

ONLINE RESEARCH NOTE

One Hundred *ASR* Papers and Counting

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One of the principal functions of a general sociology journal is to enhance the cross-fertilization of otherwise disparate specialties. The *American Sociological Review* should serve as a counterweight against undue fragmentation and segmentation in the discipline. My principal point in this short note is that there are many connections to be found across disparate areas of the discipline if one looks for them. We need to remind ourselves of the many overlapping themes in sociological scholarship rather than to focus on the lines of demarcation that often separate us. My goal is to encourage others to look even harder and deeper than I have for topical, thematic and theoretical linkages.

TOPICAL OVERLAP

Table 1 reports the classification of the first 100 papers submitted to the *ASR* editorial office at the University of Pennsylvania starting in August 2003 in the manner routinely conducted in *ASR* reports. (To avoid the possibility of identifying any particular paper, I did not report topics that were listed only once or twice.) There is no central tendency in this distribution. Several areas—such as marriage and family, race and ethnicity, religion and education—are represented but no specialty or field predominates.¹ Just over half (59) of the submissions fall into

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¹ The comparative historical area is an especially ambiguous category because it designates a methodology as much as a topic area. To the extent that it represents a topic, it is certainly the broadest topic area, covering everything that is not exclusively focused on the present.

one of these listed categories. In 9 cases, the authors declined to designate a field for their paper; in 8 other cases, the designation is "other"; and in 24 additional cases, the designation is to a field in which it is a singleton or there is only one other paper.² We may view this wide distribution of research topics in a positive light, as representing the remarkable vitality and scope of sociological scholarship, or less optimistically, as indicative of an advanced case of balkanization. But before we rush to praise or condemn this pattern, let us look more closely at whether is a fair characterization of the papers themselves.

I reassessed this conclusion by more carefully examining the topics and themes evident in these papers. I searched for connections among these papers rather than the more routine practice of sifting submissions into mutually exclusive categories based on authors' self designations. It is easier to see patterns among manuscripts that are submitted than among those that are published simply because there are far more of the former than the latter. During 2003 *ASR* published just 38 papers. Yet, in less than 3 months, our *ASR* editorial office logged in 100 papers for review. I reviewed the titles and abstracts of the first 100 submissions without reference to the authors' self-designations. Only after completing this task did I compare my results to those obtained from the authors' own classifications. These results are displayed in Table 2.

² Appendix Table A1 uses the same approach but covers an entire year of *ASR* papers, specifically, the 469 papers receiving an editorial decision between July 16 2002 and July 15 2003. This table enables one to see how well represented the smaller specialties are in *ASR* submissions. I discuss Appendix Table 1 in more detail in the appendix below.

Table 1. The First 100 *ASR* Manuscript Submissions by Topic Area: Author's Self-Designated Specialty

	N	%
Primary Topic Area		
Marriage and Family	9	9
Race and Ethnicity	8	8
Comparative Historical	7	7
Religion	6	6
Education	5	5
Political	5	5
Stratification and Mobility	5	5
Organizations	4	4
Social Psychology	4	4
Aging	3	3
Culture	3	3
Subtotal	59	59
Other, Not Classified	17	17
Singletons or Duplicates	24	24
Total	100	100

In my classification scheme, stratification was far and away the central focus of papers submitted to *ASR* during this period, with culture, politics, and organizations also significantly represented. Just over half of the papers submitted (52 of the first 100) were concerned primarily with issues of inequality and stratification. When I included papers in which stratification was a secondary rather than a primary focus, I obtained a total of 62 submissions.

Readers will not be surprised to learn that culture is another leading area of sociological inquiry. Almost one quarter (23) of the first 100 submissions addressed culture as either a primary or secondary emphasis. Some of these papers focused on cultural institutions or products, such as religion, art, literature, and music, whereas other papers deploy cultural explanations of a wide range of social phenomena. Many of these papers presented cultural explanations of stratification outcomes. Thus there was substantial overlap in these two designations.

Political sociology rounds out our trilogy. There are 17 submissions primarily or secondarily concerned with political issues. Over three quarters (77) of the first 100 papers are centrally engaged with stratification, culture, or politics. Although the applications in these areas range far and wide, the great majority of papers submitted to *ASR* fit comfortably under these three broad rubrics.

