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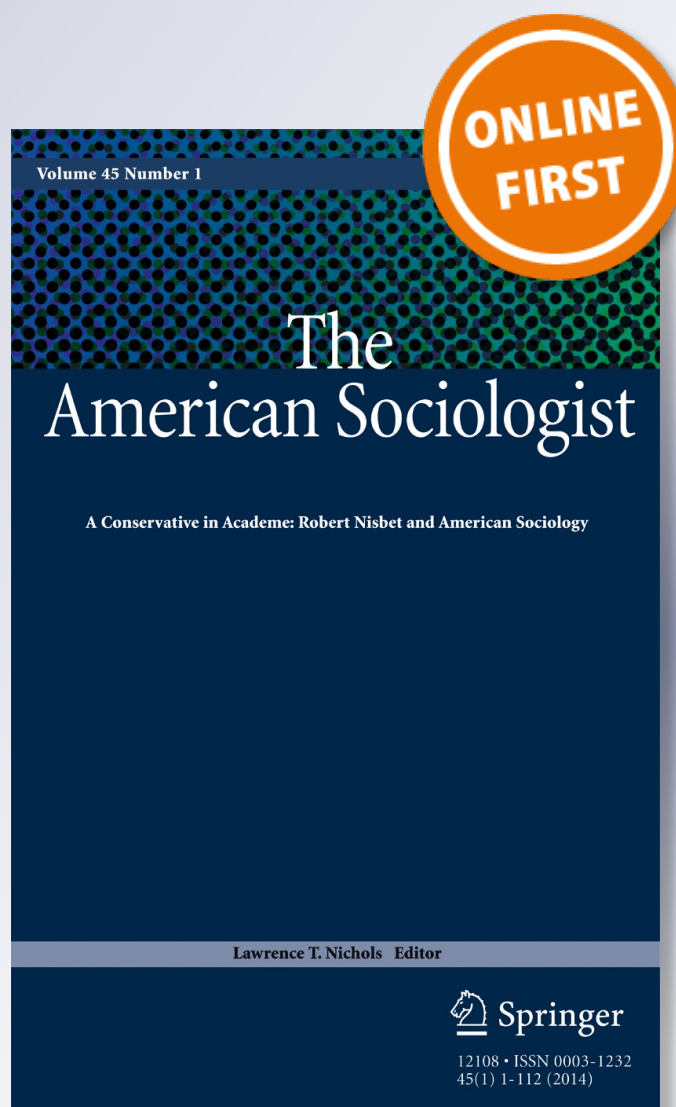
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The Regional Journal in Sociology: Recent Trends and Observations

Jessica Schultz · James R. Elliott · Robert M. O'Brien

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Abstract We investigate the historical trajectories of several sociological journals published by regional associations, focusing our attention on one of the first regional journals published by the Pacific Sociological Association, *Sociological Perspectives*. We begin with a discussion of the journal's origins and look at its professional and geographical development over time. Through a comparative-historical analysis of author affiliations of articles published in regional journals, we find geographic ties are important in shaping the early content of regional journals. However, as time passes, regional ties are stretched to include work from a broadening spectrum of regions and nations. So, while regional sociological journals do appear to maintain their original geographical connections, they also tend to expand their relative geographical influence over time.

Keywords Sociological journals · Professional associations · Regional affiliation

Introduction

In his iconic work on the small world problem, Stanley Milgram and graduate student Jeffrey Travers uncovered two fundamental features of social networks that connect otherwise disparate members of the same society: occupational affiliation and geographic location (Travers and Milgram 1969). It turns out that knowing what individuals do for a living and where they do it offers important clues about the larger social structures in which they are embedded. This discovery helped sociologists better understand how social networks operate and has since stimulated research in a wide range of fields, from history (Wetherell 1998) to physics (Watts 2004) to computer science (Kleinberg 2002). So, it is perhaps unsurprising that these two dimensions of social networks also offer useful clues for thinking about regional associations and the journals they edit and publish. After all, what is a regional association if not a

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crosscurrent of professional and geographic affiliation, and what is a regional journal if not a deliberate product of this intersection?

