

ACCREDITING KNOWLEDGE: JOURNAL STATURE AND CITATION IMPACT IN SOCIAL SCIENCE¹

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The impact of the network of journals through which scholars disseminate and accredit their ideas is compared to the prestige hierarchy of journals in sociology and political science. A comparison of prestige rankings of journals with *Social Sciences Citation Index*[®] impact scores suggests a nonlinear relationship: many reputed "top" journals receive inordinate credit and many new and less prestigious journals receive less credit than their impact warrants.

The institutional goal of science is the extension of accredited knowledge (Merton, 1942). In order to achieve this goal, scholars need to communicate with one another through regular, open channels. This exchange of ideas is thus an inescapable aspect of scientific research and development. The question for scholars is how and where to disseminate and thus to accredit their work.

Accredited knowledge is grounded in collegial recognition of the individual and her/his work. Not all ideas win equal acceptance, and neither do all the scholars who generate these ideas or all the institutions that house these scholars. For this reason, considerable research has been done on the stratification of scholarly fields—research designed to pinpoint the best, or at least the most reputable, scholars and programs in various fields (e.g., Allison and Stewart, 1974; Bingham and Vertz, 1983; Cole, 1983; Cole and Cole, 1973; Crane, 1965; Long, 1978; Merton, 1968; Reskin, 1977). However, the network of communications undergirding this stratification system remains little understood (Garfield, 1972). Ideally, good ideas, insights, theories, and findings would achieve the impact they deserve on the basis of their merits; but, in accrediting knowledge, the medium of dissemination may be as important as the message.

Journals, along with books, are the prime medium for accrediting knowledge. Cole (1983) observed that "we read papers in journals only after they have been evaluated [accredited] by others. We give people more credit for publishing in prestigious journals" (p. 137). But what do we mean by "accredited"? And to what extent is prestige independent of quality or impact? A paper published in a refereed journal has met the standards of that journal. As Glenn (1971:298) has noted, it is widely recognized that there are status differentials among the journals in any field. To publish a paper in certain journals may be a highly visible badge of success. If a paper appears in a "top" journal, the presumption is that it *must* be good. Journals, because they are refereed, provide accreditation. But some refereed journals provide much more accreditation than others.

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A different form of accreditation is provided by one's peers when they make use of one's work. Seen from this perspective, good work is work that others find useful and consequently cite in their own work. Hargens and Felmlee (1984) summarized their literature review by asserting that "the number of citations to a scientist's work is often recommended as the best single indicator of scholarly recognition" (p. 686). So the accreditation of one's work can be measured in at least two ways: the prestige of the journal in which it is published and the frequency with which it is cited. Of course, work can be widely cited precisely because of where it was published, but these two aspects of accreditation are at least conceptually distinct. Our research question concerns the extent to which they are empirically distinct. How does the latter form of accreditation (citation impact) relate to the former (journal prestige)?

Questions concerning accredited knowledge have both theoretical and practical implications. A journal can achieve the status of a "top" publication outlet for reasons unrelated to the quality or impact of the articles it publishes—reasons that include, but are by no means restricted to, its sponsorship, age, the quantitative/qualitative, theoretical/empirical, and professional/practitioner orientations of its articles, the visibility of its editor and editorial boards, and its past reputation. It seems likely that journals, like departments and universities, establish images that are relatively resistant to change. Thus, journal *X*, a long-established, discipline-supported journal, may outrank new journal *Y* in terms of prestige even though *Y* is publishing more important articles than *X* is in terms of citation impact.

Many professionals are interested in the accreditation of knowledge for practical reasons. For example, the interests of librarians and information system designers stem from their assumption that the quality of a journal affects user demand for the journal. Science planners find journal ratings helpful in assessing the payoffs of various research programs and the productivity of various researchers and research teams. Journal editors and sponsors use ratings as performance indicators and

