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Keywords
Bibliometrics, Citations, Google Scholar, Impact Factor, ISI Web of Knowledge, Publishing, Ranking, Sociology Journals

Disciplines
Demography, Population, and Ecology | Library and Information Science | Social and Behavioral Sciences | Sociology

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Journal Rankings in Sociology:

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September 10, 2011

Abstract

This paper proposes using a new metric, h, and new data, drawn from Google Scholar, for ranking sociology journals. This approach is more comprehensive in several ways than the commonly used "journal impact factor." It includes a longer time-frame and draws on a broader data base. It provides editors and prospective authors with a more informative picture of the strengths and weaknesses of different journals. Moreover, readily available software enables do-it-yourself assessments of journals. While the position of individual journals varies with the new measure, a clear hierarchy of journals remains no matter what assessment metric is used.

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Interest in journal rankings derives from many sources. Faculty and graduate students who seek a good 'home' for their articles are often interested in information on the ranking of journals. Editors point to rankings in order to boast about the reputation of their journal and to search for signs of changes in rank relative to other journals. Perhaps a less agreeable source of interest in journal rankings is the demand for productivity and accountability in higher education. The current economic crisis has added impetus to long-standing calls for efficiencies, and one can anticipate renewed pressure on departments and individual scholars to justify their research productivity. Publication in top-ranked journals is one of the metrics used for such assessments. [2]

The use of journal rankings as proxies for research quality remains controversial (Seglen, 1997; see also MacRoberts and MacRoberts, 1996). Whereas some researchers treat "high visibility" as essentially interchangeable with "high productivity" and hence "faculty effectiveness," (Adkins and Budd, 2006; Borgman and Furner, 2002; Garfield, 2006), others remain more skeptical of the validity of citation measures (van Raan, 2005). Disputes over journal rankings likely share much in common with disputes over other ranking systems, such as the rankings of academic departments and universities. Here I use the terms "visibility" or "impact" rather than "quality" in recognition of the fact that some high quality papers receive less recognition than they deserve while other high quality papers published before their time may not be fully recognized or appreciated by the scholarly community. Nonetheless, the scholarly examination of journal rankings is common, with recent articles appearing in sociology (Allen, 2003), economics (Kalaitzidakis et al., 2003; Harzing and van der Wal, 2009),
political science (Giles and Garand, 2007), psychology (Lluch, 2005), business and management (Mingers and Harzing, 2007); social work (Sellers et al., 2004) and law (Shapiro, 2000), among others. In recent years new developments have changed the approach to journal rankings (eg., Harzing and van der Wal, 2009; Leyesdorff, 2009). While the journal hierarchy does not completely change, the new tools and approaches will be valuable to sociologists both for their internal needs and for their ability to make the case for sociological research to external constituencies.

A new statistic for assessing the visibility of individual scholars can be applied to the output of journals. This new measure, h, draws on data for a longer time frame than the widely used "journal impact factor." As implemented with an easily-downloaded

[2] The use of citation counts in evaluations remains controversial, whether it is done directly or via journal rankings as a proxy (van Raan, 1996; MacRoberts and MacRoberts, 1996; Seglen, 1997; Garfield, 2006; see Holden et al. 2006 for a number of recent references). In an appendix to this report, I discuss a key issue in the use of individual citations at the tenure decision. The basic problem, at least in the social sciences, is that the impact of research papers cannot be fully assessed until well after the tenure decision needs to be made.

software program, authors and editors can obtain a list of the most cited papers published in a given journal during a specified period of time. This allows interested parties the flexibility to undertake their own analysis of particular journals, and makes the journal ranking process substantively informative.

Compared to the Web of Knowledge Journal Citation Reports, the proposed approach has a number of advantages:

- It draws on a broader data base of citations (Google Scholar) that includes citations in books and conference presentations. This data base also covers a wider set of journals than does the Web of Knowledge

- It is based on the influential new measure "h," rather than a simple average of citations per paper.

- It covers a longer time frame, allowing a more complete assessment of the citations garnered by papers published in each journal.

- The software (Publish or Perish) provides a ready list of the most highly cited papers in each journal. In this way, the perusal of journals can become a useful bibliographical tool and not just an instrument for journal ranking.

- This software makes it easy for researchers to conduct their own journal analysis. For example, one can adjust the time frame for analysis, draw on a variety of statistical measures, and alter the set of comparison journals.

Review of Journal Rankings

The Web of Knowledge (formerly ISI, or Institute for Scientific Information) has for some time produced annual Journal Citation Reports (JCRs) (ISI Web of Knowledge, 2010). This is a valuable and easy-to-use source for obtaining information on the visibility of research published by a wide range of sociology journals. The JCR reports on sociology generate statistics on nearly 100 journals at the touch of a button. Several important sociology journals, such as the Journal of Health and Social Behavior and Demography, are grouped in other subject categories, but the persistent investigator can track some of these down without too much trouble.

As a former journal editor, I found the results produced by the Web of Knowledge Journal Citation Reports to be depressing. The scores were typically in the range of 1, 2 or 3, suggesting that the typical article could be expected to receive one,

two or perhaps three citations within a year after publication.[3] Given the tremendous time and energy that goes into publishing, on the part of authors, editors, and reviewers, these scores seemed dismally low. The fact that the average paper is noted by only a few scholars, even for the most well-known journals, makes the publishing enterprise seem like a rather marginal undertaking, of interest and significance to only the most narrow-minded specialists.

Among the problems with the JCR impact factor is the short time frame. In sociology, it is not uncommon for papers to grow in influence for a decade or more after publication. A useful statistic provided in the JCR is the 'journal half life.' This indicates how many years it takes for half of the cumulative citations to papers in a journal to be registered. In sociology, it is common for journals to have a citation half-life of a decade or more. A ten year time-horizon for assessing the visibility or impact of research published in sociology journals is thus more appropriate than the very short time frames typically employed in natural-science fields.

The most recent editions of the Journal Citation Reports have taken a step in this direction by making available a 5-year impact score. I believe that this measure is more informative for sociology than the standard impact score, and I would recommend that journal comparisons drawing on the JCR data base use this measure rather than the traditional impact score. Nonetheless, there is room for improvement on even the 5-year impact score.