In considering this dynamic, it might be tempting to contrast regional journals – those operated and supported by regional associations – to flagship journals such as the *American Sociological Review* (ASR) and *American Journal of Sociology* (AJS). But, even these journals emerged from unintended intersections of occupation and geography. AJS, for example, was founded in 1895 by the sociology department at the University of Chicago, with Albion W. Small (the department head) serving as the journal's first editor (Shanas 1945). ASR was then founded 41 years later, partly in response to Chicago's dominance with AJS (Lengermann 1979) and partly in response to growing professional networks on the east coast. For ASR, annual meetings of the American Sociological Society furnished geographical proximity. Although these geographic imprints may have disappeared from Sociology's top journals over time, they remain alive and well in the form of the discipline's regional journals, which now publish significantly more peer-reviewed research than the Big Two.

In this paper we take a closer look at regional journals of sociology, paying particular attention to one of its oldest incarnations, the Pacific Sociological Association's *Sociological Perspectives*, originally named *The Pacific Sociological Review*. We first review the journal's origins and investigate how it continues to mature professionally and geographically. Then we conduct a comparative-historical analysis of author affiliations for three regional journals from their inception to the present. Results confirm regional bonds play a particularly important role in producing early content for regional journals. Over time, however, these bonds stretch to include work from colleagues representing a growing number of regions and nations, changing but not eliminating age-old influences of occupational affiliation and geographic location on publication of peer-reviewed sociological work.

In the Beginning: The Association and the Journal

In 1929, the Pacific Sociological Association (PSA) founded the first regional sociological association in the United States (for a more detailed history, see Dorn 2005). Originally, the Association identified regionally with Southern California and was known as the Pacific Southwest Sociological Society, however, within 2 years it extended northward to claim the rest of California and the larger Pacific region, including British Columbia (Dorn 2005). To signal this geographic achievement and acknowledge its new membership, the Association renamed itself the Pacific Sociological Society in 1930. Then, in 1960 it changed its name to the Pacific Sociological Association (PSA), reflecting the earlier renaming of the national association from the American Sociological Society to the American Sociological Association (Dorn 2005).

According to Dorn (2007), the PSA wanted to publish proceedings of its annual meetings, including abstracts and selected papers from its inception. So an agreement was made with *Sociology and Social Research*, a journal formerly produced by the University of Southern California and this remained the Association's primary outlet until 1939, when publication shifted to a journal called *Research Studies of the State College of Washington* (Dorn 2007). There, the PSA published its annual proceedings for nearly 20 years. However, with the surging popularity of sociology and increasing participation at annual meetings, the Association recognized its need for a dedicated

publication. This desire, along with Washington State College's reticence to continue publication, led PSA members to strategize suitable alternatives, including the founding of their own full-time journal (Dorn 2007).

Following successful negotiations with the University of Oregon for institutional support, PSA members founded a new, semi-annual publication in 1958, known as the *Pacific Sociological Review*. John Foskett (University of Oregon) served as its first editor – a role he performed for twelve of the journal's first 14 years. With increased editorial autonomy and space, the new editor began advocating for changes in the PSA's publication policy. Namely, he hoped to provide publication opportunities for authors not necessarily involved with the Association's annual meetings. The Association agreed to this request with just one stipulation—papers presented at annual meetings were to be given preferential treatment over submissions judged to be of equal or lesser quality (Dorn 2005; 2007). In this way, the Association effectively relaxed its geographic hold over the journal while continuing to benefit members in the PSA region.

Owing to these developments, submissions to the journal continued to grow in quantity and quality, and the journal's national reputation strengthened, spurring even more submissions. As submissions flowed in from an expanding array of subfields and geographic regions, the PSA moved to quarterly publication in 1970, discontinuing its official preference for papers presented at annual meetings. In 1983, the Association renamed the journal *Sociological Perspectives* to signal this shift formally and better reflect its achieved status as a general sociology journal with no overt regional restrictions on content or authorship (Dorn 2007).

