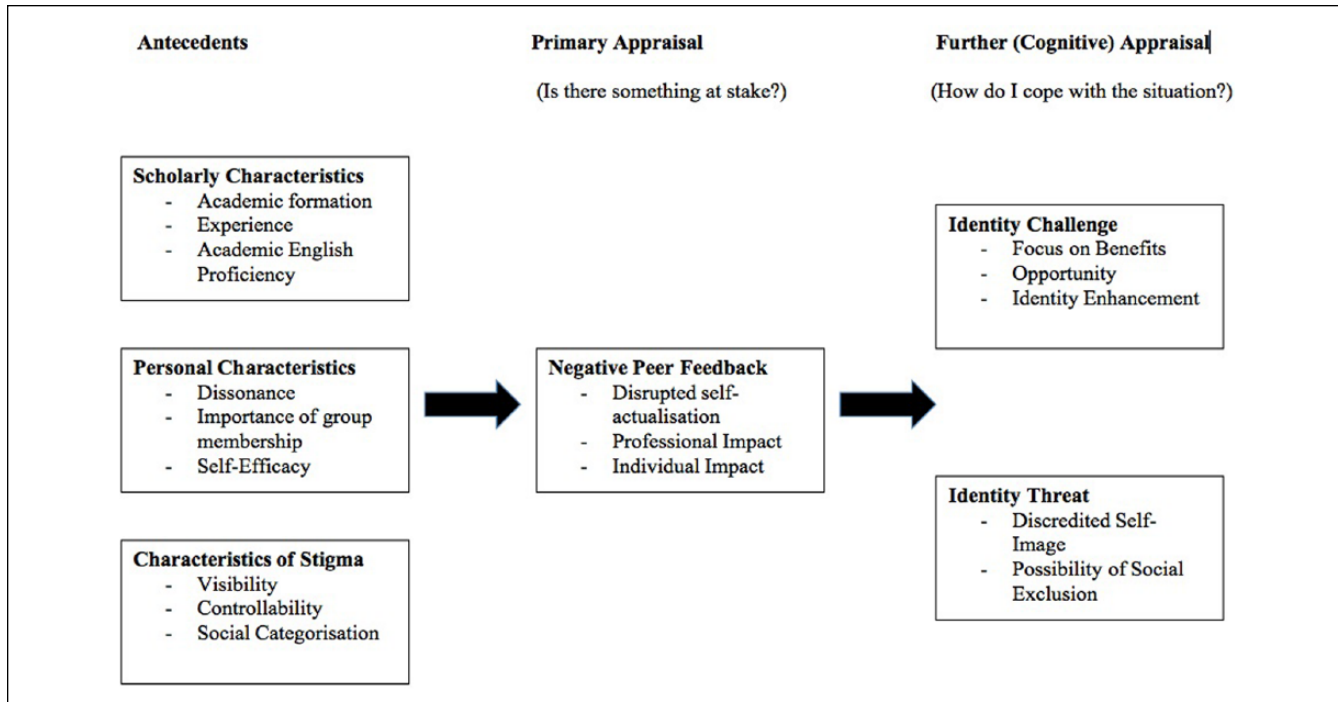
Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

threats to self. As threats to the self involve risks of devaluation (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002) while individuals aim to maintain a positive self-image (e.g., Rosenberg, 1979), the model posits specific threat appraisals and subsequent identity-related coping strategies (Berjot et al., 2012).

Stress and coping models distinguish between primary appraisals (Is there something at stake?) and secondary appraisals (Do I have the resources to cope with the situation?). This framework enables us to interpret peer rejection as a person-environment transaction, in which demand (environment, journal, review) and personal resources (psychological, social, cultural assets) combine to moderate stress appraisals. In this study, I concentrate on the primary appraisal phase, as the interplay between situational and identity-relevant clues is particularly pertinent to subsequent adjustment strategies. As Figure 1 highlights, initial assessments of peer rejections (How is this situation relevant for me?) is followed either by ego-enhancing or ego-protecting response evaluations (Is this rejection a threat or a challenge?). Linking peer rejections squarely to the domain of identity-related stress and coping enables us to explore the social and psychological consequences of scholarly experiences in high-stake contexts.

Research Propositions

As I argue above, engagement with the academic discourse is a symbolic interaction that is goal-relevant for individual scholars. In turn, peer evaluations provide meaning for scholarly self-conceptions (Day, 2011), not least because they bring potential discrepancies between external demand and individual capabilities to the fore (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, & Lickel, 2000). SIT asserts that such evaluations necessarily involve identity-related appraisal processes, including stigma awareness and subsequent coping mechanisms (Berjot & Gillet, 2011). The initial appraisal phase in performance situations is particularly important.

Situated at the juncture of identity centrality, motivation, and performance, cognitive evaluations of external demands determine emotional and behavioral responses (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The value scholars place on engaging with the academic community varies (Trevino, 2008) and, as a consequence, peer rejections are likely to have different meanings for different scholars. Peer review—conceptualized as motivational states—is "appraised by the recipient scholar as stressful, challenging, or irrelevant" (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1996). Accordingly, imbalances resulting from perceived discrepancies of community expectations and role realities are either exclusively judged as challenges or threats to scholarly identity, or simultaneously recognized as threat *and* challenge, or, finally, perceived as irrelevant (Berjot et al., 2012). Peer rejections offer the chance for personal enhancement; but they also potentially discredit scholarly integrity. In line with these prototypical responses, I assume that scholarly reactions to peer rejections are manifested in identity-specific appraisals. Thus, I propose the following:

Proposition 1: Peer rejections are identity-relevant situations. Initial judgments are composed of challenge and threat appraisals.