TABLE 1
Prestige, Impact, and Related Measures for Sociology Journals

Journal	Glenn Prestige Score ^a	SSCI [®] Impact Score ^b (Average, 1977-79)	Prestige Residual Score ^c
<i>American Sociological Review</i>	10.0	3.367	1.662
<i>American Journal of Sociology</i>	9.6	2.034	2.310
<i>Social Forces</i>	8.1	0.971	1.645
<i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> (formerly <i>Sociometry</i>)	7.8	0.944	1.367
<i>British Journal of Sociology</i>	7.8	0.535	1.688
<i>American Anthropologist</i>	7.7	1.815	0.582
<i>Social Problems</i>	7.6	1.041	1.090
<i>American Political Science Review</i>	7.5	1.973	0.258
<i>Demography</i>	7.4	1.133	0.818
<i>Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i>	7.2	0.425	1.174
<i>Public Opinion Quarterly</i>	7.1	0.851	0.740
<i>American Economic Review</i>	7.1	1.552	0.189
<i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>	7.1	2.390	-0.470
<i>European Journal of Sociology</i>	6.9	0.435	0.867
<i>Behavioral Science</i>	6.8	0.587	0.647
<i>Rural Sociology</i>	6.7	0.798	0.381
<i>Human Organization</i>	6.7	0.436	0.666
<i>Journal of Social Psychology</i>	6.7	0.283	0.786
<i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i>	6.7	2.293	-0.794
<i>Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly</i>	6.7	1.192	0.072
<i>International Journal of Comparative Sociology</i>	6.7	0.171	0.874
<i>American Behavioral Scientist</i>	6.6	0.483	0.529
<i>Journal of Social Issues</i>	6.6	1.031	0.098
<i>Social Research</i>	6.6	0.395	0.598
<i>Daedalus</i>	6.5	0.958	0.056
<i>Human Relations</i>	6.5	0.519	0.401
<i>Population Studies</i>	6.5	1.017	0.009
<i>Harvard Educational Review</i>	6.4	2.816	-1.505
<i>Current Sociology</i>	6.4	0.095	0.634
<i>Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology</i>	6.4	0.233	0.525
<i>Sociological Review</i>	6.3	0.244	0.417
<i>International Social Science Journal</i>	6.3	0.230	0.428
<i>American Sociologist</i>	6.2	0.740	-0.073
<i>Journal of Marriage and Family</i>	6.2	0.988	-0.268
<i>Journal of Conflict Resolution</i>	6.2	0.638	0.007
<i>Journal of Health and Social Research</i>	6.2	1.602	-0.751
<i>Sociology of Education</i>	6.1	0.403	0.092

planning guides. Researchers themselves want to pursue a sensible manuscript submission strategy, while department chairs and deans are faced with the need to document the quality of faculty publications in conjunction with tenure and promotion decisions, departmental reviews, and the like (Gordon, 1982).

The Link between Reputation and Performance

In the fields of sociology and political science fairly clear-cut journal prestige hierarchies have been documented. Glenn (1971) solicited evaluations of professional journals from a sample of sociologists at Ph.D.-granting programs in the

United States, and Giles and Wright (1975) undertook a similar survey of political scientists. Glenn asked his respondents to judge 63 journals in terms of "the average importance of their contributions to the field" of sociology, instructing them to use the *American Sociological Review* as an anchor for their evaluations. The *American Sociological Review* was given an arbitrary score of 10, and respondents were told to assign a score of 5 to a journal they considered only half as important as the *American Sociological Review*, 20 to a journal they considered twice as important as the *American Sociological Review*, and so on. Giles and Wright's respondents, who rated 63 journals commonly used by political scientists, also employed a 10-point rating system, but their scale was marked by verbal descriptors (0 = poor,