One aspect of the journal that has remained regionally focused, however, is its editorship and organizational oversight. After leaving the University of Oregon (with a brief interlude at the University of Washington and moving to Oregon State University and Western Washington State College during several years of John MacGregor's editorship), the journal stayed within PSA member states, moving south to San Diego State University (Aubrey Wendling), the University of California at Santa Barbara (David Gold), and Arizona State University (Bernard Barber). When the journal changed names to *Sociological Perspectives* in 1983, it returned to Oregon with John Pock of Reed College serving as editor until 1992. Then, official duties shifted back to a series of California universities, including the University of California at Riverside (Jonathan Turner); San Diego State University (Charles F. Hohm); Pitzer College in Los Angeles (Peter M. Nardi); California State University – San Marcos (Donald Barrett and Richard Serpe, who later moved to Kent State University); and finally Santa Clara University (Charles Powers and Marilyn Fernandez). In 2012, the journal returned to the University of Oregon with James Elliott and Robert O'Brien currently serving as its co-editors (Pacific Sociological Association 2012).

Throughout its editorial history, *Sociological Perspectives* has maintained regional roots, and these aren't its only geographic vestiges. For example, all PSA members continue to receive copies of the journal, which helps it retain a certain regional relevance. Additionally, those who run the PSA and thus ultimately the journal – the officers, members of the council, and members of standing committees – still are drawn overwhelmingly from within the regional confines of the Association. This regionalism also remains apparent in the journal's editorial

board. Although editors now select quality members from outside the region, the preponderance of board members still come from the PSA region. Currently, seven of the nine Deputy Editors of *Sociological Perspectives* come from within the region, as do seventeen of the twenty Advisory Editors. As the current editors, we deliberately selected people for these positions with an eye for quality, areas of expertise and geographic balance across different subregions of the Pacific Sociological Association. We also deliberately included members from our own department, given our knowledge of their work and in an effort to make the journal a focal feature of the department and University that now offers it institutional support. These factors continue to reflect and reproduce the regional character of the PSA's official journal, even as its contributors, reviewers and content continue to expand professionally and geographically.

As the current editorial team at *Sociological Perspectives*, we became curious about this tension between the regional roots and cosmopolitan nature of the journal. Specifically, we wanted to learn more about how the authorship of published articles has shifted over time to become more spatially inclusive even as those who maintain editorial and organizational control over the journal remain firmly anchored within the region. Being empirically trained, we began to pull some data together to investigate authorship trends in regional journals.

Data & Analysis

For data collection, we selected three regional journals—*Sociological Perspectives* (the official journal of The Pacific Sociological Association), *Sociological Forum* (the official journal of the Eastern Sociological Society), and *Sociological Quarterly* (the official journal of the Midwest Sociological Society). Our interest focused on one aspect of “regionalism,” the regional affiliation of authors and how, if at all, patterns of affiliation have changed over time. We first conducted this analysis for *Sociological Perspectives* (formerly *the Pacific Sociological Review*) and discussed our results in a letter from the editors (Schultz et al. 2013). We found, as expected, that as the journal aged, a declining percentage of published articles came from authors within the region and an increasing percentage came instead from other regions of the United States and from international authors. We speculated that this trend might also hold true for other regional journals.

In the present article, we examine two additional regional journals for comparative perspective using a similar methodology, based on publication data gathered from online journal archives (see JSTOR 2013a and 2013b; Wiley Online Library 2013a and 2013b; Springer Link 2013). We code authorship at the second and third year (second and third volumes) for each journal on the supposition that the first year may have an issue or two in which prominent scholars from the region were asked to contribute articles. We then examine the twelfth and thirteenth years of publication, followed by the twenty-second and twenty-third years of publication, and so on until we reach the most recent decennial pair. We label the first 2 years sampled as the “first decade,” the second 2 years sampled as the “second decade,” and so on until there are no remaining sampled decades. For each article published in these years, we code whether the lead author was affiliated with the

journal's home region (yes/no) and whether or not the lead author hailed from a foreign country (excluding Canada and Mexico).¹