One trait specific to appraisal processes that I assume moderates the evaluations of peer rejections is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, in general, has been defined as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1994, p. 71). Individuals with a high sense of efficacy are likely to deal with failures as a challenge rather than a threat. In contrast, individuals with a low sense of efficacy will tend to regard failures as a threat rather than as a challenge that needs mastering.

The effects of self-efficacy in academic contexts are well documented (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003), including, for instance, performance, commitment, or educational attainment (Pajares, 1996). Self-efficacy and self-verification interact (Stets & Burke, 2000) and increase social connectedness (Torres & Solberg, 2001). Thus, beliefs in efficacy influence social identification processes (Ellison, 1993), particularly in environments that emphasize performance (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). When group membership is gained primarily through achievement (Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999), role expectations provide a frame of reference for enacting a specific identity. Peer review, with its underlying values of conflict, self-reliance, and achievement (Chubin & Hackett, 1990), stresses self-influence on scholarly attainment. Feedback loops, then, are critical performance indicators (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996).

Peer feedback is an evaluative reaction to intellectual attainment and is therefore quite necessarily emotionally charged (Graue, 2006). As it regulates in-group and out-group membership (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990), feedback prompts ego-enhancing and ego-protecting motives (S. J. Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003). From this follows the notion that beliefs in scholarly efficacy shape how feedback information is appraised and subsequently used. Achievement failure is usually attributed either to insufficient effort or to low ability (Weiner, 2012). As a consequence, in settings such as peer review, we expect feedback to be either motivating or demotivating. As the understanding of how others perceive us shapes our self-perceptions (Shraugher & Schoeneman, 1979), peer rejections provide a major cognitive mechanism for activating self-efficacy motives:

Proposition 2: Self-efficacy affects perceptions of peer rejections: Scholars who perceive themselves as being highly efficacious will evaluate peer rejection as an identity challenge. Conversely, scholars who perceive themselves as being inefficacious will evaluate peer rejection as an identity threat.

Another facet that I propose to be relevant to the ways in which manuscript rejections are appraised is that of experience. Resilience is the ability to psychologically manage adverse situations through either personal resources or learnt

behavior (Holling, 1973). Negotiating risk varies across persons and situations, with capitulating or mastering adverse conditions being the two opposite poles of reaction to external demands (Rutter, 1987). Thus, resilience is not a fixed disposition, but a process that evolves from experiences with changing life circumstances (Luthar, 2000). Such developmental interpretations posit that individuals adjust and become more able to handle adverse situations over time (Rutter, 1985). In this sense, resilience results from experiences of effective coping mechanisms (Garmezy, 1991), including developing self-protective strategies in identity-relevant situations (Shih, 2004). This facet seems to become particularly relevant as age progresses (Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley, & Novacek, 1987) and employment conditions become more certain (e.g., Sverke, Hellgren, & Näswall, 2002). As such, tenure in academia is likely to interact with how scholars deal with negative peer-review feedback. Seasoned researchers are likely to have ample experiences with the peer-review process, which in turn will lead to less egocentric appraisal processes. Conversely, I speculate that scholars new(er) to navigating peer-review processes perceive peer rejections as a threat to their scholarly identity:

Proposition 3: Academic experience with peer-review moderates identity-related appraisal processes.

Communicating accurately and understandably is just as important as research itself (Wallwork, 2010); the moderating effects of self-efficacy on peer review cannot be explored in isolation from linguistic competencies (Römer, 2009). Based on the concept of self-discrepancy, Higgins (1987) distinguishes between the *actual* self (i.e., self-perceptions of individual attributes), the "self guides" of the *ideal* self (i.e., attributes that an individual aspires to have), and the *ought* self (i.e., representations of obligatory attributes). Dissonant representations are likely to result in emotional discomfort.

Discrepancy-based motivational states have been shown to influence self-esteem (Moretti & Higgins, 1990). Accordingly, I propose that beliefs in scholarly efficacy are affected by perceptions of linguistic competence. While English is the lingua franca of much scholarly exchange (Lillis & Curry, 2010), writing in academic contexts requires scholars to adapt to discourse-specific conventions (Hyland, 2000). The demands placed on non-native speakers to learn discursive practices, therefore, are particularly high (Huang, Frideger, & Pearce, 2013). As the standard of English is often contributory to manuscript rejections or, more generally, negative feedback to scholarly work (Eden & Rynes, 2003), the incongruencies of actual and expected proficiency should regulate the self-efficacy of both native and non-native speakers. This suggests the following:

Proposition 4: Perceived language proficiency and the extent to which English is a native language moderate self-efficacy.

Method

As a "discursive subject," the challenges of the peer-review process are well recognized in business studies (Day, 2011), most notably in terms of competition, gamesmanship, or rejection rates (e.g., Bedeian, 2004; Macdonald & Kam, 2007). I have identified IB studies as a highly suitable environment for analyzing the effects of peer rejections on individual scholars for three interrelated reasons: (a) IB and its parent organization the Academy of International Business (AIB) is highly internationalized with membership steadily expanding; (b) IB scholarship is a mature domain, implying that it is intellectually and methodologically bounded; and (c) premier research outlets in the field, such as the *Journal for International Business Studies* (JIBS), adhere to rigorous peer-review standards and competition for journal space is intense. As a result, the IB field should provide a reasonably representative profile of a specific and cohesive management discipline.