An additional limitation of the Web of Knowledge Journal Citation Reports stems from the limitations of the data base used to generate its statistics. Although specialists in this area are well area of its limitations, many department chairs, deans, promotion and tenure committees and individual scholars assume that citation scores capture all of the references to published scholarship. In fact only citations that appear in journal articles are covered, and then only those journals covered by the Web of Knowledge.

Sociology remains a field where both books and journal articles matter (Clemens, Powell, McIlwaine and Okamoto, 1995; Cronin, Snyder and Atkins, 1997). It is thus unfortunate at best that citations appearing in books are not captured in the standard statistical assessments of scholarly impact. In this way, the JCR reports understate the impact of sociological research.

Even in the area of journals, the JCR data are not comprehensive. For example, JCR does not include the DuBois Review, City & Community, and The American

[3] The mean exposure time in the standard impact score is one year. For example, the 2008 impact score for a journal is based on citations to papers published in 2006 and 2007. The papers published at the beginning of 2006 thus have almost two years to garner references, but those published at the end of 2007 have only a few months. Similarly, the five-year impact score discussed below has a mean exposure time of 2.5 years, and thus does not capture five full years of citation exposure.

Sociologist, among others. In my own specialty area, I have noticed that the journal Work, Family & Community is not covered by the JCR rankings even though it has been publishing for over a decade and has featured papers as widely noted as those in many journals that are covered. Work-family scholars thus receive less credit for their work when citations to their research appearing in this journal are missed.

Despite these limitations, many have continued to rely on the JCR rankings because there was no readily-available alternative to the Web of Knowledge System. The introduction of Google Scholar, however, has altered the landscape for citation analysis (Google Scholar, 2010). Google Scholar captures references TO articles and books that appear IN both articles and books. Google Scholar also covers conference proceedings, dissertations, and reports issues by policy research centers and other sources. An earlier analysis of Google Scholar citations revealed that Google Scholar often doubles the number of references received by sociology papers, compared to the citation score obtain in the Web of Knowledge. This prior study also found that only a small fraction of these entries represent "noise": duplicate citations or links to dead websites (identifying reference withheld). Sociology citation scores may well stand to benefit disproportionately from this broader set of references since so much scholarship in the field is published in books and other outlets besides academic journals covered by JCR. It is not unreasonable to expect that the broader coverage provided by Google Scholar will provide a bigger increment in citations for a book-heavy field like sociology and less for article-centered disciplines such as mathematics and economics. [4]

Another problem with the JCR impact factor is that it averages across all articles. While this is a sensible enough place to begin, it fails to recognize the highly skewed nature of scholarly research. A limited number of studies garner a sizable share of the attention of other researchers. Averaging the visibility of all papers in a journal is thus a bit like averaging the performance of all of the quarterbacks on a football team, including those who rarely take the field. The team's performance is typically determined by the performance of the starting quarterback, not by an average score.

Sociological scholar in other areas has similarly focused on the experiences of the top segment. Duncan (1961), in creating the socio-economic index (SEI), focused on the highest earners and the most educated members of an occupation. His argument was that the status of an occupation reflects the experiences of its most successful individuals rather than the average incumbent. This approach is particularly relevant in the context of scholarly research.

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[4] Scopus is yet another potential data source for journal comparisons (Leydesdorff, Moya-Anegon and Guerrero-Bote, 2010). I prefer Google Scholar because of its inclusion of references in books, and because it covers materials published over a longer time frame.

A good question for a journal, then, is "how many high impact papers were published in a given time frame?" The "h" index is well suited to answering this question (Hirsch, 2005). H indicates the number of papers that have been cited at least h times. Thus, an h of 30 indicates that the journal has produced 30 papers cited at least 30 times in the time frame under consideration. H is an easy to interpret statistic that provides a much more realistic assessment of the cumulative impact of papers published in a journal.

H has become a widely used measure of citation visibility or impact: Hisch's 2005 paper has been cited more than 1,000 times. Bibliometricians and others have debated the strengths and weaknesses of h and have proposed alternative measures (Bornmann and Daniel, 2007; van Raan, 2006).

Publish or Perish Software

Anne-Wil Harzing, a Professor of International Management at the University of Melbourne in Australia, has created a software package called "Publish or Perish," (hence PoP for short) that offers a practical alternative to the JCR system (Harzing, 2010). This tool allows for the analysis of the publications of entire journals as well as individual authors. PoP quickly scans the Google Scholar data base for all of the publications of a journal published in the specified time period. It lists the articles in order of the frequency of their publication, along with a menu of statistical summaries. I find this a remarkably informative feature, as it a) provides an overview of the most influential papers published in a given journal; and b) allows the researcher to check the accuracy of the articles on which the statistics are based. Items which do not belong on the list can be deleted with the statistics automatically recomputed. PoP provides a wide set of statistics, including h. (I will discuss some of the alternative measures below.) PoP thus facilitates the analysis of the impact of many journals that would be extremely laborious to conduct without this program.

Journal List

The analysis covered 120 sociology journals. I started with the list of 99 journals included in the Web of Knowledge sociology subject category. In several cases, the classification of these publications as academic sociology journals may be questioned on the grounds of subject matter (eg., Cornell Hospitality Quarterly) or because of the publication's explicit interdisciplinary orientation (Social Science Research, Population and Development Review). I included these journals on the grounds of both inclusiveness and comparability.

I added journals several journals that JCR classifies elsewhere, including the Journal of Health and Social Behavior, because it is published by the American

Sociological Association. Several prominent journals from fields closely associated with sociology were included for substantive reasons, because sociologists frequently publish in these journals, as well as for purposes of comparison: Administrative Science Quarterly, Criminology, Demography, and Public Opinion Quarterly. As noted above, the JCR list is not comprehensive. In some cases, new journals, such the Du Bois Review, are not yet covered. In other cases, well established journals, such as the International Review of Sociology, are excluded from the data base for no evident reason.[5] For the present analysis, a number of English-language journals not covered by JCR were added to the list: American Sociologist, City & Community, Community, Work & Family, Contexts, Critical Sociology, Current Sociology (UK), DuBois Review, International Journal of Comparative Sociology, International Review of Sociology, Qualitative Sociology, Socio-economic Review, and Theory, Culture and Society (UK). While even this expanded list is not comprehensive, especially with regard to journals published outside the U. S. and in languages other than English, it is broad enough to be informative and to illuminate the points under consideration here.