Results of these analyses appear in Figs. 1 and 2. First, though, let's briefly outline the early history of authorship in the PSA's own journal. In the second and third volumes of the *Pacific Sociological Review*, the vast majority of articles came from authors with university affiliations inside the PSA's official region, with only a quarter coming from outside the region. The first volume presented the work of prominent sociologists such as Herbert Blumer, Aaron Ciccourel, Donald Cressey, Otis Dudley Duncan, Amitai Etzioni, Lewis Samuel Feuer, Rudolf Heberle, Benton Johnson, Seymour Martin Lipset, and Robert Nisbet. By the second volume, however, the journal began publishing more articles from lesser-known scholars as well as from authors located outside the region. These early volumes spanned an eclectic mix of subjects, appealing to a broad, trans-regional audience. Topics included, among others, criminology, health, employment, marriage, organizations, racial inequality, and social movements, in addition to general sociological methods and theory.

With this background now in place, we turn to Fig. 1, which displays data by decades for each regional journal under investigation. Although the historical trend-lines for these journals – *Sociological Perspectives*, *Sociological Forum*, and *Sociological Quarterly* – are not parallel, they do show consistent decreases over time in the percentage of articles published by authors from within the respective home region. This trend seems not to be a function solely of when the journal was founded. This assessment is based on the curved line representing *Sociological Forum* that begins at seventy percent regional authors during the first decade and then decreases to approximately 55% by the third decade, in the late 2000s. By this historical point *Sociological Perspectives* and *Sociological Quarterly*, which were each now in their sixth decade of operation, had 37 and 28% of their authors hailing from their home region, respectively.

Figure 2 shows the data for trends over these decades for international authors. During the first three decades, there were no authors from foreign institutions in *Sociological Perspectives*. However, that percentage has increased monotonically since and, as of now, stands at approximately 12%. This trend is similar for both *Sociological Quarterly* and *Sociological Forum*. *Sociological Quarterly* had 17% of authors from foreign institutions in the most recent decade; and, *Sociological Forum* had 11%. Thus, in terms of both trans-regional and trans-national sources of published work, all three “regional journals” have become less regional over time even as they have remained professionally rooted in their home regions.²

In order to gain a better sense of changes in the size and affiliation of regional journals over time, we also explored historical trends in the number of articles, length of articles, and publisher history for our regional journal of interest, *Sociological*

¹ Canada and Mexico fall within the official region of the Pacific Sociological Association, which probably comes as a surprise to many sociologists in these countries.

² There are also, of course, some differences in the journals' trajectories requiring a more nuanced knowledge of the individual regions and historical contexts to fully explain. For example, the Eastern Sociological Association was founded in 1930, a year after the Pacific Sociological Association. Yet, it did not begin publishing *Sociological Forum* until 1986, nearly three decades after the PSA began publishing its own journal. It could be that being centrally located geographically suppressed early institutional incentives to develop a regional journal. However, this supposition is just that. Full investigation of such contextual nuance merits attention but also falls beyond the scope of the current study.