How did I come up with so many stratification

papers when only five authors listed their specialty as stratification and mobility? It turns out that it was not too difficult. Several well-represented areas of study—including race and ethnicity, gender, and education—clearly address issues of inequality. When I reviewed the papers on each of these topics, it was evident that their principal goal is to understand the causes or consequences of inequality in its various forms. When I added up the self-designated papers in specialties that relate to stratification processes, I obtained roughly one-third of the *ASR* submissions.

This procedure left me well short of the 52 papers designated as stratification in my coding scheme. I found the remaining papers in many areas, from social psychology to crime to the family. Status and power are common topics of papers in social psychology. Surely these fit under the broad rubric of stratification. So too do criminology papers that try to examine unequal aspects of the criminal justice systems, such as hate crimes, racial profiling, and the impact of family and school factors on the likelihood of delinquent behavior. Some papers on the family focus on power dynamics, for example, in trying to understand who does housework. Several of the comparative historical papers focus on stratification as well, but more are concerned with culture and politics. It is not a stretch to say that all of these papers connect to the larger concerns about inequality that preoccupy many contemporary sociologists.

Thus, despite the large and growing number of *ASA* sections and the diverse settings in which sociological research is conducted, it is not hard to find several prominent foci of sociological inquiry. The lesson from this exercise is that there are many substantive connections between papers in apparently disparate areas. I encourage readers of *ASR* to remember that each of our specialty areas shares many links with the central axes of the discipline.

Table 2. The First 100 *ASR* Manuscript Submissions by Topic Area: Jacobs's Coding

	N	%	Topic Area Primary + Secondary (%)
Primary Topic Area			
Stratification	52	52	62
Culture	13	13	23
Politics	12	12	17
Subtotal	77		77
Organizations	9	9	
Demography and Family	5	5	
Micro	5	5	
Other	4	4	
Total	100	100	

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

Theoretical connections between various topics ultimately represent the greatest prospect for constructing a more unified vision of the field. Although I have lacked the time needed to thoroughly map out the thematic and theoretical connections among the first 100 *ASR* submissions, I provide here a few examples selected from accepted papers.

Steven Messner, Eric Baumer, and Richard Rosenfeld have an upcoming *ASR* article that focuses on the connections between neighborhood social capital and homicide rates. Social capital is a concept that appears in papers on wide-ranging topics—crime, politics, culture, education, and even the military. Readers will learn a great deal about the many different components of social capital. For example, Messner et al. show that political engagement and community trust are separate dimensions of social capital that do not necessarily overlap in any given setting. This is a good example of a paper that should not be pigeonholed as "criminology." Instead, it should be of interest to that much broader group of scholars interested in learning about our contemporary urban landscape as well as that energetic and diverse group of scholars interested in pursuing the nature of social capital.

Another fine example of an *ASR* paper that should have broad appeal is the study that Brian Uzzi and Ryon Lancaster have conducted on how law firms set their prices. (This paper will also appear later this year.) I fear that some readers of *ASR* will skim this title and move on, assuming that this is a narrow study of interest only to economic sociologists. However, those who look past the title will discover a study that shows that social embeddedness has many facets. For example, Uzzi and Lancaster suggest that network ties may reduce information costs and thus lower prices, while a firm's position in a status hierarchy may signal quality and increase the price that law firms charge their clients. This multidimensional approach to social ties may well find applications in a wide variety of contexts, such as ties among artists, community volunteer groups, social movement participants, and adolescent peer groups.

It is my hope that *ASR* helps scholars see these and many other thematic connections between research studies being conducted in seemingly disparate contexts.

METHODOLOGY

What of methodology? Table 3 summarizes the 469 *ASR* papers on which a decision was made between August 2002 and July 2003. Approximately two-thirds of these submissions employed statistical methods, one-sixth of the papers used qualitative methods, and one-sixth of the papers deployed a variety of other approaches. Some will be surprised that there were 33 submissions that drew on ethnographic and in-depth interviews. This was a small fraction of *ASR* papers, but it nonetheless represents a larger number than some might have suspected. However, there were only 7 papers that the authors designated as theory submissions. I am pleased to report that several interesting multimethod papers have been submitted since August 2003. I sincerely encourage submissions in all specialties of sociology that use all of the research methods at our disposal.