Results:

The Broad Visibility of Sociology Journals

Table 1 reports several measures of the visibility of 120 sociology journals. The proposed measure h, calculated over the period 2000-2009, is provided along with the standard JCR Impact factor and the relatively new 5-year impact factor. The table is ordered by the journal's score on the h statistic measured over the period 2000-2009. I also include a measure of h based on the most recent five years of exposure. The JCR impact factor and 5-year impact factor are also provided for the purposes of comparison. Two other statistics, the 5-year and 10-year g statistics, are also listed. This alternative measure is discussed in more detail below.

What we can learn from the new measure, h? I submit that this measure better reflects the reception of papers published in these journals. The standard impact factor understates the visibility of research published in sociology journals. Impact scores exceed 2.0 for only 9 of the 106 journals where this measure was available, indicating that, even in the top journals, the average paper can only expect a small number of citations one year after publication. In contrast, the h statistic reveals that sociology journals are a robust enterprise with many papers achieving wide visibility.

Since 2000, the American Sociological Review has published 78 papers with cumulative citation totals of 78 or more. H statistics over 70 were also found for

[5] The International Review of Sociology has been published since 1893, two years before the American Journal of Sociology.

American Journal of Sociology, the Journal of Marriage and the Family, and the Annual Review of Sociology. This measure of cumulative citations reveals that these journals have featured many articles that have attained a considerable degree of recognition.

The h measure is also informative for the journals that are not at the top of the journal citation list. While it is hard to get excited about an impact score of 1.0, or a five year impact score of 1.5, most journals on the list have published a number of articles that have attained recognition. Of the 120 journals on the list, 79 have an h of 20 or more, indicating that they have published at least 20 papers cited 20 times or more during the period since 2000. More than 100 (104) of the sociology journals have an h of 10 or more. Most of the exceptions are not published in the United States and do not publish in the English language. [6]

The data presented in Table 1 thus support the conclusion that a broad set of sociology journals publish research with considerable impact and visibility. The breadth and depth of these contributions is more easily seen when a ten year time frame is employed, when the top papers is the focus of the analysis, and when the broader Google Scholar data base is utilized. In each of these respects, the present analysis presents a more comprehensive and informative assessment of sociology journals than does the standard ISI-Web of Knowledge Journal Impact Factor.

Top Cited Papers Since 2000

Table 1 also reports the number of citations garnered by the top-cited paper in each journal since 2000. Five of these journals published a total of six papers that were each cited more than 1,000 times, a remarkable degree of visibility. Fully 70 of the journals included a paper cited 100 times or more, and in 93 of the119 journals covered, the top paper was cited at least 50 times during the last decade.

The ranking of the journal does not set a firm limit on the visibility of papers. The correlation between the top-cited paper and the journal's impact score is a rather modest .52, computed across 106 journals where both measure are available, which indicates that roughly one quarter of the variance in the visibility of the top paper is associated with the journal's rank.

One of the virtues of PoP is that it quickly brings prominent papers into focus. ` Table 2 lists eleven papers cited at least 700 times since 2000 in the Google Scholar data

[6] The DuBois Review has only been published since 2004; it has achieved an h score of 11 over a six year period.

in the covered journals.[7,8] While a number of the most-cited papers appeared in the top-ranked journals, there are a number of exceptions to this rule. For example,
two of the papers on this list were published in Theory and Society, a well-regarded outlet in the area of social theory. Theory and Society ranks 60th among sociology journals based on its impact factor score (it moves up to rank 42 when the 5-year impact score is used as the metric). Thus, a wide range of journals besides ASR and AJS can produce highly visible studies and essays.

The list of top-cited papers includes three review essays published in the Annual Review of Sociology. Other bibliometric studies have found that review essays often appear in lists of top-cited papers (Seglen, 1997; Moed and Van Leeuwen, 1995).

Substantively, these top cited papers cover social networks, neighborhood effects, stratification processes, divorce, web surveys, social movements, historical sociology, and several aspects of social theory. Quite a broad range.

Several of these papers were written by non-sociologists.[9] I decided to leave these on the list because the focus is on the most visible papers in sociology and related journals, rather than the most visible papers published by sociologists. The fact that these papers are highly cited suggests that the boundaries between disciplines are far more porous than some analysts suggest (Jacobs and Frickel, 2009).

Comparing Journal Rankings

As we have seen thus far, the h-based method of journal ranking is valuable because it helps to illuminate the scope of contributions in sociology journals more fully

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[7] An entry to "Reflexive Modernization" by Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash in the journal Theory, Culture & Society garnered 783 citations. This reference, however, is to a special issue of the journal rather than a single article.

[8] An earlier draft of this paper cited an essay by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis entitled "Schooling in Capitalist America Revisited" as the most frequently cited paper. Unfortunately, the references to this article, published in the journal Sociology of Education, appear to be conflated with references to the with the same title published by these authors a quarter of a century earlier.

[9] Ronald Inglehart is a political scientist by training but his research on "post-materialist" values is quite prominent in sociology. Gautam Ahuja is a management professor; his highly cited paper seeks to build on the research by Ronald Burt, a noted sociologist of networks. Perhaps the paper that "sticks out" the most is the paper by Filmer and Pritchett on wealth effects in the journal Demography. This paper examines the impact of household wealth on schooling in India. While this topic is in principle of interest to sociologists, this article has been of greater interest to scholars in other fields. Based on the ISI classification of the citing journals, Filmer and Pritchett paper is most popular in public health, tropical medicine, economics and demography, with only 2 percent of the citations appearing in sociology journals.

than does the standard metric. The new software, PoP, is also substantively helpful in the way it lists the most cited papers during a given time frame. The new index would thus be valuable even if the ranking of journals remained unchanged. Nonetheless, it is interesting and important to explore whether this new metric alters the relative position of sociology journals. Let us begin with a review of the traditional JCR impact factor, followed by the changes wrought by its' companion, the five-year impact score. Finally, we will consider how the h-based measure alters this picture.

