

# What types of papers get published in the *Journal of Sociology*, 1965-2008?

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## **Abstract**

This paper presents an analysis of all articles published in the *Journal of Sociology* (formerly the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*) between 1965 and 2008 (excluding book reviews). The aim is to empirically identify trends in paper characteristics in terms of what is being published (country of focus, subject area, and methodological approach). Findings show that topic areas have changed in popularity over time; and most recently there is a higher proportion of qualitative empirical papers. Information such as this can inform editorial practices and serve to inform the readership on the nature of the journal.

**Keywords:** Australian sociology, authorship, history of sociology, *Journal of Sociology*, Publication trends, The Australian Sociological Association (TASA)

## **Introduction**

The study reported in this paper is a content analysis of the *Journal of Sociology (JOS)*. A wide range of aspects about *JOS* were collated and this paper presents a summary of the characteristics of the papers themselves. An earlier paper (McGee and Germov, 2009) reports our analysis of who publishes in the journal (most common authors, authors' academic rank, gender, institution, and country). The *JOS* is the premier sociological journal in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region. As such, there is a genuine need to examine trends in what and who the journal publishes.

Like leading journals elsewhere, there is often much anecdotal conjecture about the nature of the journal, in terms of whether there are biases towards publishing particular types of research, or publishing authors from particular institutions or of a particular gender or academic status. Moreover, a study of the characteristics of published articles can identify trends over time that can be used to inform editorial practices, particularly to identify potential issues to address, as well as inform journal readers on the broad nature of the journal. The paper begins with a brief history of *JOS* and some background information about the bibliometrics of the journal. This is followed by a description of the methodological approach taken in the study, followed by the key findings.

### **A brief history of the journal**

The *Journal of Sociology* began its life in 1965 as the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology (ANZJS)*, following the formation of the Sociological Association of Australia and New Zealand (SAANZ)—the forerunner of TASA—in 1963. Initially, the journal was published biannually, moving to three issues in 1971, and four issues in 2001. The change of name from *ANZJS* to *JOS* occurred in 1998—a change primarily aimed at broadening the journal's potential appeal to an international readership. What

has helped most in this regard was the decision in 2001 to have the journal published by the international publisher SAGE. In 2002, SAGE began making the full content of the journal accessible via electronic journal databases and in 2004 began digitising the back catalogue so that all volumes of the journal since its inception are available online.

Up until the move to SAGE, it is fair to say the journal had a modest international readership. Since then, improved international distribution, no doubt aided by the growing reliance of university libraries and researchers on online journal databases, have seen a progressive improvement in the journal's ranking based on impact factor analysis. Table 1 lists the journal's impact factor ranking based on data sourced from the ISI Web of Knowledge (2008) *Journal Citation Reports*.

**Table 1: Rank and impact factor of the *Journal of Sociology* within sociology journals**

Year	Sociology Journal Rank	Impact factor
2003	65/93	0.256
2004	47/90	0.467
2005	47/92	0.455
2006	62/93	0.419
2007	34/96	0.833
2008	44/99	0.791

Source: ISI Web of Knowledge *Journal Citation Reports* (accessed 9 July 2009)

The 2008 ISI Web of Knowledge also allows for the examination of the journals that cited *JOS* papers in 2008 (Table 2) and the most common journals that papers published in *JOS* cited in 2008 (Table 3).

**Table 2: Top 10 journals that are citing papers from *Journal of Sociology* in 2008**

Journal	Number of citations in these journals (Total = 174)	Proportion of all citations of <i>Journal of Sociology</i> papers
1. <i>Australian Journal of Political Science</i>	8	4.60
2. <i>Australian Geographer</i>	8	4.60
3. <i>Journal of Sociology</i>	6	3.45
4. <i>British Journal of Sociology</i>	4	2.30
5. <i>Qualitative Health Research</i>	4	2.30
6. <i>Geoforum</i>	3	1.72
7. <i>Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry</i>	3	1.72
8. <i>Journal of Rural Studies</i>	3	1.72
9. <i>Race &amp; Class</i>	3	1.72
10. <i>Sociological Research Online</i>	3	1.72

Source: Web of Knowledge 2008 (accessed 9 July 2009)

