



## Editorial

# Antiracism CoalITION in Pain Research (ACTION-PR): Guiding Principles for Equity in Reporting

Over the past 2 years, the systematically disproportionate burden of Covid-19 on people from racialized and minoritized communities has glaringly illustrated the longstanding oppression, discrimination, bias, and racism-based violence faced by excluded communities worldwide. Ongoing legacies include the murder of Black people by law enforcement in the US, anti-immigration policies in Europe, the persecution of Uighur Muslims in China and women and their allies in Iran, and the discovery of hundreds of unmarked graves of Indigenous children in Canada. Long overdue conversations about the mistreatment of minoritized communities have ignited global discourse on structural injustices and have spurred the research community to engage in a critical examination of racism, oppression, and biases in our fields – all pointing to the urgent need for change.<sup>1</sup> As one of the gatekeepers of knowledge, scholarly and scientific journals have moved towards addressing equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) issues, including transparency in reporting,<sup>4,13,15</sup> and purposively expanding diversity with the inclusion of women and people from racialized groups to editorial boards and peer review panels.<sup>10</sup>

In pain treatment, care, and research, racism manifests in numerous insidious ways.<sup>9</sup> For decades, pain inequities have been documented for racialized and minoritized groups,<sup>2,3</sup> along with non-inclusive research practices,<sup>8</sup> and a lack of transparency in reporting and dissemination of findings.<sup>6,7</sup> Thus, to promote EDI and confront racism in pain science, the Antiracism CoalITION in Pain Research (ACTION-PR; also informally known as the Pain Justice League)<sup>11</sup> was formed in September 2020. ACTION-PR is an independent group of scientists committed to EDI

comprised of researchers with expertise in pain inequities, clinical and population pain research, basic science, and translational research (see authors on this paper) who are committed to implementing antiracism principles in pain research and are guided by cultural humility – a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and critique to redress power imbalances.<sup>5</sup> More recently, ACTION-PR has expanded to include more basic pain scientists and additional members who reside outside of the US to better reflect the global reach of oppression and colonization.

Thus far, ACTION-PR's collective efforts include facilitating virtual group think tanks with 39 pain scientists, co-authoring the 3-part *Confronting Racism in Pain Research* series<sup>6,8,11</sup> and presenting at webinars, grand rounds, and conferences (eg, US Association for the Study of Pain) about the implementation of an antiracism framework in pain science and clinical care for audiences of pain researchers, clinicians, and people with lived experience of pain. In the fall of 2020, ACTION-PR began to discuss ways to promote principles of justice, equity, and diversity in scientific publishing practices in pain research. Pain-focused journals can lead in dismantling the barriers, systems, and structures that uphold pain science injustice<sup>9</sup> and limit the capacity of pain science to address pain inequities. Through our conversations, the need to enhance equity in reporting pain science became imperative.

Peer review is an intrinsically subjective evaluation system utilizing researcher expertise to uphold standards of rigor, reproducibility, validity, objectivity, novelty, and integrity. Our peer review decisions are formed from the intersection of our training background (often consciously) and our cultural worldview (often unconsciously). For this reason, it is important for EDI principles to be integrated into scientific practices and during the peer review process. Formal editorial guidance and policy will help authors, editors, and reviewers align their equity values with scholarly practices and become change agents in this effort. Using structured guidelines would help authors and reviewers enhance research products that promote equity via increasing precision, specificity, and clarity of reporting – all hallmarks of scientific rigor. Therefore, ACTION-PR created the *Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Antiracism, and Accessibility (IDEAA) guidelines* to increase transparency and equity in manuscript reporting.

The development of the IDEAA guidelines used a reflexive process grounded in bias reduction, antiracism