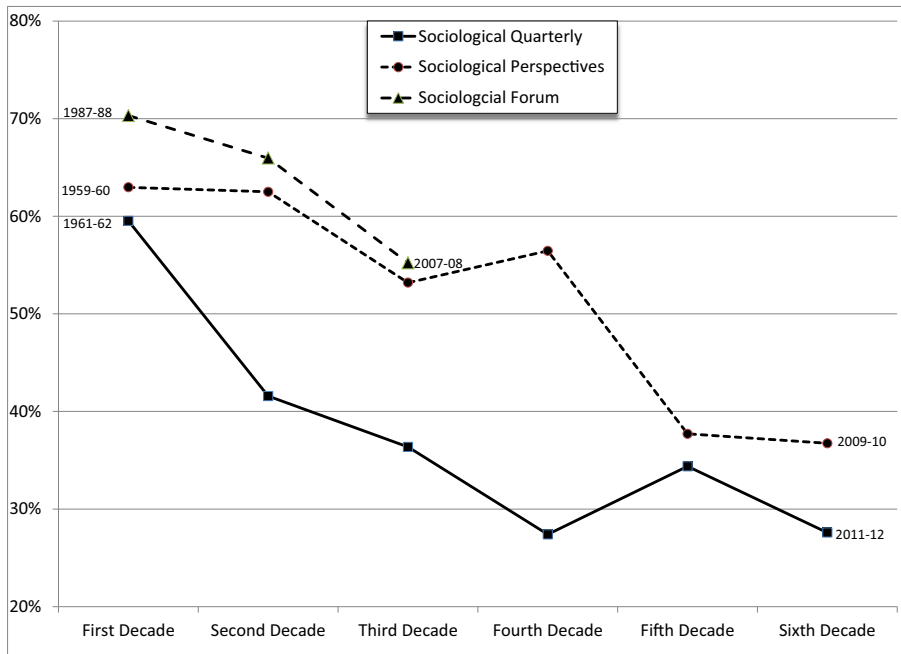


Fig. 1 Lead authorship in regional journals from their first through most recent decade (percentages represent percent of authors within the region)

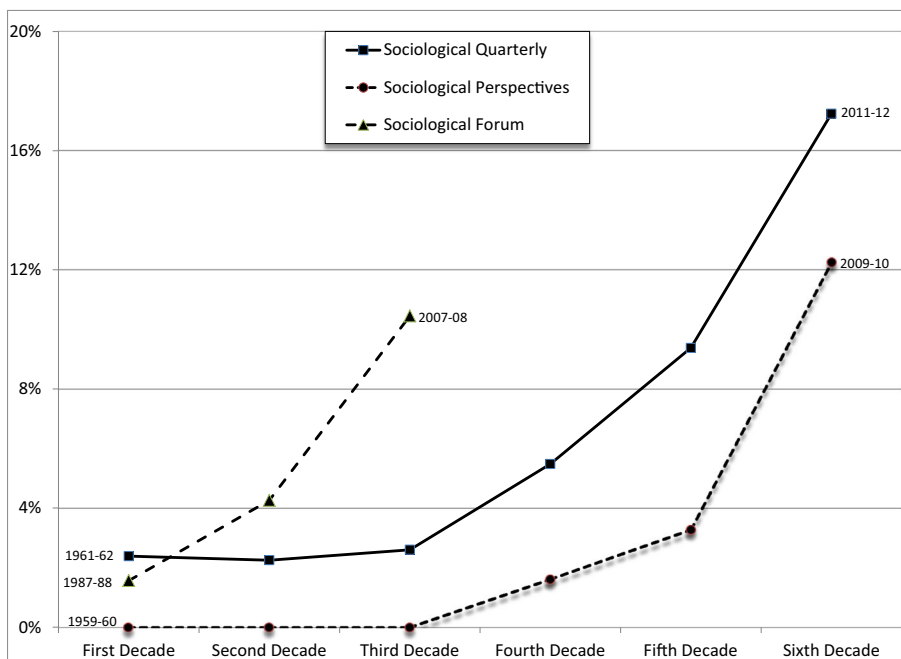


Fig. 2 International authorship in regional journals from their first through most recent decade (percentages represent percent of authors from foreign countries)*. Here foreign countries include only authors not from the United States, Canada, or Mexico (as described in text)

Perspectives. We report overall changes in the number of articles, the number of pages, and the mean page length of articles in Table 1. The first year issues were unique since they contained numerous articles and abstracts from PSA meetings, therefore, we have not included these in our analyses. The limited number of articles in the first decade was certainly affected by the fact that until 1970 there were only two issues per year (before the journal moved to the four issue standard). The number of articles increases monotonically except for the most recent period which is also the case for the number of pages in the journal. Also striking is the length of articles in the first two periods. These page lengths include only “full-fledged” articles. (It is important to note that the first two decades included articles perhaps best characterized as research notes.) From the journal’s inception until 1970, *Sociological Perspectives* was housed at the University of Oregon and published by the University of Oregon Press. During this time, the journal was supported both by the University of Oregon and increasingly by the PSA. The journal moved to its first commercial publisher (Sage) in 1971, at which time it also changed format. In 1983 the journal moved publication to the University of California Press, where it remained until moving back to Sage, its current publisher, in 2014.