**Table 3: Top 10 journals that papers from *Journal of Sociology* are citing in 2008**

Journal	Number of citations in <i>Journal of Sociology</i> (Total = 877)	Proportion of all citations
1. <i>Theory, Culture and Society</i>	9	1.03
2. <i>American Journal of Sociology</i>	8	0.91
3. <i>British Journal of Sociology</i>	8	0.91
4. <i>Sociological Review</i>	8	0.91
5. <i>Journal of Sociology</i>	6	0.68
6. <i>American Sociological Review</i>	6	0.68
7. <i>Cyberpsychology and Behavior</i>	5	0.57
8. <i>Gender and Society</i>	4	0.46
9. <i>Journal of Family Issues</i>	4	0.46
10. <i>New Left Review</i>	4	0.46

Source: Web of Knowledge 2008 (accessed 9 July 2009)

## Method

The focus of this paper is on research articles published in *ANZJS/JOS* and excludes editorials, symposia, and book reviews. The approach taken is consistent with content analyses of other journals (cf. Anderson 2002; Wall, Emmelin, Janlert, Mustonen, and Skog 2006). All issues of the journal were coded from 1965 up to and including 2008, yielding a total of 823 papers. The type of information included in the journal, particularly in relation to author information, has changed over time. Therefore, some of the

analyses presented in this paper only refer to a subset of the total papers. Where relevant, this is noted in the footnotes of the tables presented below.

The development of a coding sheet was informed by the information available in the journal as well as the coding activities of other researchers in their examinations of other journals (Anderson 2002; Kim and Chung 2007; Weiss and Qiu 2008; Wingate 2003). The coding sheet was piloted with two research assistants coding one volume of the journal. One of the research assistants then compared the results of the two coding exercises in order to identify any inconsistencies. The researchers reviewed these inconsistencies and established that the discrepancies were due to lack of clarity in coding instructions, ambiguity of available data, and lack of specific discipline knowledge of the coders. These problems were addressed in the development of a shortened and revised coding sheet that was used for the study.

The key focus of the current research is to examine trends in paper and author characteristics over time; therefore, the results are divided into decades. Given that the journal was first published in 1965, the data displayed in the 1960s columns only ranges from 1965–1969. Furthermore, given that the data coding exercise took place in the summer of 2008–09, only journals published from 2000–2008 are included in the 2000s column. The characteristics of the authors on multiple author papers vary, and the focus of these analyses is only on the first author or sole author of each paper. The unit of analysis is the paper not the author.

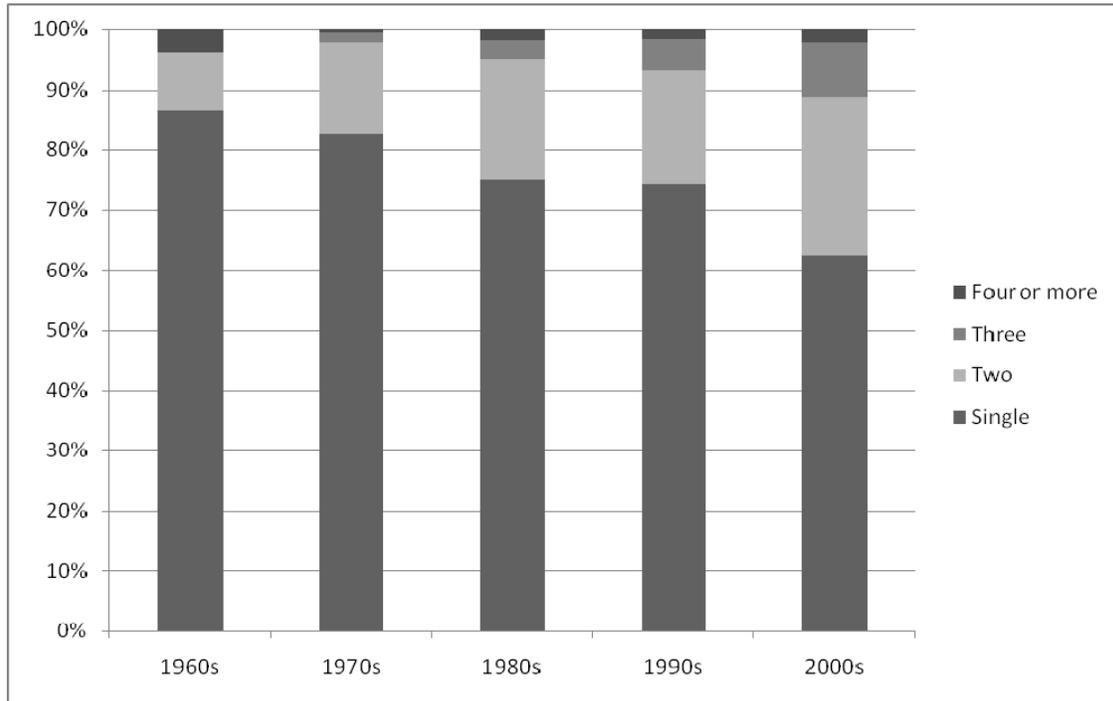
## **Findings**

### **Paper characteristics**

Over time the proportion of single author papers has decreased. In the 1960s, 86.5 per cent of papers were single authored, but by the 2000s this type of paper represented

only 62.5 per cent of papers. The proportions are displayed in Figure 1 below. This change reflects a trend towards collaborative research in recent times which is different from the natural sciences where papers are authored by research teams.