When perusing the tradition JCR for the field of sociology, the American Sociological Review and the American Journal of Sociology have vied for the top ranking. For 2008, the data examined here, ASR edged out AJS. However, the list provided in Table 1 expands the set of journals considered and consequently the well-established hierarchy is dislodged. The journal The Future of Children garners the top position, ahead of ASR and AJS, while Administrative Science Quarterly edges out AJS for the number 3 slot.

The tremendous visibility of the Future of Children no doubt reflects considerable interest in the subject matter addressed by this journal, along with the prominence of the editors and authors. It also may reflect the fact that FOC publishes two issues per year which are devoted to particular topics. Thus, there may be more year-to-year fluctuation in the citations for this journal than for journals which publish more articles on a wider subject area.

The visibility of ASQ reflects the tremendous growth in business schools in recent years and the accompanying increase in scholarship on organizational issues. If we switch metrics to the five-year impact score, ASQ surpasses both ASR and AJS in impact. FOC does well on the five-year impact score, but no longer leads the pack. It drops to a virtual tie for sixth place with Demography.

The Annual Review of Sociology has also become a highly cited journal in recent years. It ranks fourth in the five-year impact score, just after ASQ, ASR and AJS. In many fields, review journals are highly cited (Moed, 2005), and the Annual Review of Sociology is establishing itself as example of this pattern.

Another highly-cited journal is the Journal of Health and Social Behavior. This ranks fifth based on the five-year impact score; it also ranks third among public health journals, where it is listed in the JCR classification. The prominence of this journal no doubt relates to the considerable intellectual vitality and research funding in research related to health and medicine. Other journals in the top 10 include Demography, Social Networks, Journal of Marriage and the Family, and Sociology of Education.

In my view, the five year impact score begins to capture the time frame in which citations actually transpire in sociology, and thus is a preferred measure. It should be noted, however, that the longer the time frame, the less it reflects the efforts of the current editor. All journal rankings look back through a rear-view mirror at the impact of articles published some time ago. As we move toward longer and more realistic time

frames for assessing journals, the relevance of these measures to the current editorship declines.

The five-year impact scores indicate that the papers in the top sociology journals are cited 4-6 times. Keep in mind that the average exposure for these papers is really 2.5 years. While these numbers are larger than the traditional impact scores, they still do not fully reflect the real visibility of the scholarship in sociology journals.

The overall rankings do not change radically with the introduction of the five-year impact factor. The correlation between the traditional impact factor and the five-year impact factor computer across 101 journals for which these two measures are available is quite strong (r=.91). Thus, the overall hierarchy is not radically altered with the move to the five-year impact factor.

Another way to view this association recognizes that the five-year factor score includes the two year score. It may be useful to examine the relationship between the first two years of citation with the subsequent three years of citations. This involves subtracting the impact score from the five-year impact score and correlating the former with the remainder. This association is substantially weaker (r=.56).

How does the new measure, h, affect the journal rankings? The correlation between the 5-year JCR score and the 10 year Google-Scholar-based h statistic is strong (r=.87). Nonetheless, the rank-ordered position of individual journals can and does change.

ASR and AJS lead other sociology journals over the last decade in terms of the number of highly cited papers. While ASR has a slight lead, it should be noted that AJS publishes fewer papers and thus has produced high-visibility papers at a higher rate than has ASR. The Journal of Marriage and the Family, Administrative Science Quarterly, and Demography round out the top five spots.

The Annual Review of Sociology falls from rank four to rank seven using the 10-year h statistic. Future of Children, which publishes only two issues per year, drops out of the top ten, as does Social Networks. Population and Development Review and the British Journal Sociology join the top 10. While many sociologists would maintain that it should not be included on this list, The Annals of Tourism Research comes in at rank six. It is included here because it is on the Web of Knowledge list of sociology journals. With the exception of this journal, I would submit that the list of top-ranked journals based on the h statistic over a ten-year period has substantial face validity for top ten, the top twenty and perhaps even the top thirty journals. After a certain point, small differences can begin to have a considerable impact on a journal's ranking.

Gender & Society

An earlier paper noted that articles published in the journal Gender & Society (G&S) were cited roughly twice as many times in Google Scholar than they were in the ISI-Web of Knowledge (identifying reference withheld). I suggested that gender articles were particularly likely to be cited in books, and thus the incremental value of Google Scholar would be greater for G&S than for journals in other fields. The present analysis indicates that G&S ranks 21st in the new 10-year rankings based on h.

Does this finding undercut the results of the previous research? There is some overlap as well as some divergence. The ranking of G&S does improve relative to the JCR impact factor but not compared with the 5-year impact factor: G&S ranks 24th with the JCR impact factor and 20th with the five-year impact factor. This more comprehensive analysis suggests that most leading sociology journals are frequently cited in books as well as journal articles, and thus the citation boost conferred by Google Scholar is quite widespread. The main reason G&S fared better in the earlier analysis was that the earlier analysis pertained to a different time frame. Papers published in G&S in late 1980s and early 1990s were particularly highly cited. The earlier analysis reflected the prevalence of these high-impact articles. If the present analysis were repeated for the period 1987-2009, that is, the years since G&S was first published, G&S it would move up six ranks when ranked on the h statistic (passing the British Journal of Sociology, Economy and Society, Social Indicators Research, Social Networks, Sociologia Ruralis, and Work, Employment and Society). While G&S has done well in recent years, it has featured fewer of these high-impact papers. Further analysis would be required to pin-point how much citations appearing in books contribute to the Google Scholar-based rankings.

Social Forces

Social Forces is a generalist journal published at the University of North Carolina on behalf of the Southern Sociological Society. In existence since 1922, it has long been viewed as of one of the most prominent generalist journals in the field. Tenure candidates fortunate enough to publish in ASR, AJS and Social Forces are seen as having won the "triple crown" and stand an excellent chance of promotion.