Table 3. *ASR* Editorial Decisions from July 16, 2002 to July 15, 2003, by Author Self-designated Primary Research Method

Method	N	%
Quantitative		
Unit		
Individual	146	31.13
Country, region or larger	49	10.45
Metro area, country, or state	27	5.76
Organization, movement	25	5.33
Book, text	10	2.13
Analysis of methodology	50	10.66
Subtotal	307	65.46
Qualitative		
Comparative, historical	38	8.10
Field work (interviews/ethnography)	33	7.04
Methods	7	1.49
Language-based (textual, interactional)	2	.43
Subtotal	80	17.06
Other		
Verbal, synthetic theory (known findings)	21	4.48
mathematical, formal theory	16	3.41
Laboratory/experimental, structured observation	10	2.13
Study of social theory	7	1.49
Other	28	5.97
Subtotal	82	17.48
Total	469	100.00

See note in Table A1.

CONCLUSION

The pages of *ASR* can only present a small fraction of the huge volume of professionally executed research that is being conducted currently. The risk is that in any given issue there will be few if any papers that

directly focus on the immediate research interests of any particular scholar. However, if readers define their interests broadly and search for underlying theoretical and methodological developments that may have far-reaching implications, their efforts will be well rewarded.

APPENDIX

469 ASR DECISIONS

The self-designated specialties of 469 *ASR* papers for which decisions were made between July 16, 2002 and July 15, 2003 are displayed in Appendix Table A1. Authors were given 56 classifications to choose from (with "other" as a final, 57th option). There is much to be learned from this table and more than one way to look at these data. The simplest way to glean the overall pattern of submission is to examine the distribution of the first specialty area designated by the authors. From this perspective, there is no central tendency. The most popular fields appear far from dominant. The field of race and ethnicity leads the pack, but only 6.7 percent of authors reported this as their principal substantive contribution. Only three other areas—stratification and social mobility, political sociology, and comparative historical sociology—surpass five percent of submissions. At the lower tail of the distribution, 26 fields represented less than one percent of submissions. Viewed in this manner, submissions to *ASR* seem to derive from an intellectually wide-open discipline.

Another way to look at these data is to recognize that papers often spill over boundaries and make contributions in more than one area. For example, a paper on racial disparities in schools may be classified as an education paper, but it might be equally appropriate to view it as a race paper, a social capital paper (if that were the theoretical focus), an urban paper (if residential segregation were a key part of the story), and so on. Thus, a second way to look at Table 1 is to sum the first, second, and third designations made by the authors. This sum gives a better sense of whether the authors viewed their paper as touching each of these areas. I take these

designations as a fraction of the papers submitted to see what fraction of papers had a bearing on each of the specialty fields.

Although 31 submissions had a primary designation of race and ethnicity, there were 78 papers with race and ethnicity designated as the first, second, or third specialty. This represents 16.5 percent of all papers submitted. If we take the total designations as a fraction of total submissions, we see that the top five fields each represent more than 10 percent of submissions. (This approach involves double-counting and will produce a total well in excess of 100; nonetheless, it is useful because it makes clear what areas sociologists find prominent in their research.) By adding the areas of race and ethnicity, stratification and mobility, sex and gender, education, Asia and Asian Americans, sociology of work, and occupations and professions—areas centrally connected to issues of inequality and stratification—I quickly arrived at just over half of all the papers (assuming no overlap between these). This total is in line with that reported by my own classification scheme discussed above. However, this approach needs to be adjusted in two ways. First, we need to remove overlap (some race papers are also education papers); and second, we need to add papers related to stratification issues where authors failed to designate this issue as a concern. If these two adjustments are approximately of the same order of magnitude, then the results from this broader set of papers can be brought in line with my analysis of our first 100 *ASR* submissions.

(See next page for Appendix Table A1.)