**Figure 1: Number of authors per article in ANZJS/JOS, 1965–2008**



Despite the aforementioned moves to internationalise *JOS*, the country of focus of the published papers has consistently been predominantly focussed on Australia, very much reflecting the journal's primary purpose as the journal of TASA and the major outlet for Australian sociological publication. In the 1960s papers were almost exclusively focussed on Australia moving to some diversity on the country of focus in the 1970s. By the 2000s, 92.6 per cent of papers were focussed on Australia (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Country or region studied of papers in ANZJS/JOS, 1965–2008**

Country	1960s n (%)	1970s n (%)	1980s n (%)	1990s n (%)	2000s n (%)
Australia	38 (97.44)	129 (81.13)	141 (81.50)	137 (91.33)	151 (92.64)
New Zealand	0 (0.00)	14 (8.81)	23 (13.29)	8 (5.33)	4 (2.54)
UK	0 (0.00)	2 (1.26)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.61)
USA	0 (0.00)	4 (2.52)	3 (1.73)	0 (0.00)	2 (1.23)
Other	1 (2.56) <sup>1</sup>	10 (6.26) <sup>2</sup>	6 (3.47) <sup>3</sup>	5 (3.33) <sup>4</sup>	5 (3.07) <sup>5</sup>
Total	39 (100.00)	159 (100.00)	173 (100.00)	150 (100.00)	163 (100.00)

Notes:

1. West New Guinea
2. Cook Islands, Australia and New Zealand; Denmark; Hungary; India; New Zealand and The Netherlands; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Poland
3. Australia and New Zealand; Australia, Canada and USA; Malaysia; New Zealand; USA and Australia
4. 15 OECD countries; Australia and US; Japan; Taiwan; United States and New Zealand
5. France; Hong Kong; NZ & Australia; UK & Australia
6. Only those papers where a particular country or group of countries were the focus of the paper have been coded in these analyses.

The papers were also coded into the subject area used on the TASA membership form.

These categories are the way in which members identify their research interests for the TASA membership directory. The top five subject areas each decade for papers published in *JOS* are presented in Table 5. The most common subject area overall was 'Class, Stratification and Mobility'. When examining trends in this subject area over time, the vast majority of papers coded in this subject area (64 of 80 papers) were published in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. This subject area was the leading subject area during these decades, but by the 1990s it was no longer in the top five. The second most common subject area overall was 'Feminism, Gender and Sexuality'. This subject area was not in the top five subject areas in the 1960s, but since then has consistently been in the top five subject areas each decade. In addition, gender issues have also received attention in articles coded to the 'Family' subject area. Interestingly, the field of 'Occupations and Professions' features prominently in all decades bar the 2000s, though the subject area 'Industrial Sociology, Work and Organisations' has been in the top 5 from the 1980s to the present.

Studies of Indigenous Australians did not make it into the top 10 subject areas, let alone the top five, for the 1960s-1990s period. Only during the 2000s did this subject area make it into the top five; and most of these papers came from a special thematic issue of the journal dedicated to Indigenous studies (see *JOS* 2006, volume 42, issue 4). This shows the importance of editorial interventions, through devices such as thematic issues, to address gaps in journal publication coverage.

The use of thematic issues in the 2000s needs to be taken into account when identifying the most popular subject areas. For example, the 2002 thematic issue dealt with the intersections of families and work, the 2005 issue with life pathways, the 2007 issue with economy and society, and the 2008 issue was on cultural sociology, clearly influencing the top 5 subject areas in this decade. Thematic issues facilitate the topicality of journal publications, and given the increased politicisation of immigration and work related issues in the 2000s, it is perhaps unsurprising to find these subject areas in the top five. Equally of note are subject areas that are missing in recent decades, such as the absence of demography, education, and the overall absence of areas such as consumption, ageing, youth, and welfare in all decades—most likely due to the existence of specialist journals in these areas. Nonetheless, at the broad subject area level, Table 10 provides an interesting overview of both continuity and change in publication trends.