TABLE 1—continued
Prestige, Impact, and Related Measures for Sociology Journals

Journal	Glenn Prestige Score ^a	SSCI [®] Impact Score ^b (Average, 1977-79)	Prestige Residual Score ^c
<i>Sociological Quarterly</i>	6.1	0.221	0.235
<i>Acta Sociologica</i>	6.1	0.174	0.272
<i>Social Science Quarterly</i>	6.0	0.479	-0.068
<i>Southwestern Journal of Anthropology</i>	6.0	NA ^d	NA
<i>Sociology and Social Research</i>	5.9	0.103	0.127
<i>Sociology</i>	5.9	0.694	-0.337
<i>Sociological Inquiry</i>	5.8	0.187	-0.039
<i>Society</i> (formerly <i>Transaction</i>)	5.7	0.198	-0.147
<i>Sociological Perspectives</i> (formerly <i>Pacific Sociological Review</i>)	5.7	0.222	-0.166
<i>Law and Society Review</i>	5.7	1.760	-1.375
<i>Sociological Analysis</i>	5.7	0.197	-0.146
<i>Journal of Gerontology</i>	5.4	1.316	-1.326
<i>Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency</i>	5.4	0.735	-0.869
<i>American Journal of Economics and Sociology</i>	5.3	0.237	-0.578
<i>British Journal of Criminology</i>	5.3	0.394	-0.701
<i>Gerontologist</i>	5.3	0.877	-1.081
<i>Crime and Delinquency</i>	5.2	0.831	-1.145
<i>Science and Society</i>	5.2	0.309	-0.734
<i>Journal of Crime Law, Criminology, and Police Science</i>	5.1	1.921	-2.101
<i>Phylon</i>	5.0	0.098	-0.769
<i>Social Biology</i>	5.0	0.571	-1.140
<i>Jewish Journal of Sociology</i>	4.9	0.288	-1.018
<i>American Journal of Correction</i>	4.8	NA	NA
<i>Eugenics Review</i>	4.7	NA	NA
<i>Journal of Negro Education</i>	4.5	0.076	-1.251
<i>New Society</i>	4.5	0.065	-1.243
<i>Federal Probation</i>	3.8	0.326	-2.148

^aSource: Glenn (1971).

^bSource: *Social Sciences Citation Index® Annual*, vols. 1-3.

^cThis is the actual value of the Glenn prestige score, less the prestige score predicted from the regression of prestige scores on impact factor scores.

^dNA: Not available.

2 = fair, 4 = adequate, 6 = good, 8 = very good, and 10 = outstanding) rather than being anchored by a prominent journal.

Sociologists' and political scientists' ratings of their professional journals, as determined by the Glenn and Giles-Wright surveys, are summarized in the first column of Tables 1 and 2, respectively. Two of the top five journals on the political scientists' list (the *American Sociological Review* and the *American Journal of Sociology*) were the top-rated sociology journals. Sociologists, for their part, also gave high marks to the principal journals of their sister disciplines, ranking the *American Anthropologist* sixth and the *American Political Science Review* eighth.

How closely are these reputational ratings related to the actual influence or quality of these journals? "Extensive past research indicates that citations are a valid indicator of the relative quality

of work" (Cole, 1983:116). Number of citations is also highly correlated with other measures of quality that sociologists of science have employed (e.g., access to resources, status of degree-granting institutions, initial appointments, mobility). However, quality in this context is defined as intellectual influence—the impact of one's ideas as accredited by others through use in their own work. Citations are a measure of quality, in that they suggest that other professionals working in the same area have found one's ideas valuable.

The *Social Sciences Citation Index®* (SSCI[®]) provides "impact factor" scores for more than 1,300 social science journals. Journals from the disciplines of psychology followed by psychiatry, economics, and law generally have higher impact scores. Sociology journals rank about 10th, with political science journals about 25th. Such differences among disciplines reflect, among other