In the rankings presented here, Social Forces lags considerably behind ASR and AJS not just on the new measure, h, but across a variety of measures. For example, Social Forces ranks 23rd on this list with both the h index and on the traditional impact factor and 18th f we rely on the five-year impact factor.[10]

[10] Francois Nielsen, who currently serves as editor of Social Forces, reports that Social Forces ranks higher on the eigenfactor metric. This measure weights citations by 'quality,' ie the ranking of the citing journal. This type of adjustment would be difficult to

Can we gain any insight into the relative position of Social Forces by examining trends over time. Figure 1 presents data on the comparative position of four journals for each of the last four decades. The h index for each journal is expressed as a percentage of the average h for ASR and AJS combined. This provides a useful benchmark which controls for the state of scholarship at the time and the length of time available for citation. Figure 1 reveals that Demography, the Journal of Health and Social Behavior, and the Annual Review of Sociology have all made gains relative to ASR and AJS since the 1970s. Social Forces in contrast, made gains as well during the 1980s and 1990s, but has slipped back in the last decade. However, it should be noted that, even after the recent decline, the gap between Social Forces and these two leading journals was narrower in the last decade than it was in the 1970s.

A plausible reading of the trend data presented in Figure 1, then, is that Social Forces has not so much fallen behind, but rather that other journals have made more progress in forging ahead relative to ASR and AJS. It may be that the relatively short research reports published in Social Forces tend to generate fewer of the 'home run' articles captured by the h index. This trend may also reflect a pattern of increasing segmentation in the discipline, with increasing recognition going to the specialties and less focus going to the generalist journals.

The generalist issue was pursued further by an investigation of five other generalist journals: Sociological Focus, Sociological Forum, Sociological Perspectives, and Sociological Spectrum. The question explored was whether these journals gained ground or lost ground, relative to ASR and AJS, since the 1970s. Since Sociological Forum and Sociological Spectrum date to the 1980s, the analysis for these journals spans their starting date until the present. The results (not shown) indicate that each of these journals has narrowed the gap vis-à-vis ASR and AJS over the last few decades. For example, the ratio of h for Sociological Perspectives (relative to the average for ASR and AJS) rose from .19 during the 1980s to .30 during the 2000s. Thus, the relative decline of Social Forces during the last decade does not appear to be part of a broader trend afflicting generalist journals.

Foreign Journals

Journals published outside the U. S. are clearly at a disadvantage in terms of visibility. Closer inspection reveals that publication in languages other than English further reduces the visibility of journals. This pattern no doubt reflects in part the concentration of sociologists in the U. S. and other English speaking countries, and the tendency for English-speaking sociologists to principally read English-language

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implement with Google Scholar, since one would have to weight not just journals but citations appearing in books and other sources as well.

journals and books. It may also result from a tendency for Google Scholar and especially the ISI Web of Knowledge to more comprehensively cover English-language sources.

Table 3 summarizes information about the journal visibility by country. The list analyzes here includes 73 journals published in the U. S.; the U. K. is a distant second with 22 sociology journals, followed by Germany (4), the Netherlands (4), France (3) and Canada (2). A valuable extension of this research would collect a more compete list of journals from countries not represented here, including journals published in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

English is doubtless the most common language for sociology publications. The list includes 102 journals published in English. Eight journals are designated "multi-language," but in fact several of these mostly feature English-language articles, including the International Sociological Review (published in Italy), Sociological Theory and Methods (published in Japan), and the Archives Europeene de Sociologie (published in France).

While several long-standing and well-established British journals, including the British Journal of Sociology and Sociology are among the most highly cited journals, the average visibility is severely limited for most journals published outside the U.S. and particularly for non-Enlgish language journals. The twenty most visible journals (ranked by their Web of Knowledge 5-Year Impact Factor) are all published in the U. S. or the U. K., as are 62 of the 65 most visible. Two journals published in English in the Netherlands, Sociologia Ruralis and Agriculture and Human Values, are ranked 23rd and 42nd on the Web of Knowledge Five-Year Impact Factor. The highest ranked non-English is the German-language Kolner Zeitschrift fur Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, which ranks 60th. For foreign language journals, both the Impact Factor and the Five-Year Impact Score are nearly all below 1.0, and most have 10-year h statistics of less than 10.

Other Measures and Other Journal Ranking Considerations

The summary measure employed here, h, has many attractive features and is widely used, but there are inevitably limitations. One prominent consideration is that h ignores the most highly influential papers above the cutoff value. For example, two journals could both have an h score of 30, but the top-cited publication for one journal could be double that of the other journal. The h measure ignores variability in the upper tail of the citation distribution. An alternative measure, g, takes this into account. [11]

[11] The g-index is the (unique) largest number such that the top g articles received (together) at least g^2 citations.
(Egghe, 2006).

As a practical matter, the difference between h and g is not that large. The correlation of these two measures, h and g, for the 120 sociology journals considered here, is quite close (r=.98). I suspect that g would be more volatile from year to year because it is influenced by the citations to a handful of very highly-cited papers. [12]Consequently, h seems slightly preferable to g as a measure of a journal's visibility.

Another consideration affecting this analysis is the issue of inaccurate or variant citations. Google Scholar, along with other citation data bases, includes variations of references to the same item. For example, Inglehart and Baker's article in the American Sociological Review was cited in at least four different ways. I endeavored to include all variant citations for the top cited article, but was unable to attempt this type of correction for every paper published in every journal. Variant citations have two effects on the statistics reported in PoP.

The main impact of this problem is that the number of papers per journal reported in PoP is highly inflated. For a number of the journals examined here, PoP reports 1,000 or more articles; this far exceeds the actual number of articles published since 2000. As a result, the POP statistic on citations per paper measure is substantially understated.

The impact on the h statistic for each journal is likely to be far more limited.

I have not endeavored to try to correct for the problem of variant citations. It would be difficult to do so, given the large number of articles and journals under consideration. There is good reason to expect these errors to be randomly distributed. Consequently, they are unlikely to affect the rankings of the journals based on its h score. In terms of the absolute scores, random errors would most likely result in downward biases in h but there may be cases in which the variant listing itself is sufficiently high to count as an additional high-impact paper, thus inflating h.

Another point that should be noted is that citations counts reflect exposure time. Most of the top-cited papers date from the early 2000s; recent papers simply have not had sufficient time to be highly cited. In terms of the comparison between journals, this is not a limitation for the current analysis, since all of the journals are examined during the same time frame. [13] It may be possible to extrapolate citation counts for individual articles, but I have chosen not to do so for the purpose of identifying the most-cited papers. There is considerable variation from paper to paper in terms of its citation trajectory, and thus it seems more grounded to simply report the observed cumulative citation counts.