For triangulation purposes, and in response to the call for multi-method analyses in IB research (Hurmerinta-Peltomäki & Nummela, 2006), I used qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Qualitative data are, as we will see, particularly effective for providing rich insights into the vast array of scholarly experiences with peer rejection. Semi-structured interviews, informal email feedback, and open-ended survey questions helped me to explore performance expectations and the impact this has on the dynamics of dealing with stress resulting from professional failure in great detail. I use quantitative methods to assess how individual and context-specific dispositions interact with appraisals of identity threatening and/or challenging situations.

I tested my propositions with data collected from active members of the AIB community. I identified and cross-checked scholars via name lists from two AIB conference proceedings (2012, 2013): the EIBA 2013 (European International Business Academy) and the AIB UK conferences (2013). From October to December 2013, I invited a total of 2,546 scholars by email to participate in a survey on peer rejections and stress. Accounting for unsuccessful contacts (i.e., undelivered emails, prolonged absence, job mobility), the response rate was 411 (17.3%). Data were collected using the Bristol Online Survey. Human phenomena are best portrayed through different perspectives of seeing. I therefore complement these data with interviews from 15 scholars who offered further feedback. These I conducted between November 2013 and January 2014.

With respect to nationality and linguistic background, my sample includes responses from scholars originating from all six continents. Two thirds of the respondents are non-native English speakers, half of whom publish their work also in languages other than English. In terms of academic experience, 14% of the respondents have been working in a higher education institution for less than 3 years, 30% between 3 and 10 years, 28% between 10 and 20 years, and 22% more than 10 years (missing data = 6%). Furthermore, 58% of the respondents stated that they have been trained either fully or partly at Anglo-Saxon institutions (the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and Canada). More than 94% of respondents indicated that they have experienced a manuscript rejection. The relatively high response rate, the regional and linguistic distribution of respondents, and the variations in experience working in higher education all imply a negligible non-response bias.

The survey instrument was developed in three iterations. First, I identified scales for the proposed constructs of social identity threat and challenge, and for self-efficacy and self-discrepancy. Second, I contextualized items specific to an academic setting, and pretested the instrument among 30 business scholars located in Europe. The instrument was designed in English. I paid particular attention to clarity and ease of understanding (through translations and back-translations). Based on feedback and data exploration, I further calibrated the instructions and items to be included in the survey instrument. Specifically, balancing possible sequencing effects, I instructed the respondents to think about the most stressful situation that they have experienced in relation to a peer rejection. The control variables that I used consisted of academic degree, country (where academic degree was received), native language, and other languages used for publication. The final questionnaire included 104 items, consisting of the following scales:

Self-efficacy. Because mastery of life events is domain-specific (Bandura, 1994), I operationalized self-efficacy through adaptation of the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). Originally created to assess performance beliefs in relation to stressful life events, I modified the scale to embrace the specific challenges of reaching academic goals when participating in the academic discourse. After pretesting and exploratory factor analysis, the final version consisted of eight items, each assessing the degree of coping with unfavorable peer reviews, measured on 5-point Likert-type scales.

Threat and challenge. Berjot and colleagues (2011; 2012) developed and extensively tested a scale measuring threat and challenge appraisals of identity-relevant situations. With the aim of assessing individual engagement strategies, I adopted the threats and challenges to personal identity subscales of the Primary Appraisal of Identity Threat (PAIT) instrument. Each item refers to either threat or challenge attributions, and responses should indicate how scholars appraise peer rejections. Eleven items were mixed and randomly presented to respondents.

Self-discrepancy. Dissonance results from the perceived incongruity between actual and socially expected attributes. I asked respondents to judge their academic English

proficiency in terms of (a) actual performance (i.e., the level of academic English proficiency respondents think they actually possess), (b) ideal performance (the level of academic English proficiency respondents would ideally like to possess), and (c) ought performance (the level of academic English proficiency respondents believe they ought to possess). I created self-state representations by first calculating the mean for overall proficiency, presentation, and writing skills (5-point Likert-type scaled, ranging from *excellent* to *not adequate*) and then subtracting actual proficiency ratings from ideal and ought proficiency ratings.

Findings

Peer review is a deeply human experience and the question I want to answer here is this: How do scholars react to rejection of their articles by major journals? I first merge open-ended survey questions, informal email feedback and semi-structured interview data. In doing so, I offer initial insights into associated process of peer evaluation and its outcomes. Informed by my theoretical discussion, I then visit the survey findings.

Interviews

Respondents proved willing to share their experiences. From this emerged a candid portrayal of the challenges, disruptions, and demands that go with peer-review processes. For convenience, I discuss my findings along the conceptual framework developed above.