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Address reprint requests to Anna M. Hood, PhD, Coupland I Building, University of Manchester, Manchester, M15 6FH, United Kingdom. E-mail address: [anna.hood@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:anna.hood@manchester.ac.uk)  
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scholarship (eg, diversity science, sociology, psychology, etc.), and equity values. We intentionally focused on the experiences of people living with pain who, due to societal oppression (eg, from racism, colorism, sexism, ageism, classism, transphobia, ableism, etc.), have additional burdens on physiological processes, well-being, and ability to receive adequate pain care. Using an iterative approach, ACTION-PR first shared ideas for the guidelines with *The Journal of Pain's* former editor-in-chief (Dr. Mark Jensen). To facilitate in-depth discussions, a smaller group of ACTION-PR members (AMH, CAM, VAM, ENM, JEL) began meeting monthly with Dr. Jensen and *The Journal of Pain's* current editor-in-chief (Dr. Tonya Palermo) to partner on refining the IDEAA guidelines and discussing implementation. Feedback was then sought and incorporated from Associate Editors and members of *The Journal of Pain* editorial board, other editors-in-chief of pain journals, and people with lived experience of pain. For example, people with lived experience of pain suggested that the IDEAA guidelines should be in accessible formats (eg, for people who are blind/people with vision impairments). Therefore, ACTION-PR members are actively working to make these available. Beginning in January 2023, *The Journal of Pain* will be the first pain journal to adopt the IDEAA guidelines (see Palermo, 2023 in this issue).<sup>12</sup> In building a pain research community that values EDI guiding principles and aims to improve research and reporting practices, we hope that other pain journals will also choose to incorporate the IDEAA guidelines.

The goal of the IDEAA guidelines is to have authors increase equity in reporting whilst reflecting on how EDI principles were embedded in their work, to assist reviewers in identifying where papers can be strengthened, and to have the resulting manuscript transparently disseminate pain research. As IDEAA guidelines become standard practice for rigorous reporting of pain science, the hope is that the guiding EDI and accessibility principles will become integral to the research process from the point of study conceptualization through to research dissemination, community uptake, and policy-making.

With any systemic publishing change, however, there are likely concerns related to an increased burden on authors and reviewers, a shortage of time for editors, and insufficient awareness and training. Nevertheless, successful prior changes aimed at improving the quality and equity focus of published articles make us confident that the IDEAA guidelines will become a meaningful part of the peer review process. For example, the Sex and Gender Equity in Research guidelines have demonstrated that these types of requirements can be embedded into the editorial and peer reviewer instructions across hundreds of journals.<sup>14</sup>

The IDEAA guidelines were created to eliminate research practices that uphold social privilege and biased assumptions that innate characteristics drive observed differences in pain outcomes for racialized and marginalized groups, thereby cultivating a pain research landscape across the translational continuum that helps reduce inequities. ACTION-PR recognizes that some IDEAA guidelines will evolve (eg, language styles) and are committed to periodic reviews, improvements (eg, language

translations), and updates as our understanding develops. To improve the lives of all people with lived experience of pain, equity in manuscript reporting is required to drive structural changes that meaningfully advance pain research and its global dissemination.

Anna M. Hood  
Manchester Centre for Health Psychology, Division of  
Psychology and Mental Health, University of Manchester,  
Manchester, UK

Calia A. Morais, PhD  
Department of Hematology and Oncology, The University of  
Alabama at Birmingham, University of Arkansas School of  
Social Work, Birmingham, Alabama

Edwin N. Aroke  
School of Nursing, Nurse Anesthesia Program, Department of  
Acute, Chronic, & Continuing Care, University of Alabama at  
Birmingham, Birmingham, Alabama

Staja Q. Booker  
Department of Biobehavioral Nursing Science, College of  
Nursing, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida  
Pain Research and Intervention Center of Excellence (PRICE),  
University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida

Lisa C. Campbell  
Department of Psychology, East Carolina University,  
Greenville, North Carolina

Claudia M. Campbell  
Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, Johns  
Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, Maryland

Burel R. Goodin  
Department of Psychology, College of Arts and Sciences,  
University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham, Alabama

Mary R. Janevic  
Department of Health Behavior and Health Education,  
University of Michigan School of Public Health, Ann Arbor,  
Michigan

Flavia P. Kapos  
Center for Child Health, Behavior & Development, Seattle  
Children's Research Institute, Seattle, Washington

Vani A. Mathur  
Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, Texas A&M  
University, College Station, Texas  
Texas A&M Institute for Neuroscience, Texas A&M University,  
College Station, Texas

Ericka N. Merriwether  
Department of Physical Therapy, Steinhardt School of Culture,  
Education, and Human Development, New York, New York  
Department of Medicine, NYU Grossman School of Medicine,  
New York University, New York, New York

Janelle E. Letzen  
Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, Johns  
Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, Maryland

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