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[12] In terms of data errors, h is a bit less vulnerable to incorrect and variant citations. While each such error would affect g, h only depends on the accuracy of citation counts of papers close to the value of h. In other words, errors in the citation counts of very highly-cited and very rarely-cited papers will not affect the measured value of h.

[13] It should also be noted that the statistics reported here also do not adjust for the number of articles published by each journal.

Conclusion

Most sociology journal examined here publish a considerable number of papers that achieve a substantial degree of scholarly visibility. The journal rankings presented here are based on the h index and draw from the Google-Scholar data base. The measures capture more citations than the traditional journal impact factor because of the longer time frame and because Google Scholar captures a broader range of citations both from journals and from other sources. The PoP software is informative because it identifies specific, highly cited papers, and thus serves as a bibliographic tool and not just a journal ranking metric. While the position of individual journals shifts somewhat with the new measure, by and large a steep hierarchy of journals remains. It is interesting, however, to note that the top cited paper in a journal is not unduly constrained by the journal's rank: even modestly ranked journals often publish several highly visible papers. While certain aspects of journal rankings remain controversial, in my view the practice of journal rankings is likely to remain with us, and consequently improved and more comprehensive rankings are to be preferred to more limited ones.

Appendix: Citation Counts and Tenure Decisions

Promotion and tenure committees face the difficult task of assessing the credentials of young teachers and scholars. The stakes are high: tenured faculty positions offer job security and unparalleled intellectual freedom. A negative vote, on the other hand, poses the risk of a tarnished professional reputation and uncertain employment prospects. Consequently, it is natural that review committees will seek out the most objective and defensible criteria available to supplement the written evaluations of professional colleagues.

One basic problem with the use of citation measures at the tenure stage is timing: it takes a number of years for the impact of scholarship to be fully felt. In the short term, low citation scores may represent false negatives: quality scholarship that simply has not had sufficient time to become recognized. This is particularly true of articles and books that are less than a year or two old when the candidate is being evaluated.

How accurate are short-term citation measures in terms of predicting the long-term impact of journal articles? I explored this question by investigating the impact of ASR papers published in 1988 and 1989. I compiled the cumulative citation scores through 1990, and then five and twenty years after the initial publication.

For the 92 papers included in this analysis, the impact factor and the five-year impact factor correlate .84 at the level of individual papers. (See Appendix Table 1.) The predictive power of the early impact factor, however, declines over time, with the impact factor predicting the cumulative citations over a twenty-year period to a modest degree (r=.52). The five-year impact score does a better job predicting cumulative citations over a 20-year period (r=.72).

These correlations are inflated by the fact that the later scores include the earlier measure. I computed the associations a second time to reflect only the relationship between early and subsequent citations. The findings indicate an even weaker set of relationships. Citations through year 2 predict citations in years 3-5 only modestly (r=.56) and the predictive power declines somewhat for years 3-20 (r=.44). The five-year score does a bit better in predicting citation in years 6-20 (r=.67).

The thrust of these findings point to the highly uncertain predictive power of early citations. While early citations are statistically associated with subsequent visibility and impact, there is a high degree of variability in this relationship. I would not recommend making high-stakes judgments such as tenure decisions based on citation data in fields such as sociology since their predictive power regarding the subsequent visibility of the articles in question has only a modest predictive power.

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Table 1: see last pages of this document.

Table 2. Articles Published in Sociology Journals Since 2000 with 700+ Cumulative Citations in Google Scholar

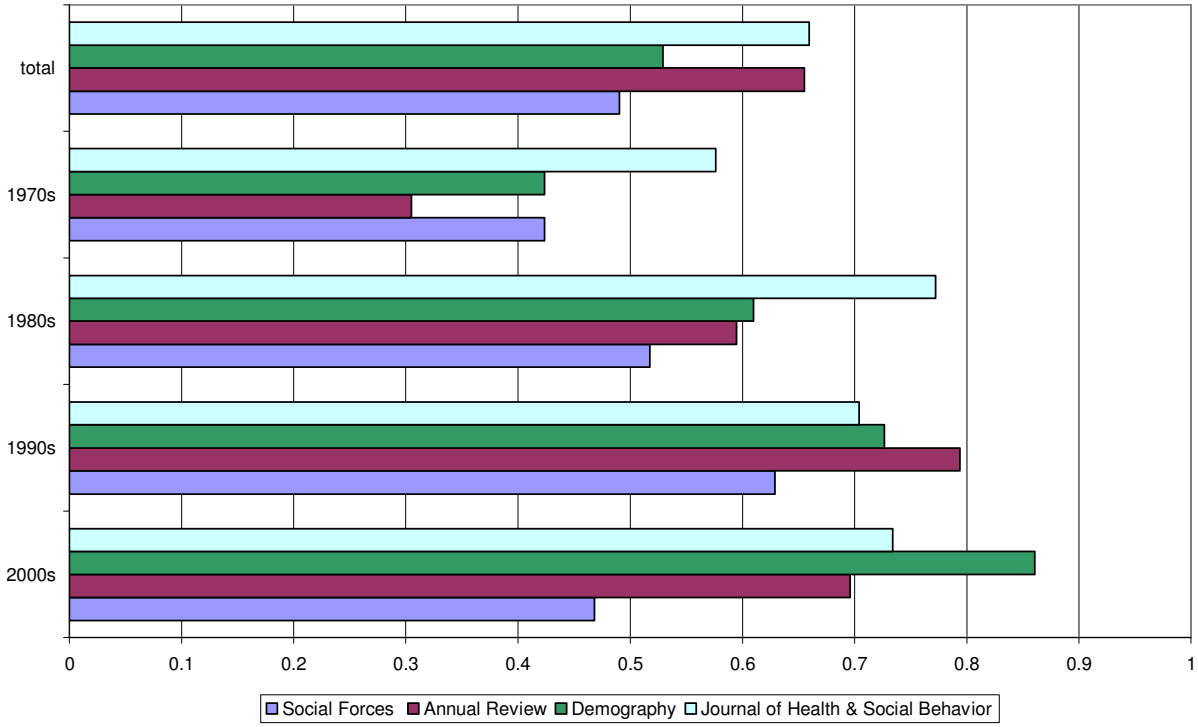
Cumulative Citation Count	Article Reference
1424	McPherson, Miller and Lynn Smith-Lovin. 2001. "Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks." Annual Review of Sociology.
1165	Ahuja, Gautam. 2000. "Collaboration networks, structural holes, and innovation: A Longitudinal Study." Administrative Science Quarterly.
1161	Benford, Robert. D. and David. A. Snow. 2000. "Framing processes and Social movements: An overview and assessment." Annual Review of Sociology 26:611-639.
1143	Filmer, Deon and Lant. H. Pritchett. 2001. "Estimating wealth effects without expenditure data – or tears." Demography 38(1):115-132.
1114	Inglehart, Ronald. and Wayne. E. Baker. 2000 "Modernization, cultural change, and the persistence of traditional values." American Sociological Review 65(1):19-51.
878	Sampson, Robert J., Jeffrey D. Morenoff and T. Gagnon. 2002 "Assessing neighborhood effects." Annual Review of Sociology 28(443-478.
794	Couper, Mick P. 2000. "Web surveys: A review of issues and approaches." Public Opinion Quarterly. 64:464-494.
789	Amato, Paul R. 2000. "The consequences of divorce for adults and children." Journal of Marriage and the Family 62(4):1269-1287.
741	Mahoney, James. 2001. "Path dependence in historical sociology." Theory and Society 29(4): 507-548.
713	Link, Bruce and J. C. Phelan. 2001. "Conceptualizing stigma." Annual Review of Sociology 27:363-385.
705	Brubaker, Rogers. 2000. "Beyond identity." Theory and Society 29(1):1-47.