Antecedents. Although motivations for participating in the disciplinary discourse vary, publications appear to provide meaning for self-conceptions. Indeed, scholarly and personal identities are strongly intertwined. Specifically for younger scholars publications are a marker for coming of age. By implication, peer evaluations come with negative ("A rejection really upsets me. It's not so much an intellectual challenge but more a personal challenge to my credibility!") and positive emotions ("Generally I think the review process is great. It's almost a thrill getting something back. How can I communicate better? What have I missed?"). Publications are widely perceived as reputation enhancing, with academic ranks connected to a specific publication profile. Reversely, this means that being unsuccessful is commonly perceived to be career inhibiting. Peer review, therefore, can induce a strong sense of anxiety, especially for those scholars who are under intense publication obligations ("My contract specifies a publication quota. This means my whole life is really tied to publication success! Not getting published has dramatic financial implications. Success and failure literally decides over a life dominated by huge teaching commitments with relatively little income."). This does not concern only younger scholars in tenure-track positions, where academic success is particularly crucial ("I simply cannot afford to sulk. Even if rejections are frustrating, I know I need to get on with submitting articles."). Indeed, I find that most respondents are concerned about their jobs, with publication records as proxy for leveraging career trajectories ("Publications are extremely important as far as my employing institution is concerned. As long as one delivers world-class publications, everything is hunky-dory. Things can get complicated if one does not live up to these expectations. So, yes, I feel under pressure to contribute to the departmental profile.").

Primary appraisal. My data suggest that many scholars indeed appraise negative peer evaluations as high-stake competition. The problem of rejection is seen as extremely acute in IB, because "we have so few journals to publish from." Predictably, contending with peer rejection can provoke very negative emotions. Writing for publication is identity forging, and being turned down not only means "you are not good enough." It also dampens the feeling of belonging, or as one respondent put it:

> A peer rejection is a defeat. It feels like being elected last into a school football team, because one is perceived to have two left feet. At a conference one would like to be recognized as being part of the IB team. A manuscript rejection is a clear signal that this is not the case.

How, then, do scholars respond to conflicting information resulting from self-efficacy beliefs on the on hand and community demands on the other? I identified a huge range of instant responses to having work rejected, including surprise, shock, and shame. Some respondents reported aggressive behavior. Even if a rejection goes back many years, most respondents were able to recall particularly painful episodes ("Even after 2 years it is still very much in my memory. It still haunts me."). I found that the *verbatim* reproduction of reviewer's comments was not uncommon. Especially, the time spent developing a manuscript and reviewer effort is often viewed by respondents as *disproportionate*. Whether or not negative peer feedback is stressful depends on the author's commitment and the perceived fairness of the comments ("As long as one thinks the reviewers have a point, it's not that stressful.").

Further appraisal. Should this initial assessment produce cognitive dissonance (i.e., the encounter indeed is perceived as high stake), scholars then appear to engage in stress reducing strategies, most notably (a) pragmatism ("I think the person did not understand what I was talking about. I then go through the feedback and identify how this person read my paper."), (b) rationalizing ("To me this is not stressful. It's just part and parcel of the process of trying to get published."), (c) reinterpretation ("I usually tell myself it's the

Table 1. Principal Components Analysis (Orthogonal Solution).

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2
I experienced this situation as a threat to my scholarly identity (T)[a]	.839	
I had the feeling that I was being regarded a second-class scholar (T)	.764	
I doubted my ability to measure up to scholarly expectations (T)	.763	
I was worried about not being able to cope with this situation (T)	.697	
I felt a direct attack on my integrity as a scholar (T)	.670	
I had the feeling of being reassessed as a scholar (T)	.532	
I experienced this situation as if I had to take up a scholarly challenge (C)		.699
I saw rejection as an opportunity to develop my scholarly capabilities (C)		.682
I thought about the consequences of the rejection and how to best overcome these (C)		.662
I focused on the way I could take advantage of the situation (C)		.557
The maxim "publish or perish" came to mind, but I was sure I would rise to the challenge (C)		.511
Eigenvalues	3.509	1.866
% of variance	31.898	16.964

[a]Items were a priori categorized either as Threat (T) or Challenge (C) appraisal.

narrow-mindedness of the editor/reviewer. So it's their problem and not mine."), (d) denial ("I don't even want to look at the rejected article. Honestly, I don't want to touch it!"), or (e) behavioral change ("I am so conscious of being rejected that I now only send off very polished manuscripts."). Regardless of the dissonance-reducing route, one overriding effect of manuscript rejection is anxiety about being "exposed as a bluff." The embarrassment usually lends itself to speculation about who the reviewer was and who else "knows about this underperformance." In sum, I find that the constant upgrading of publication targets leaves many scholars professionally struggling, with some respondents reporting disturbing individual ("I lost about 20 pounds a year. All I could do was work.") and collective ("This pressure lends itself to not good studies. There are now things out there that do not add anything to the literature.") consequences.

My survey findings provide further details about scholarly coping mechanisms in response to rejection. Expanding on the existing research on identity and stress (Berjot et al., 2012, 2013; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), I postulate above that in the peer-review process, the primary appraisal phase plays a central role when receiving negative peer feedback. I therefore must first establish the latent variable structure emerging from my appraisal items. The principal components analysis (orthogonal solution) identifies a two-factor solution (Table 1). Factor 1 explains 32% of the total variance. Factor 2 explains 17% of the total variance. Eigenvalues are greater than 1.8. Factor loadings on both latent variables are above the .4 threshold. All items only load high on their a priori specified response mode. A relatively high internal consistency for both threat and challenge to personal identity is confirmed by a subsequent reliability analysis, which yields high item homogeneity for Factor 1 ($\alpha = .827$) and moderate item homogeneity for Factor 2 ($\alpha = .650$). My results indicate a satisfactory structural fit of negative peer

feedback appraisal, construed as a scholar-community transaction. Clearly, negative feedback is a significant stressor. However, I also observe tremendous variability in how scholars appraise rejection.