Discussion & Conclusion

Over recent decades, professional pressures to publish have increased the volume of sociological research produced and submitted for publication. Since there is insufficient room for this growing body of work to fit within the discipline’s top 2 or 3 journals, much of it has found a home in quality journals historically supported by Sociology’s loose confederation of regional associations. Further, since professional norms discourage persistent publication in all but the top outlets – as it might be interpreted as a sign of limited intellectual acceptance or value – many authors of publications in one regional journal will become authors of publications in other regional journals over time. For these reasons – and because papers rejected with constructive feedback from one regional journal may be judiciously revised for submission and eventual acceptance at another – parallel historical trends at different regional journals evident in Figs. 1 and 2 might be expected. The broader sociological point is that none of the regional journals exist in isolation but rather operate as parts of a broader system that continues to expand spatially – in content, outlets, and geographic affiliation of respective authors – to

Table 1 Number of articles, pages, and length of articles for the PSA official journal across the first to most recent decade

Years analyzed	Number of articles	Number of pages	Mean length
1959–60	28	176	6
1969–70	49	365	7
1979–80	48	1,002	21
1989–90	60	1,071	18
1999–00	62	1,510	24
2009–10	50	1,190	24

accommodate accelerated, cumulative output from professionals charged with the responsibility of producing as well as consuming new sociological knowledge.

As often occurs, new technological developments have encouraged and accommodated these trends. For one thing, it has become easier and less expensive for authors outside a region (especially international authors) to submit their work over longer distances. Similarly, it is now no more expensive for libraries to subscribe to and receive journals electronically from far away sources, since pricing and delivery in the electronic age have become much more a function of publisher oligopolies than financial friction imposed by space. However, electronic submissions and distributions have also generated complementary feedback loops within the review process. As the economic and temporal costs of corresponding over long distances has declined alongside increases in professional pressure to publish additional articles, editors are pressed to extend their reviewer networks to other regions in the country and around the world. As this extension occurs it familiarizes new audiences with journals and regional associations, implicitly inviting reviewers to consider submitting their own work, which feeds an endogenous reviewer-author feedback that further expands the professional reach of regional journals.

We might note that this endogenous process would not operate if it weren't for the highly professional and cosmopolitan vision most solicited reviewers seem to hold of Sociology as a calling, as well as a vocation. Editors often and understandably lament the number of rejections they receive in the process of securing quality reviewers. Nevertheless, what continues to be even more impressive is the number of colleagues who willingly accept the invitation to review – including those outside the region and country of the journal in question – even though they remain extremely busy and experience the same pressures to publish as those who submit the manuscripts they're asked to review. Moreover, the poor or sloppy evaluation, once the review invitation has been accepted, remains the rare exception. So professional socialization – both in instilling a sense of collective duty and in expert training – remains a necessary, if insufficient and under-appreciated force behind some of the trends documented in Figs. 1 and 2.

In turn, keeping a regional journal active and relevant beyond the geography of its own association helps provide financial support for the association at a time when traditional transfers from constituent universities and other home institutions have begun to decline. Perhaps nowhere is this institutional pressure clearer than when securing resources for the editorial team of a regional journal. Traditionally such support has included some combination of release time for editors, office space, phone service, computer access, and hiring of a managing editor. We have been fortunate to receive some of this support from the University of Oregon, but it is becoming rarer, and associations are preparing for this decreased support. Fortunately, most regional journals continue to be profitable for their regional associations. Indeed, *Sociological Perspectives* now serves as the main funding source for the Pacific Sociological Association, helping to cover costs of administration, annual meetings and staff. In a recent decision to change the publisher for *Sociological Perspectives*, a change instituted in 2014, the issue of payments from the publisher was considered alongside such considerations as bundling of the journal with other prominent journals, access to the journal for readers, the potential of greater citation impact, and the reputation of the publisher.