TABLE 2
Prestige, Impact, and Related Measures for Political Science Journals

Journal	Giles-Wright Prestige Score ^a	SSCI [®] Impact Score ^b (Average, 1977-79)	Prestige Residual Score ^c
<i>World Politics</i>	7.3	0.970	1.282
<i>American Sociological Review</i>	7.1	3.367	-0.322
<i>American Journal of International Law</i>	7.0	1.323	0.775
<i>American Journal of Sociology</i>	7.0	2.034	0.359
<i>American Political Science Review</i>	7.0	1.973	0.394
<i>Journal of Politics</i>	6.7	0.378	1.028
<i>Comparative Politics</i>	6.6	0.708	0.735
<i>American Journal of Political Science</i>	6.6	1.027	0.548
<i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i>	6.5	2.293	-0.293
<i>Public Opinion Quarterly</i>	6.5	0.851	0.551
<i>Daedalus</i>	6.4	0.958	0.489
<i>Journal of Public Law</i>	6.4	NA ^d	NA
<i>Public Administration Review</i>	6.3	0.195	0.735
<i>British Journal of Political Science</i>	6.2	0.708	0.335
<i>Public Interest</i>	6.2	2.093	-0.476
<i>Political Theory</i>	6.2	0.267	0.593
<i>Law and Society Review</i>	6.2	1.760	-0.281
<i>International Organization</i>	6.2	0.961	0.187
<i>Social Forces</i>	6.1	0.971	0.081
<i>Political Studies</i>	6.0	0.348	0.346
<i>Social Science Quarterly</i>	6.0	0.479	0.269
<i>Sage Professional Papers</i>	6.0	NA	NA
<i>Government and Opposition</i>	6.0	0.357	0.341
<i>Politics and Society</i>	6.0	0.412	0.308
<i>Behavioral Science</i>	6.0	0.587	0.206
<i>Public Choice</i>	6.0	0.374	0.331
<i>Public Policy</i>	6.0	0.766	0.101
<i>Polity</i>	5.9	0.175	0.347
<i>Canadian Journal of Political Science</i>	5.9	0.465	0.177
<i>Journal of Conflict Resolution</i>	5.9	0.638	0.076
<i>International Affairs</i>	5.8	0.814	-0.127
<i>Comparative Political Studies</i>	5.8	0.523	0.043
<i>Urban Affairs Quarterly</i>	5.8	0.544	0.031
<i>Foreign Affairs</i>	5.8	2.050	-0.851
<i>Western Political Quarterly</i>	5.8	0.300	0.174
<i>Administration and Society</i>	5.8	0.328	0.158
<i>Administrative Law Review</i>	5.8	1.235	-0.374

things, the relative size and professional diversity of the disciplines.

The earliest journal impact scores *SSCI* published are for 1977 and are based on citations from articles published during 1975-76. A journal's impact factor score for 1977 is defined as the number of citations during 1977 to articles that the journal published during 1975-76, divided by the total number of articles the journal published during 1975 and 1976 (i.e., the ratio of citations to "citable" items for a given journal). Dividing the number of citations by the number of citable items controls for the journal's size and the frequency with which it is published. Gordon (1982) found that impact scores were highly correlated over time. For example, the correlation of impact scores between 1977 and 1978 for 59 of Glenn's

journals was .84. To mitigate the possibilities of yearly fluctuations, a three-year (1977-79) average is calculated in this research for each journal. If journal prestige influences submission decisions, the prestige ratings published in the early to mid 1970s would influence publications in the mid 1970s and citation counts in the latter 1970s, the time of our assessment.

What is the relationship between citation impact and journal reputation? The Glenn and Giles-Wright reputational ratings are related to the *SSCI* impact factor scores (which are shown in the second column of Tables 1 and 2): the correlation between the Glenn (sociology) and *SSCI* measures is .526, and the correlation between the Giles-Wright (political science) and *SSCI* measures is .572. This suggests that reputations are perfor-

TABLE 2—continued
Prestige, Impact, and Related Measures for Political Science Journals

Journal	Giles-Wright Prestige Score ^a	SSCI [®] Impact Score ^b (Average, 1977-79)	Prestige Residual Score ^c
<i>American Politics Quarterly</i>	5.8	0.597	0.000
<i>International Studies Quarterly</i>	5.7	0.581	-0.091
<i>Publius</i>	5.7	0.172	0.149
<i>Asian Survey</i>	5.7	0.446	-0.012
<i>Political Methodology</i>	5.6	NA	NA
<i>Political Science</i>	5.6	0.388	-0.078
<i>Dissent</i>	5.6	0.205	0.030
<i>American Behavioral Scientist</i>	5.6	0.483	-0.133
<i>Political Science Quarterly</i>	5.6	0.504	-0.146
<i>Political Quarterly</i>	5.6	0.134	0.071
<i>Journal of Peace Research</i>	5.6	0.557	-0.177
<i>International Social Science Journal</i>	5.4	0.230	-0.185
<i>Journal of International Affairs</i>	5.4	0.312	-0.233
<i>Simulation and Games</i>	5.3	0.268	-0.307
<i>Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i>	5.3	0.425	-0.399
<i>Review of Politics</i>	5.3	0.217	-0.277
<i>International Interactions</i>	5.0	NA	NA
<i>Journal of Developing Areas</i>	5.0	0.146	-0.536
<i>Experimental Studies of Politics</i>	4.9	NA	NA
<i>Policy Studies Journal</i>	4.8	0.106	-0.712
<i>Orbis</i>	4.8	0.457	-0.918
<i>PS</i>	4.7	0.518	-1.054
<i>Midwest Review of Public Administration</i>	4.2	NA	NA
<i>National Civic Review</i>	4.1	NA	NA
<i>Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs</i>	4.1	0.272	-1.510
<i>Social Science Journal</i>	3.8	0.196	-1.765

^aSource: Giles and Wright (1975).