The bi-dimensional factorial structure enables me to distinguish between four prototypical responses to negative peer feedback: (a) Scholars who exhibit low scores on the two dimensions as are characterized as ambivalent; (b) scholars who score high on the threat dimension and low on the challenge dimension are characterized as primarily threat-sensitive; (c) conversely, scholars who score high on the challenge dimension and low on the threat dimension are characterized as primarily challenge-sensitive; (d) finally, scholars who score high on both dimensions perceive discrepancies of community expectations and role realities both as a threat and challenge to their identity. Because of the overlap of ego-protecting and ego-enhancing motivations, I characterize these scholars as highly peer sensitive.

Based on this, I conducted a one-way ANOVA to compare the effect of self-efficacy on my four prototypical appraisal types. There was a significant effect of self-efficacy on evaluations of negative peer feedback at the $p < .01$ level for the four conditions, $F(3, 402) = 31,785$, $p = .000$. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's Honest Significant Differences (HSD) test indicate that the mean score of self-efficacy was significantly lower for scholars who perceive peer rejection as a threat ($M = 2.84$; $SD = .63$) than it was for the three other groups. Conversely, scholars who perceive peer rejection primarily as a challenge exhibit a significantly higher self-efficacy ($M = 2.14$; $SD = .56$) than scholars who score high on both dimensions. This group does not differ significantly from those scholars who are ambivalent to negative peer feedback ($M = 2.25$; $SD = .53$). Finally, scholars who are simultaneously threat and challenge-sensitive display significant self-efficacy differences ($M = 2.51$; $SD = .58$) to all
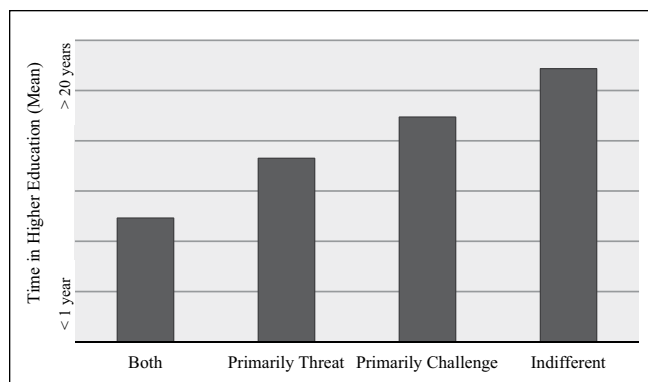
Figure 2. Average length of tenure for the four response conditions.

Figure 3. Efficacy and language competence (interaction effects).

other groups at the .05 level. Taken together, my results indicate the substantial moderating effects of self-efficacy on how scholars judge the significance of negative peer feedback. Specifically, my data suggest that scholars who exhibit high levels of efficacy perceive manuscript rejections as a challenge. However, scholars who exhibit low levels of efficacy perceive manuscript rejections as a threat to their scholarly identity. Interestingly, medium levels of self-efficacy indicate dual evaluations of both identity-relevant threat and challenge.

With respect to the effect of tenure on primary appraisal, I posited interactions between length of experience and response options. My research proposition was supported: A one-way ANOVA indicates significant effects of tenure on evaluations of negative peer feedback at the $p < .01$ level for my four appraisal options, $F(3, 381) = 4,730, p = .003$. Subsequent analysis using Tukey's HSD test reveals that these effects result from group differences between highly peer-sensitive scholars ($M = 3.29; SD = 1.04$), scholars with a challenge-sensitive appraisal profile ($M = 3.69; SD = 1.05$), and scholars with an indifferent attitude to peer rejection ($M = 3.88; SD = 1.02$), respectively. Figure 2 illustrates the average length of tenure for the four response conditions. With time (exposure to peer-review processes), evaluations shift from dual appraisals to identity-relevant threats, then to perceptions of manuscript as a challenge, and ultimately indifference. In other words, the more experience that scholars have (and the more professionally secure they are) the less they perceive an imbalance between dispositional capabilities and external demands. Senior scholars are the least likely to be psychologically affected by negative peer feedback.

My framework presented above suggests the main effects of English language proficiency on self-efficacy. I tested this relationship with measures of perceived self-discrepancy and English nativeness. Consistent with research Proposition 4, I observed main effects of incongruity between actual and socially expected English proficiency. In
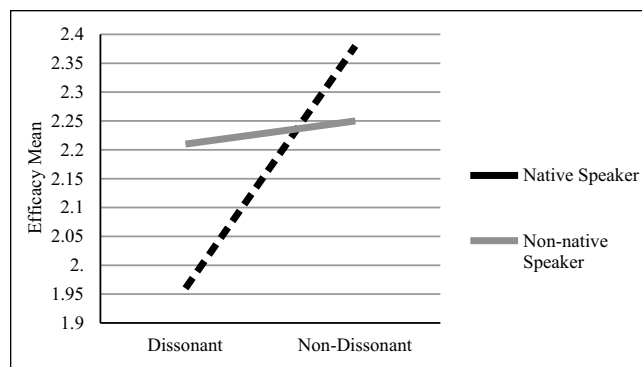
general, respondents who judged their actual English proficiency to be lower than their ideal proficiencies display lower self-efficacy, $M_{dissonant} = 2.09, M_{non-dissonant} = 2.313; F = 6.077, p = .014$. In spite of this, I found no main effects between native and non-native English speakers, $M_{native} = 2.17, M_{non-native} = 2.24, F = .716, p = .389$. Nativeness appears to play an insignificant role in determining peer-review related self-efficacy; however, as Figure 3 highlights, I observe a statistically significant interaction between self-discrepancy and English nativeness. The effect of perceived English proficiency was not the same for native and non-native speakers of English, $F = 4.139, p < .043$. Subsequent inspection suggests that levels of self-efficacy are relatively equal for native and non-native scholars under non-dissonant conditions. In the case of perceived language skill incongruency, my results exhibit significant effects of nativeness. By implication, the self-efficacy of English native speakers is less affected by dissonant perceptions of linguistic competencies (i.e., rhetoric, writing) than scholars whose mother tongue is not English.