Table 3. Sociology Journals by Country and Language

Country	
U. S.	73
U. K.	22
Germany	4
Netherlands	4
France	3
Canada	2
Other	12
Total	120

Language	
English	102
Multi-language	8
German	3
French	3
Other	4
Total	120

Figure 1. H For Selected Journals Compared as a Fraction of ASR/AJS Average, by Decade since 1970s



Appendix Table 1.

Correlation of Early Citations with Subsequent Citations

	Impact Factor	Five-Year Impact Factor
Five-Year Impact Factor	r=.84	
20-Year Cumulative Citations	r=.52	r=.72
Citations Years 3-5	r=.56	
Citations Years 3-20	r=.44	
Citations Years 6-20	r=.40	r=.67

Data based on author's analysis of citations 92 to articles published in the American Sociological Review in 1988 and 1989, drawing from the ISI Web of Knowledge data base

Table 1. Sociology Journal Rankings: Currently Sorted by h Metric Calculated for Period 2000-2009

Name of Journal	Google Scholar 10 year h	Google Scholar 5 year h	Google Scholar 10 year g	Google Scholar Most Cited Article	ISI Web of Knowledge Impact Factor	ISI Web of Knowledge 5-Year Impact Factor	Country	Language
American Sociological Review	78	36	124	1036	3.762	5.285	US	English
American Journal of Sociology	75	34	122	573	2.808	5.046	US	English
Journal of Marriage and the Family	73	33	120	758	1.639	2.848	US	English
Administrative Science Quarterly	71	27	127	1114	2.853	6.313	US	English
Demography	65	28	99	1094	2.321	3.732	US	English
Annals of Tourism Research	62	28	86	157	1.104	1.683	US	English
Criminology	57	26	81	383	2.321	3.732	US	English
Journal of Health and Social Behavior	54	18	82	259	1.836	4.536	US	English
Annual Review of Sociology	53	3	112	1320	2.273	4.954	US	English
Sociology of Education	52	19	98	3126	1.594	2.265	US	English
Population and Development Review	48	22	77	383	1.806	2.164	US	English
Sociology (UK)	48	21	68	214	1.464	1.785	UK	English
Social Networks	45	23	68	282	2.068	2.929	US	English
Sociologia Ruralis	43	13	65	196	1.41	1.925	Netherlands	English
Public Opinion Quarterly	42	24	81	758	1.972	2.606	US	English
Economy and Society	42	17	71	379	1.655	1.965	US	English
British Journal of Sociology (UK)	42	20	70	514	1.473	2.173	UK	English
Work, Employment and Society	42	18	54	141	1.105	2	US	English
Future of Children	40	25	65	304	4.371	3.735	US	English
Social Indicators Research	40	25	60	325	0.955	1.362	US	English
Gender & Society	38	18	57	351	1.387	1.989	US	English
Journal of Family Issues	38	22	54	130	1.13	1.536	US	English
Social Forces	37	16	61	303	1.247	2.08	US	English
Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion	37	15	51	143	0.907	1.538	US	English
European Sociological Review	37	22	54	122	0.816	1.345	UK	English
Social Problems	36	19	57	197	2.059	2.677	US	English
Sociology of Health and Illness	36	21	48	463	1.845	2.899	US	English
Language in Society	36	28	66	295	0.727	1.21	US	English