^bSource: *Social Sciences Citation Index® Annual*, vols. 1-3.

^cThis is the actual value of the Giles-Wright prestige score, less the prestige score predicted from the regression of prestige scores on impact factor scores.

^dNA: Not available.

mance-based to some degree, for the journals that are perceived as most prestigious in each discipline tend to be the ones that have the greatest scholarly impact. On the other hand, these correlations are not nearly strong enough to permit us to conclude that a journal's reputation is a simple function of scholarly influence. Approximately two-thirds of the variance in the reputed quality of political science journals and three-quarters of the variance in the reputed importance of sociology journals remain unexplained by the SSCI impact scores.

The unexplained variance in journals' reputations might simply reflect the operation of random error in the reputational measures. Moreover, there is a lag of several years between the reputational measures and the impact measure. But we doubt that either random measurement error or a time lag tells the whole story. Rather, we think it quite likely that scholarly journals, like academic departments, tend to establish reputa-

tions that endure in spite of what they merit. Once a journal has been placed on a discipline's prestige ladder, it tends to retain its place because its reputation is accepted at face value and is not continuously reevaluated in light of changing circumstances.

We certainly do not claim to possess definitive proof of this interpretation, but some intriguing evidence is available. For the 56 journals for which both Giles-Wright reputational and SSCI impact data are available, the correlation between reputational scores and the residual in these reputational scores (the portion left over after regressing the Giles-Wright scores on the SSCI impact scores) is extremely high: $r = .820$. For the sociology journals, the correlation between the Glenn measure and the residual unexplained by the SSCI impact score is even higher: $r = .851$. (These residuals are shown in the third column of Tables 1 and 2.) These highly autocorrelated error terms suggest that in each field high-status

journals tend to have better reputations than their influence would warrant, while lower-status journals tend to have poorer reputations than their influence would warrant. Subsequent examination of scatter plots supports this argument. This is *not* to say that none of the highly reputable journals deserves its reputation. For example, the Giles-Wright reputational score for the *American Sociological Review*, 7.1, is very close to what would be predicted from a regression of Giles-Wright scores on the *SSCI* impact scores. Generally, however, both very good and very bad reputations tend to be exaggerations of what the impact data suggest are merited. Especially noteworthy in this regard among the political science journals are *World Politics* and the *Journal of Politics*, both of whose reputational scores are far above what would be predicted from the citation data: *World Politics*, whose score of 7.3 places it first among all the political science journals, has a *predicted* reputational score of 6.07, close to the mean on the Giles-Wright scale, and the reputational rating of 6.7 for the sixth-ranked *Journal of Politics* is also much higher than the predicted score (5.7). Among the journals rated by sociologists, the *American Sociological Review*, the *American Journal of Sociology*, *Social Forces*, and the *British Journal of Sociology* display the largest positive residuals, i.e., the largest "unearned" reputations, though the first two would still be very highly rated even if their ratings were exactly consonant with their influence as measured by the *SSCI* citation data.

In short, the residuals provide strong presumptive evidence that reputational measures of journal quality reflect persisting stereotypes rather than simply summarizing actual influence. This suggests at the very least that widely held stereotypes about some of the most prominent sociology and political science journals may need to be reconsidered. It also suggests that in thinking about the role various journals play in accrediting knowledge, it would be well to incorporate a behavioral as well as a reputational dimension.

Rating Sociology and Political Science Journals

Since the prestige rankings of sociology and political science journals were published in the early 1970s, many new journals have been established, the stature of journals may have changed, and citation information has become available. This recent citation information provides behavior-based comparative data for a wide range of journals in the social sciences.