Discussion

In this study, I investigate the social and psychological effects of manuscript rejections. Drawing on insights from Social Psychology, I view the peer-review process as a symbolic, reciprocal, and dynamic interaction between individual scholars and the academic community. The application of SIT to academic settings allows us to more fully comprehend the causes and consequences of negative peer feedback. Editorial decisions are usually absolute and, as scholarly output is so central to who academics are (Graue, 2006), failure to align scholarly performance with community expectations disrupts the process of cultivating a scholarly identity (Burke, 1991; Thoits, 1991). The spectrum of peer recognition is very narrow and the unpredictability of review outcomes helps to foster feelings of insecurity. The approach I develop in this article suggests that peer review creates "motivated performance situations" (Blascovich et al., 2000), not least because

of intellectual dynamics, centrality to self-actualization, and outcome unambiguity. I discern two basic dimensions of appraisal: threat and challenge. As self-concepts result from social interactions (Franks & Marolla, 1976), I postulate that scholars' beliefs in their own self-efficacy have moderating effects of scholarly beliefs in self-efficacy. My research propositions were tested among academics of a specific management studies domain. The relatively large probability sample allows for a confident generalizability of my empirical findings for the IB community.

Overall, I find that the social identity of the IB community is salient among my respondents. This appears to affect scholarly self-categorization (Van Knippenberg, 2000) and thus, the effort to either protect or enhance group status (Berjot et al., 2012). From this follows that performance expectations are identity-relevant and motivate strategies to deal with peer-review processes. There is consensus among the respondents that the process of getting work published is arduous. Yet, I detect stark contrasts in terms of how and to what extent peer review is positioned in pushing knowledge forward. Some respondents perceive peer feedback as an identity-building process supportive of gathering information about the quality and direction of one's own scholarship. In other words, they draw strength from the process of shepherding their ideas through peer-review processes (see Cope, 2011). In many cases, however, negative experiences and indeed pain appear to outweigh the ideals of peer-review processes as scientific dialogue (Spier, 2002). These discrepant experiences are in good agreement with Stets and Burke (2000) who suggested that role expectations take on meaning for individuals. Not meeting these expectations can frustrate scholarly self-categorization (Riley & Burke, 1995). This creates unique dynamics of coping with threats and challenges in peer-review settings. Specifically, my respondents differed in their tendencies to attribute setbacks to the locus of professional failure, performance controllability, and trust in procedural accuracy (see Weiner, 1985): First, authors have to live with events that are perceived to be largely out of control. Peer evaluations emerge from the interplay among author, reviewer, and editor (Moizer, 2009) and often suffer from substantial variations. As a consequence, review processes are widely believed to be, at best, a gambling game or, at worst, chronically toxic. Second, feedback tonality shapes scholarly experiences with the peer-review process. Here, struggle seems valuable and suffering lies at the heart of good scholarship. A reoccurring observation I note was that the ideal of negotiating knowledge (Bedeian, 2004) counterintuitively becomes a turf of intellectual competition with cumulative effects on individual scholars. As review processes unfold, transactions become increasingly complex (Uzzi, Mukherjee, Stringer, & Jones, 2013). Indeed, my data suggest that reviewers are perceived to favor ideas that are not radically different from established thinking (see Luukonen, 2012). For this reason, adaptation of manuscripts

appears to take place within very narrow boundaries with the roles of authors, reviewers, and editors perceived as unequally distributed. As aggrieved scholars do not have a court of appeal, knowledge creation is often experienced as nonconsensual, if not plainly unjust (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Third, my findings have revealed how variously scholars react to unfavorable decisions. It would seem that their reactions are of no concern to editors. But things are not quite so simple. Consider this: Editors are in a delicate position. They not only make the acceptance decision but also select the reviewers (De Rond & Miller, 2005). As reviewing is voluntary, and good journals usually do not select bad reviewers, editors depend on scholarly goodwill. Although there is little control over what a manuscript reviewer says, it is the editor who brokers feedback. It is the unscripted outcome and the tonality that appears to be decisive for situational appraisals of identity threats. Fourth, and in addition to the heavy-handedness of the process, institutions further induce insecurity, by constantly moving the goal posts of expectations. That is, the criteria for promotion, largely concomitant to publication success, are often kept vague. The disconnect between external, largely fluid demands, and personal ambitions escalates already high levels of anxiety.