Table A1. ASR Editorial Decisions from July 16, 2002 to July 15, 2003 by Author Self-designated Specialty

Area of Specialty ^a	Area				Total (n)	% ^b
	1st (n)	1st (%)	2nd (n)	3rd (n)		
Race and Ethnicity	31	6.61	37	10	78	16.63
Stratification, Social Mobility	33	7.04	32	10	75	15.99
Political Sociology	28	5.97	30	12	70	14.93
Comparative/Historical Sociology, Social Change	20	4.26	33	12	65	13.86
Family and Marriage	29	6.18	16	9	54	11.51
Economy and Society	18	3.84	19	9	46	9.81
Demography	12	2.56	17	16	45	9.59
Collective Behavior, Social Movements	29	6.18	5	7	41	8.74
Sex and Gender	16	3.41	10	15	41	8.74
Sociology of Culture	12	2.56	15	10	37	7.89
Social Psychology	16	3.41	10	10	36	7.68
Education	14	2.99	9	11	34	7.25
Organizations	14	2.99	17	3	34	7.25
Theory	10	2.13	13	8	31	6.61
Religion	12	2.56	12	3	27	5.76
Community, Urban Sociology	10	2.13	7	8	25	5.33
Methodology, Quantitative	9	1.92	9	6	24	5.12
Criminology/Delinquency	16	3.41	4	2	22	4.69
Aging, Life Course	7	1.49	8	6	21	4.48
Asia and Asian Americans	5	1.07	9	4	18	3.84
Public Policy	7	1.49	5	6	18	3.84
Social Capital	5	1.07	8	4	17	3.62
Sociology of Work	8	1.71	6	3	17	3.62
Children/Adolescents, Developmental Psychology	5	1.07	8	3	16	3.41
Mathematical Sociology and Networks	5	1.07	6	4	15	3.20
Medical Sociology, Mental Health	9	1.92	0	5	14	2.99
Rational Choice	3	.64	6	5	14	2.99
Criminal Justice	9	1.92	0	4	13	2.77
Occupations and Professions	4	.85	7	2	13	2.77
Sociology of Knowledge	6	1.28	1	6	13	2.77
Deviance/ Social Disorganization	3	.64	4	4	11	2.35
Environmental/ Environmental Justice	10	2.13	0	1	11	2.35
Law and Society	8	1.71	1	2	11	2.35
World Systems/ Development	3	.64	3	5	11	2.35
Social Control	1	.21	4	4	9	1.92
Emotions	4	.85	2	2	8	1.71
Socialization	2	.43	3	2	7	1.49
Sociology of Sexualities	2	.43	2	3	7	1.49
Sociology of Science	2	.43	3	1	6	1.28
Symbolic Interactionism	1	.21	2	3	6	1.28
Rural Sociology	2	.43	1	2	5	1.07
Science and Technology	0	.00	5	0	5	1.07

(Table A1 continues on next page.)

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Table A1.
ASR Editorial Decisions from July 16, 2002 to July 15, 2003 by Author Self-designated Specialty

Area of Specialty ^a	Area			Total (n)	% ^b
	1st (n)	1st (%)	2nd (n)		
Ethnography	2	.43	1	4	.85
History of Sociology/ Thought	1	.21	0	3	.85
Industrial Sociology	0	.00	2	2	.85
Mass Communication and Public Opinion	3	.64	1	4	.85
Sociobiology	2	.43	2	4	.85
Latina/ Latino Studies	0	.00	1	2	.64
Methodology, Qualitative	1	.21	2	3	.64
Alcohol and Drugs	1	.21	1	2	.43
Ethnomethodology	0	.00	2	2	.43
Leisure, Sports, and Recreation	1	.21	0	1	.43
Sociology of Art/ Literature	0	.00	2	2	.43
Applied Sociology/Evaluation Research	0	.00	0	1	.21
Human Ecology	0	.00	1	1	.21
Military Sociology	0	.00	0	1	.21
Other	18	3.84	14	48	10.23
Total (N)	469	100.00	418	1156	

Note: The data reported in this table were compiled by Franklin Wilson and Charles Camic during their tenure as editors of *ASR*. They developed the coding scheme and devised the "acknowledge and classify" procedure that continues to be used to collect self-designated specialty and methods information from authors. Camic and Wilson originally reported these data at the August 2003 *ASR* editorial board meeting in Atlanta, GA.

^a Up to three specialty choices allowed.

^b Does not sum to 100% because of rounding.