The *SSCI* journal impact data do pose some problems, which we need to acknowledge. One problem is that of incomplete coverage. The *SSCI* data base does not include several journals that are increasingly important publication outlets in

sociology and political science. In political science, the list of exclusions includes *Political Behavior*, *Micropolitics*, and *Political Psychology*, to name only three examples from one relatively small corner of the discipline. If journal ratings are to be based on the *SSCI* impact scores, then being excluded from the *SSCI* data base is tantamount to being excluded from consideration altogether.

Exclusion of journals from the *SSCI* data base is a problem, but it is a problem of limited scope: the journals that are not included in the *SSCI* data base are, for the most part, journals that would not score very high in terms of impact if they were included. The truly major problem stems from the difficulty of defining the boundaries of a scholarly discipline. If we wish to determine which are the best sociology or political science journals, we must first be certain what we mean by a sociology or political science journal. This is a very difficult problem, and it is by no means peculiar to the *SSCI* data base; indeed, it affects every attempt to evaluate journals in any field. For example, Glenn's list of 63 journals includes several top journals from other disciplines (e.g., the *American Political Science Review*, the *American Economic Review*, and the *Harvard Educational Review*) as well as numerous interdisciplinary journals (e.g., *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Behavioral Science*, and *Social Science Quarterly*). The *SSCI*, for its part, categorizes journals according to their disciplinary affiliation, but its categories are hardly authoritative. To cite only three examples, should *Current History*, *IPW Berichte*, and the *Journal of Canadian Studies* really be considered three of the 77 journals subsumed under *SSCI*'s political science category?

Despite these problems, the *SSCI* impact data seem to us to provide a firmer foundation for assessing the quality of sociology and political science journals than any other method devised to this point. On the basis of the *SSCI* impact data, we get a fresh picture of the quality of several established journals. For example, *Sociology and Social Research*, which has been published for almost three-quarters of a century, has an impact score of only 0.103, which places it about 58th of the 66 journals in the *SSCI* sociology category. Similarly, the impact score of the venerable *Political Science Quarterly* (0.504) places it well below the other established political science journals. More dramatically, *World Politics*, the most prestigious journal according to the Giles-Wright ratings, has an impact score of 0.970, which would not place it among the top 10 in the Giles-Wright rating. Many regional journals also have lower impact ratings than might have been expected (e.g., *Sociological Quarterly*, *Sociological Perspectives*, and others not reported such as *Sociological Spectrum* and *Sociological Focus*)

(data not presented). And some specialized journals (e.g., *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Journal of Health and Social Research*, *Public Interest*) have a greater impact than their reputations would suggest. Of course, these comments should not be taken out of the context of the *SSCI* impact scores upon which they are based; any problems associated with the *SSCI* data to measure journal quality will have to be borne in mind in interpreting journal ratings based on the *SSCI* data.

Conclusion

If the medium accredits knowledge, assessment of the impact of journals that constitute the medium for the exchange of scholarly ideas demands more scrutiny than it has previously received. This study indicates that the prestige accorded many journals seems out of line with the impact these journals have had in the social science research community. The relationship between reputation and citation impact is nonlinear, best described as a sigmoid curve. A fairly clear-cut prestige hierarchy is present, but many of the most prestigious journals have less impact than might be expected, and many other journals have more impact than is attributed to them by the reputational ratings.

The availability of behavior-based journal ratings should mitigate the common tendency simply to count number of articles published as a measure of scientific productivity or to limit journal evaluations to outdated reputational hierarchies. It is easy to count articles, but it is difficult to draw meaningful comparisons. We believe that impact should be weighted much more heavily than simple number of articles or stereotypic journal reputations in assessing journal accreditation of scholarly work.

The *SSCI* citation data permit scholars to evaluate the importance of journals based not on opinion but on the frequency of citations. While such assessments do not directly measure the quality of journals, frequency of citation implies scholarly acceptance, or at least acknowledgment of importance through utilization of others' work. However, the *SSCI* should not become the litmus test for quality of social research. Journals have prestige, but their prestige is only derived from the usefulness of the articles they publish. In the long run, individual articles and books become the litmus test of quality. But practically, most of us work within very limited time parameters. Thus, in the short run journal citation data do provide deans, tenure committees, and those studying stratification in science a more defensible and less stereotyped means of measuring "accredited" knowledge than any other method now available.

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