The findings broadly support my research propositions. Scholars adapt to negative peer feedback in multiple ways. Negative peer evaluations are a common experience for scholars and they evoke ego-enhancing and ego-protecting responses. Perceived discrepancies between community expectations and role realities result in independent assessments of threat and challenge scenarios. As a consequence, scholars experience manuscript rejections as stressful, challenging, or irrelevant. In line with Berjot et al. (2012), appraisals of peer rejections are malleable. Scholars construct their relationship with the academic community along four response options: ambivalence, primary challenge, primary threat, and co-appraisal of threat and challenge (see Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). I speculate that scholars find themselves in high-risk, high-return situations with competing assessments of dispositional capabilities and external demands. Confluent evaluations in high-stake contexts have been linked to self-handicapping behavior (Major & O'Brian, 2005), and scholars who simultaneously perceive negative feedback as both a threat and a challenge could be torn between endurance and avoidance strategies to maintain personal or social esteem. While some may perceive "agony" as prerequisite of publication success, others may be discouraged to engage with peer-review outlets all together.

As anticipated, trust in one's own scholarly competence plays an important role in moderating response modes. Consistent with findings from Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995), self-efficacy is a personal resource for balancing the demands of the academic community. Scholars who displayed higher levels of self-efficacy tend to appraise negative peer feedback as challenging, whereas lower self-efficacy

relates to threat appraisals. In terms of antecedents, my results reveal that scholarly experience has a differential impact on appraisal processes. Perceived discrepancies between dispositional capabilities and external demands recede over time. By implication, initial threats to the scholarly identity give way to a challenge orientation before scholars display more indifferent attitudes toward negative feedback. Such learning curves are typical for identity-relevant contexts (Folkman et al., 1987; Rutter, 1985): Scholars appear to develop self-protective strategies, with changes in their employment circumstances as their careers progress as one possible explanation.

Linguistic competencies also play a role in determining reactions of scholars. Interaction effects between dissonant perceptions of linguistic competence and English nativeness clearly indicate that language matters when it comes to engagement with the academic community. English language nativeness per se does not affect levels of self-efficacy; however, in combination with perceived low levels of linguistic competence, native and non-native scholars differ in their self-belief concerning their ability to reach their academic goals. In other words, native speakers of English are far less concerned with their ability to achieve the expected linguistic skills than their non-native counterparts. In fact, my findings indicate that dissonant information about linguistic ability is a potential source of stigmatization, particularly as the acquisition of English language competence is widely believed to be self-influenced and therefore controllable (Horwitz, 1987). With self-efficacy exerting significant effects on appraisal strategies, this intimates that the ability to perform at a fluent level of English results in specific stress appraisals and subsequent identity protecting and enhancing coping methods.

All my findings show essentially the same thing: Peer-review processes provide a socio-evaluative and uncontrollable context, which puts self-esteem and social status of scholars at risk. Intuitively, scholars perceive peer-review processes as invidious and corrosive (De Rond & Miller, 2005), and the synthesis of SIT and the Stress and Coping theories intimates why this is the case: Scholars do not only worry about how their work is judged, but they also worry about how they are valued as a person (Graue, 2006). This is in good agreement with Clegg (2008) who argued that peer-review processes induce intellectual potency *and* individual legitimacy. Once scholarship is understood as a competition for status that is crucial for advancing both an individual's career and self-conception, we need to query the collective representations of academic achievement (Crocker, 1999) and the associated effects of social-evaluative judgments (Thoits, 1991).

The overall picture is that of unity in terms of self-blame and diversity in terms of dealing with negative feedback. Appraisals range from negative peer evaluations as a persuasive source of stigmatization through to platforms to push oneself forward. A key insight of this study is that self-efficacy, linguistic capabilities, and length of tenure—and their interplay—moderate these systematic differences. Social categorization is very important for managing contributions to knowledge (Becher & Towler, 2001), for the nature of peer review is "leading scientists to intentionally display conventionality" (Uzzi et al., 2013). The power of my framework lies with explaining how scholars handle such processes. The psychosocial consequences of identity processes—including increased apprehension, impaired performance, or dissociative responses (Steele et al., 2002), among other effects—are well documented (Burke, 1991). Peer review as a legitimacy-building or preserving process might not be conducive to an elastic and open community culture. In fact, the social-evaluative threat of peer-review processes is extraordinarily damaging for nurturing scholarly resources.

Implications and Direction for Future Research

Historically, the role of peer review is to facilitate cooperative learning. With leading universities vying for research excellence to increase their reputational ambitions, bibliometrics, citation impact, or research productivity rankings are what incentivize much of today's scholarship. This changes the coordinates of knowledge creation and scholarly experiences, and peer-review processes are not unaffected by this. Many scholars embark on "playing the publication game" and are less concerned with quality contributions to knowledge, not least because of the increase in pressure to perform (Faria, 2005). In this sense, not only do journals become a brand, but scholars themselves engage in publication politics to foster their own self-image and reputation. Research output has reached inflationary proportions (Harvey, Kelly, Morris, & Rowlinson, 2010), and publications in journals with strict review processes are deemed especially career enhancing. Unsurprisingly, the expansion of manuscript submissions and rejection rates goes hand in hand. In other words, institutional expectations are in conflict with de facto publication success. As a result, research—once cherished as a sanctuary in face of an increasingly hectic academic life ("Stress in the World of Academia," 2013)—has itself become a substantial source of stress.