**Table 5: Classification by main subject area of papers in ANZJS/JOS, 1965–2008**

Top Five Subject Areas by Decade	Number of papers published in each decade	Proportion of all papers published in that decade
<b>1960s</b>		
Class, Stratification and Mobility	9	17.31
Occupations and Professions	8	15.38
Demography and Population Research	5	9.62
Education	4	7.69
Immigration, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism	4	7.69
Methodology	4	7.69
<b>1970s</b>		
Class, Stratification and Mobility	26	13.68
Education	17	8.95
Applied Sociology, Teaching and Sociological Practice	16	8.42
Feminism, Gender and Sexuality	16	8.42
Occupations and Professions	13	6.84
<b>1980s</b>		
Class, Stratification and Mobility	29	13.12
Immigration, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism	21	9.50
Feminism, Gender and Sexuality	16	7.24
Occupations and Professions	15	6.79
Industrial Sociology, Work and Organisations	13	5.88
<b>1990s</b>		
Feminism, Gender and Sexuality	22	12.50
Health, Medicine and the Body	22	12.50
Social Theory	16	9.09
Occupations and Professions	15	8.52
Industrial Sociology, Work and Organisations	11	6.25
<b>2000s</b>		
Family	18	9.78
Feminism, Gender and Sexuality	17	9.24
Industrial Sociology, Work and Organisations	13	7.07
Immigration, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism	10	5.43
Aborigines and Indigenous People	9	4.89
Culture and Cultural Policy	9	4.89
Social Theory	9	4.89

Note: Where the fifth ranked theme was tied, more than five themes have been included.

As noted in Table 6, quantitative approaches were the dominant methodology among authors from universities contributing the leading number of articles. When looking at the methodological approach overall (see Table 6), it can be seen that while in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s a quantitative approach was predominate in empirical papers, in the 1990s and 2000s there is a more even balance between quantitative and qualitative approaches, with more qualitative papers being published in the 2000s.

The qualitative trend in the 2000s is significant given the 2005 thematic issue of the journal focussed exclusively on longitudinal (quantitative) research (see *JOS* 2005, volume 41, issue 4). While those of a qualitative persuasion may well view the trend in the 2000s in a positive light—as vindication of the importance of such methods after years of dispute—others could be concerned that the discipline may be ceding its authority in the quantitative analysis of social issues to other disciplines such as economics, human geography, criminology, and psychology. The data also show an increasing proportion, albeit small, of papers that used a mixed method approach and a decreasing proportion of non-empirical papers. It will be interesting to see if this trend continues as many commentators on methodology, and reviewers for grant funding bodies, extol the virtues of mixed methods.

**Table 6: Methodological approach of papers in *ANZJS/JOS*, 1965–2008**

Methodology	1960s n (%)	1970s n (%)	1980s n (%)	1990s n (%)	2000s n (%)
Quantitative	28 (53.85)	97 (51.05)	79 (35.75)	47 (26.70)	52 (28.26)
Qualitative	1 (1.92)	16 (8.42)	22 (9.95)	42 (23.86)	67 (36.41)
Mixed	0 (0.00)	4 (2.11)	6 (2.71)	8 (4.55)	11 (5.98)
Non-empirical	23 (44.23)	73 (38.42)	114 (51.58)	79 (44.89)	54 (29.35)
Total	52 (100.00)	190 (100.00)	221 (100.00)	176 (100.00)	184 (100.00)

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the findings show that the country of focus for almost all of the papers is Australia. This suggests that the attempts toward internationalisation of the journal may not have been as effective as hoped. 'Class, Stratification and Mobility' was the leading subject area in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, but was no longer in top 5 in the 1990s and 2000s. Gender issues have been a key focus of published articles in the subject areas of 'Feminism, Gender, and Sexuality' and 'Family'. While papers tended to be single authored in the 1960s, there has been an increasing proportion of collaborative papers over time. There was also a move from empirical papers being predominantly quantitative in the 1960s to having a fairly even proportion of quantitative and qualitative papers published in the 1990s and 2000s, with qualitative papers representing the highest proportion of empirical papers for the first time in the 2000s.

Despite myths about the editorial biases of particular journals, many journal editors will readily admit that what journals publish generally reflects the range of articles that are submitted to them. That said, there is still a need to regularly review the publication trends of a journal to identify disciplinary trends and to potentially identify any gaps in publication coverage that editorial policies may need to address.

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