Theory, Culture & Society (UK)	36	21	68	754	na		UK	English
Social Psychology Quarterly	35	15	54	369	1.143	1.983	US	English
Sociological Theory	34	14	52	298	1.226	1.596	US	English
British Journal of the Sociology of Education	34	17	49	131	0.573	0.862	UK	English
Social Science Research	33	21	46	153	1.423	1.833	US	English
Law and Society Review	33	18	49	165	1.389	1.887	US	English
Global Networks (UK)	32	20	51	213	1	1.75	UK	English
Sociological Methods & Research	31	17	56	442	1.368	2.776	US	English
Theory & Society	31	13	62	711	0.727	1.294	US	English
Work & Occupations	30	15	44	190	1.69	1.866	US	English
Rural Sociology	30	12	44	183	1.2	1.353	US	English
Agriculture and Human Values	30	17	47	226	1.186	1.319	Netherlands	English
Media, Culture & Society	30	18	42	121	0.938	1.005	US	English
Journal of Leisure Research	30	13	43	114	0.7	1.344	US	English
Politics & Society	29	14	44	215	1.45	1.58	US	English
International Journal of Intercultural Relations	29	15	40	109	0.989	1.199	UK	English
Discourse & Society	29	16	42	113	0.946	1.162	US	English
Sociological Review (UK)	29	19	41	108	0.764	1.246	UK	English
Leisure Sciences	28	11	41	162	0.776	1.169	US	English
European Journal of Social Theory	28	14	44	253	na		UK	English
Human Ecology	27	15	39	108	1.253	1.721	US	English
Youth & Society	27	12	37	99	0.9	1.856	US	English
European Societies	26	16	42	173	0.875	1.114	UK	English
International Sociology	26	14	43	142	0.623	0.81	UK	English
Acta Sociological	25	13	35	122	0.957	0.873	UK	English
Society & Natural Resources	24	15	39	201	1.167	1.725	US	English
Mobilization	24	12	38	166	0.783	na	US	English
Sociological Quarterly	24	13	32	63	0.565	0.883	US	English
Sociologie du Travail (France, French)	24	9	35	139	0.231	0.339	France	French
Socio-economic Review	24	20	41	145	na		UK	English
International Review of Sociology	24	11	32	77	na		Italy	Multi-language
Poetics	23	14	32	65	0.821	1.135	US	English
Rationality and Society	23	12	39	197	0.788	0.901	US	English
Symbolic Interaction	23	9	49	409	0.438	0.576	US	English
Sociological Perspectives	23	10	29	47	0.358	0.85	US	English
Journal of Contemporary Ethnography	22	12	31	70	1.06	0.992	US	English

Ethnic and Racial Studies (UK)	22	22	34	115	0.887	1.36	UK	English
Comparative Studies in Society and History	22	7	31	158	0.484	0.459	US	English
Sociological Forum	22	11	36	295	0.423	0.577	US	English
American Journal of Economics and Sociology	22	12	30	79	0.349	0.364	US	English
Qualitative Sociology	22	11	30	80	na		US	English
Journal of Sociology (Australia)	21	13	27	55	0.791	0.879	Australia	English
Deviant Behavior	21	12	31	105	0.717	1.125	US	English
Sociology of Religion	21	3	28	69	0.68	0.851	US	English
Sociological Inquiry	21	10	27	66	0.581	1.11	US	English
Body & Society (note: problem with 5-year impact factor)	21	10	32	113	0.537	na	US	English
Contemporary Sociology	21	3	37	187	0.481	0.444	US	English
Canadian Journal of Sociology	21	9	34	140	0.382	0.577	Canada	Multi-language
Berliner Journal fur Soziologie (German Language)	21	8	31	95	0.173	0.181	Germany	German
Current Sociology	21	16	37	256	na		UK	English
Men & Masculinities	20	11	29	82	0.393	na	US	English
Sociology of Sport Journal	19	11	27	71	0.674	0.813	US	English
Journal of Sport & Social Issues	19	10	26	75	0.643	0.752	US	English
Sociological Research Online	19	11	28	64	0.376	0.44	US	English
Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology	19	8	25	66	0.368	0.476	Canada	Multi-language
Community, Work & Family	19	10	26	56	na		UK	English
Teaching Sociology	17	7	20	43	0.745	0.718	US	English
International Journal of Comparative Sociology	17	11	27	77	na		UK	English
Journal of Law and Society	16	9	25	119	0.774	0.814	US	English
Review of Religious Research	16	10	24	84	0.446	0.703	US	English
Arned Forces & Society	16	11	22	50	0.417	0.561	US	English
Sociological Spectrum	16	9	21	37	0.317	0.514	US	English
City & Community	16	11	27	189	na		US	English
Critical Sociology	15	10	21	57	na		UK	English
Journal of Mathematical Sociology	14	8	30	404	1.04	0.933	UK	English
Society	14	6	25	136	0.19	0.198	UK	English
Contexts	14	8	20	44	na		US	English
Zeitschrift fur Soziologie	12	4	19	70	0.608	0.784	Germany	Multi-language
Society & Animals (Netherlands)	12	6	19	47	0.293	0.765	Netherlands	English
Social Compass (Belgium, Multi-Language)	12	9	14	24	0.206	0.277	Belgium	Multi-language

American Sociologist	12	8	16	46		na		US	English
Du Bois Review	11	8	18	66		na		US	English
Race & Class (UK)	10	2	17	64	0.8		0.835	UK	English
Human Studies (Netherlands)	10	6	14	37	0.395		0.376	Netherlands	English
International Journal of the Sociology of Law	10	6	15	41	0.28		0.329	US	English
Journal of Historical Sociology	10	4	12	22	0.213		0.289	US	English
Journal of the History of Sexuality	9	5	14	34	0.062		0.393	US	English
Contributions to Indian Sociology	9	4	12	17	0.045		0.338	India	English
Kolner Zeitschrift fur Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie	6	3	12	40	1.188		0.867	Germany	German
Soziale Welt (German)	6	3	9	20	0.225		0.143	Germany	German
Sociologia (Slovakia, Sloevenian Language)	5	4	8	25	0.175		0.151	Slovakia	Slovenian
Chinese Sociology and Anthropology (English)	3	2	3	4	0.229		0.149	China	English
Drustvena Istrazivanja (Croatia, Multi-Language)	3	2	4	6	0.196		0.245	Croatia	Multi-language
Polish Sociological Review	3	6	4	16	0.118	na		Poland	English
Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	2	2	3	8			na	US	English
Revue Francais du Sociologie	2	0	2	3	0.509		0.421	France	French
Deviance et Societe	2	0	3	7	0.22	na		Switzerland	French
Sotsiologicheskie Issledovaniya (Russian, Russian)	2	1	2	2	0.152		0.136	Russia	Russian
Sociological Theory and Methods (Japan, Multi-Language)	2	1	2	2	0.069		0.029	Japan	Multi-language
Archives Europeene de Sociologie (France, Multi-Language)	1	1	1	1	0.2		0.382	France	Multi-language
Sociologisk Forskning (Swedish)	1	1	2	4	0.028		0.042	Sweden	Swedish
Sociologogicky Casopis Czech Sociological Review	0	1	0	2	0.206		0.277	Czech Rep.	Czech