If peer reviewing has many advantages for knowledge creation (Day, 2011), then one obvious question is, how can peer rejections be a problem? Drawing on insights from the domains of social identity and stress, I present in this article a framework to address the taboos surrounding the failure to secure journal space. Three principal findings stand out. The first is that most scholars today experience frequent professional failure, which, as my findings intimate, comes with extensive social and psychological consequences. Curiously, I also find tremendous variations in how scholars appraise peer rejections, ranging from ambivalence to psychological

distress. The second finding is that scholars' length of tenure, self-efficacy, and linguistic competence are all likely to have great influence on how they deal with peer rejections and resultant cognitive dissonance. The third and final significant finding, which I was surprised to discover, is the unconscious or even covert emphasis on linguistic competence within peer-review processes. The dynamic role of English proficiency interacts and modifies identity-relevant appraisal mechanisms. My findings would seem to indicate that the ability to communicate at a native or near native level of English results in asymmetric effects on ego-enhancing and ego-protecting responses to peer rejections.

Altogether, my empirical findings enhance our understanding of the many ways that scholars can be affected by perceived ostracism, should actual and expected social identity not match. This study sends out the clear warning that we should no longer ignore the paradoxical effects of a research climate that values publication success at all cost. Concealing personal failure can have detrimental effects on scholars' well-being and social engagement (Pachankis, 2007; Smart & Wegner, 2003), and this study provides evidence that the bifurcating mechanisms of peer review produce such predicaments. An unfortunate consequence of making failure taboo is that it simultaneously squanders the self-restoring efforts of individual scholars and collectively justifies in-group-based power differentials (see Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995). Like attracts like, and this conservatism can inhibit innovation (De Rond & Miller, 2005). The preference for conformity to domain-specific expectations may result in a great deal of happenstance and poor use of talents. Moving forward, I believe it is time to further disentangle "scholarly" and "personal" experiences from peer-review processes, and the marginalization, precariousness, and resilience it produces.

Some limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the implications of this study. As with any kind of self-report, my data may suffer from imperfect reliability. Social desirability can influence response behavior, and as such, my findings may fall short of representing the "real" experiences of peer-review mechanisms. I offer two responses to this concern. One is that identity-related measures are usually regarded as conservative, especially when concerning overt, performative behavior (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). The other is that I only used conservative data analysis methods. As a consequence, any significant findings offer meaningful insights, particularly when taking into account the potential for the under-reporting of undesirable effects by respondents. Future work should further contextualize the social and psychological effects of peer review, perhaps by complementing my findings with qualitative data. As stress is usually not a singular phenomenon, such research should incorporate the cumulative consequences of peer rejections.

Another limitation of this study is my attention to the recipients of identity-related threat and challenge appraisals

through the exploration of intellectual marginalization as perceived by individual scholars. This has brought psychological concepts such as self-efficacy and social comparison, among other internal processes, into focus. My view is that situational and institutional characteristics matter, as Goffman's (1963) work makes unequivocally clear. Stigmatization serves social functions (Neuberg, Smith, & Asher, 2000), and I explicitly assume that bifurcating "valued" and "less valued" contributions is no exception. As an "immune system" of scholarship, editors and reviewers force disciplinary domains to evolve. An agency-based approach to how knowledge is socially constructed and what role these stakeholders play in creating trust and maintaining legitimacy should offer a more complete picture of the stigmatizing processes in academic settings. Finally, as the quality and intensity of stigma is dependent on context (Steele et al., 2002), I speculate that social conditions vary by discipline. The current research was limited to the field of IB studies, and the inclusion of other academic domains should broaden our understanding, both of the organization of knowledge in general as well as the social mechanisms underlying peer review.

SIT and its integration in transactional models of identity-related stress place in-group and out-group membership as opposing poles on a continuum of social interaction. Its application to academic settings invites further consideration as to how social and psychological factors influence the trajectory of knowledge creation. In this study, I have brought to light the tremendous variability in coping efforts within today's high-stakes environment of scholarship. Responses range from vulnerability to resilience, and ambivalence to passion—sometimes simultaneously—and this affects scholarly performance. I also generate relevant insights into the frenetic nature of competing for space in an internationally recognized journal. The most fundamental issue here is the extent of trust in the cooperative nature of peer-review mechanisms. This differs between scholars and institutions. While most scholars regard the peer-review system as invidious and fluid, institutions place great faith in the fairness of the review process and its outcomes (Macdonald, 2014). This tension becomes particularly prominent when it comes to the controllability of academic work and the associated professional standing of the individual scholar.

For institutions, especially those who stand in competition for global ranking tables, research output is a very tangible variable for measuring intellectual productivity and corporate potency. As such, there is little wonder as to why they want to exert control over the "value" of scholarship by, for instance, fine-tuning research and impacting planning schedules. Scholars, however, have inadequate control over peer-review processes, especially so far as non-native speakers of English are concerned. The implications that flow from these findings therefore influence academic life in its totality, namely, scholarship, institutions, and their interplay.

A key challenge for the advancement of knowledge is to realign these adversarial perspectives. Capacity building depends on the permeability, diffusion, and absorption of expertise. The eclipse of scholarly work based on conformity (e.g., socio-linguistic proficiency) stifles innovation and may have considerable implications for the development of disciplines. My framework therefore holds promise for improving our understanding of how research gains traction and, consequently, how disciplinary domains evolve.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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