These observations, however, do not answer the question about the proper role of a regional journal or in what sense it should remain regional. These are questions we think respective editors and publication committees should reflect on from time to time. At a recent annual meeting of the PSA, we solicited feedback from members of the publications committee, current board members, and former editors of *Sociological Perspectives*. Responses paralleled discussions we've had within our own three-person "editorial team" of two co-editors and a managing editor. The gist is largely as follows. Now that the journal is well established, quality rather than regional appeal or affiliation must remain the first priority. Thereafter, submissions of regional significance might invite a bit more favor, but only if they meet high professional standards. The same goes for special issues and article "clusters" on topics of regional interest. To be viable, their production must adhere to the peer-review process; ensure high professional quality; and leave sufficient room in the journal for articles submitted through regular peer-review channels. There also remains a collective sense that any guest editors for such efforts should include at least one member from the region. We will begin experimenting with this format ourselves next year, with a cluster of articles on human trafficking and the sex trade, guest-edited by colleagues from Nevada and Washington. Additionally, at least part of this cluster will focus on regional issues. Such efforts serve to carry on the tradition connecting production of sociological research to region through professional and geographic affiliation while attempting to maintain appropriate separation between the two.

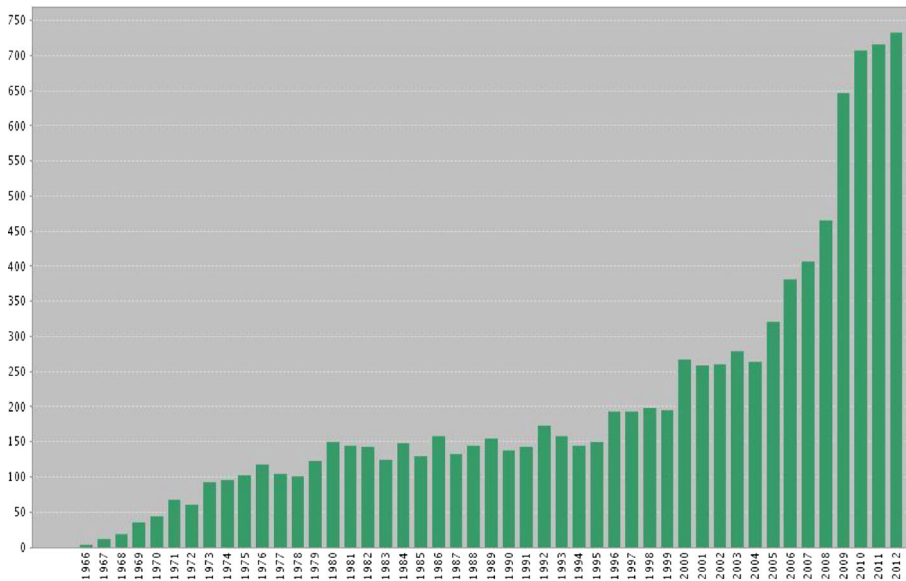
In considering this separation further, two reviewers of the present piece wondered whether the geographically expanding authorship of regional journals in general, and *Sociological Perspectives* in particular, has helped to solidify their collective reputation as second tier journals – ones professionally respected but not highly cited, relative to national flagship journals. The idea is intriguing because it challenges the assumption that journals' geographic scope and professional stature rise together. It also acknowledges important historical shifts within the PSA as an organization. Prior to the 1990s, the Association was more of an elite institution, organized largely by and for well-known research-oriented sociologists in the region. Since that time the PSA has grown largely by attracting sociologists from institutions whose main focus is on teaching rather than research. Could it be that these organizational shifts began discouraging submissions from leading regional scholars, thereby indirectly encouraging geographic expansion of authorship but also declining journal prestige over time?

To consider this possibility, we looked for additional sources of data. Commonly used Impact Factor scores produced and sold by Thomson Reuters are unavailable publicly prior to the mid-1990s. The same is true for newer EigenFactor scores produced and published online by the University of Washington. Moreover, these databases have 2-5 year moving windows for referenced work, meaning that influential articles published 6 or more years ago are discounted. To overcome these limitations we turned to the Social Science Citation Index, which provides longitudinal reporting with a more open timeframe. This database allows measurement of the total number of citations to a journal each year, from 1965 to the present. If journal prestige can be reasonably tracked with annual citation counts, and if journal prestige has indeed slipped as the PSA has become less elite and *Sociological Perspectives* has become more geographically inclusive, then we would expect a steep increase in annual citation counts prior to the 1990s, followed by a flat trajectory thereafter. The latter (given the

relatively short half-life of article citations) would reflect the declining “value-added” of more recently published articles. However, data presented in Fig. 3 do not conform to that expectation.

Prior to the mid-1990s, the annual number of peer-reviewed references to articles published in *Sociological Perspectives* hovered near or below 150, despite growing

A. *Sociological Perspectives* (and *Pacific Sociological Review*)



B. *American Sociological Review*

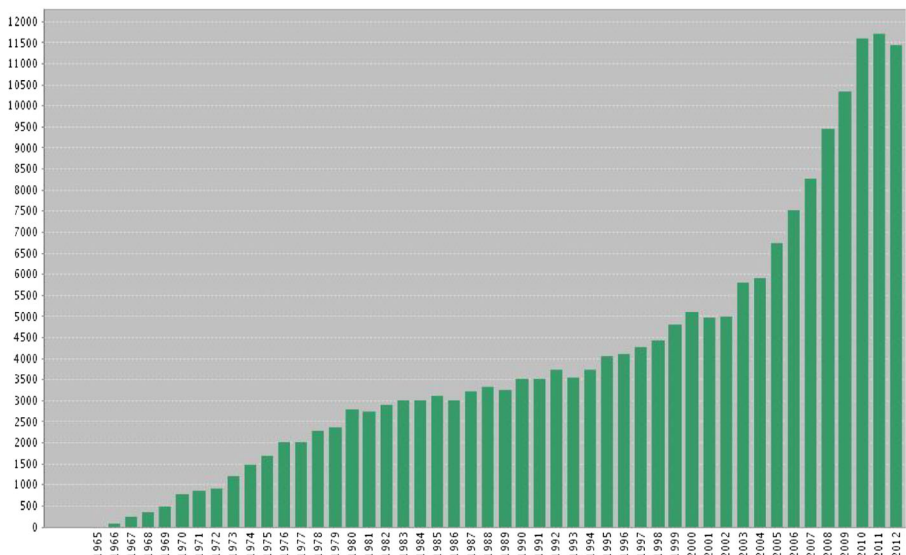


Fig. 3 Total citations to *Sociological Perspectives* and *American Sociological Review* by Year, 1965 – present. Source: Web of Science, citation reports, accessed and computed by authors, 8/29/2013

numbers of articles available for citation. Since then, annual citations counts have increased steadily, reaching roughly 260 in 2000 and 730 by 2012, the last full year of available data. Part of this upward trajectory may reflect improvements in record keeping over time, as well as increases in publications generally. To assess these underlying dynamics, we report the same data for the *American Sociological Review*, the highest prestige journal in Sociology. Results in Panel B of Fig. 3 indicate a similar pattern over time. Although cursory, the main implications seem to be twofold. First, organizational shifts in membership and geographically expanding authorship have not reduced total citations to *Sociological Perspectives* over time; in fact, the opposite has occurred. Second, in relative terms, the journal has long hovered between 4 and 6 % of annual citation counts of the discipline's flagship journal. So, professional norms that regulate cultural assessments of first and second tier journals in sociology seem to remain surprisingly constant over time despite notable shifts in the professional and geographic structures that support them.

Our concluding sense, mirroring Milgram's long ago, is that these axes of affiliation – professional and spatial – do not operate independently but continue to express a complementary relationship. This relationship can be seen in regional and national sociological associations since membership is based almost exclusively on professional affiliation. Critically, these associations bring members into spatial contact at annual meetings and into networks of committees and, we dare say, into networks of editorial teams and reviewers. They assist in the formation of strong social networks, conferring great advantages to the profession and to individual professionals connected within these networks. Of course, the nature of these intersections will continue to change over time, but they will likely remain an important part of our professional sociological world, as will other social forces, including enduring notions of journal prestige. What remains to be seen is how and whether these intersections will continue to hold true for regional associations and the journals those associations support as a new generation of open-source, geographically ambiguous journals arrive on the scene.

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