Journal Impact factors: what they mean, what they don't mean, and why you should care

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Stokes Library
Wallace Hall
Lunch and Learn
November 30, 2011

Publish or Perish

- One's publication record is a key component of hiring, tenure and promotion decisions.
- Grant agencies want their money to support research that is widely distributed/relevant.

“I did all that research…

- Are people reading my work?
  - To me, this is a much more interesting question than which journals are most highly read.
- However, I am frequently asked by researchers for suggestions of the best journal for them to submit their work to.
  - The underlying assumption is that the more visible the journal is, the more your paper will get seen and (hopefully) read and (hopefully) cited.

Overview of session

- What is a citation?
- What is impact?
- What is a bibliographic database?

- Web of Science (a.k.a. Science Citation Index/Social Science Citation Index)
- Journal Citation Reports
- Journal's Impact Factor

- Google Scholar as an alternative to Web of Science
- Alternative measures of Impact Factor (briefly, if time)

- How do you decide the "best journal" to publish in?
- What is the best way to keep track of who's citing me?

Basic Definitions

- Impact = effect.
- Citation= entries in a list of references at the end of an article, chapter, book, etc.
- Database=collection of records about, for example, articles published in a particular field.

Impact of one article

- Looking for a way to quantify an article's impact.
- The simplest measure of impact is "Times Cited."
- Whether being cited is an indication of impact requires a leap of faith.

But even the simplest measure of impact (Times Cited) quickly gets complicated

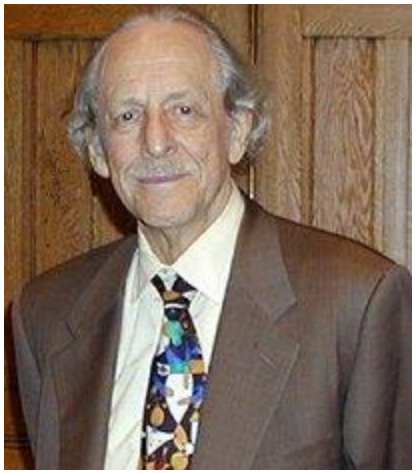
- What counts as a citation?
  - Self-citation?
  - Citation by one's co-authors?
  - Citation in a book chapter? Working paper? Dissertation? Conference presentation?
  - Only citations in peer-reviewed journal articles?

Continued...But even the simplest measure of impact (Times Cited) quickly gets complicated

- The older the article the more potential for citations. The total number of citations doesn't control for this.

- Some fields are much larger and would therefore have more citations.

The person who has given more thought to these questions than anyone else is Eugene Garfield



Eugene Garfield, Ph.D.

Citation Indexes for Science

A New Dimension in Documentation through Association of Ideas

Eugene Garfield

"The uncritical citation of disputed data by a writer, whether it be deliberate or not, is a serious matter. Of course, knowingly propagandizing unsubstantiated claims is particularly abhorrent, but just as many naive students may be swayed by unfounded assertions presented by a writer who is unaware of the criticisms. Buried in scholarly journals, critical notes are increasingly likely to be overlooked with the passage of time, while the studies to which they pertain, having been reported more widely, are apt to be rediscovered." (*1*)

In this paper I propose a bibliographic system for science literature that can eliminate the uncritical citation of fraudulent, incomplete, or obsolete data by making it possible for the conscientious scholar to be aware of criticisms of earlier papers. It is too much to expect a research worker to spend an inordinate amount of time searching for the bibliographic descendants of antecedent papers. It would not be excessive to demand that the thorough scholar check all papers that have cited or criticized such papers, if they could be located quickly. The citation index makes this check practicable. Even if there were no other use for a citation index than that of minimizing the citation of poor data, the index would be well worth the effort required to compile it.

This paper considers the possible utility of a citation index that offers a new approach to subject control of the literature of science. By virtue of its different construction, it tends to bring together material that would never be collated by the usual subject indexing. It is best described as an association-of-ideas index, and it gives the reader as much leeway as he requires. Suggestiveness through association-of-ideas is offered by conventional subject indexes but only within the limits of a particular subject heading.

If one considers the book as the macro unit of thought and the periodical article the micro unit of thought, then the citation index in some respects deals in the submicro or molecular unit of thought. It is here that most indexes are inadequate, because the scientist is quite often concerned with a particular idea rather than with a complete concept. "Thought" indexes can be extremely useful if they are properly conceived and developed.

In the literature-searching process, indexes play only a small, although significant, part. Those who seek comprehensive indexes to the literature of science fail to point out that such indexes, although they may be desirable, will provide only a better *starting point* than the one provided in the selective indexes at present available. One of the basic difficulties is to build subject indexes that can anticipate the infinite number of possible approaches the scientist may require. Proponents of classified indexes may suggest that classification is the solution to this problem, but this is by no means the

Science, 122(3159), p.108-11, July 1955.

Like every field…

- Garfield developed what were referred to as “Citation Indexes” to compile information about citation counts.
- These citations indexes evolved into the present day Web of Science
- nb: earlier versions of WoS were referred to as the discipline specific *Science Citation Index* and *Social Science Citation Index*

Web of Science

- We can talk about the impact of one article, one author, or one journal. All of this comes from the database Web of Science and the related product, Journal Citation Reports.
  - Bibliographic database.
  - http://isiknowledge.com/wos

- Alternatives to using Web of Science exist, most notably Google Scholar.

The workings of Web of Science

- Journals aren't included in Web of Science until they have a "proven publication record."
- Once Web of Science accepts a journal into its list of covered journals…
- The bibliographic information of each article of each issue of the journal is added to their database PLUS the References at the end of the article (REGARDLESS of whether or not the journal it appeared in is one of the journals Web of Science covers.)

References from back of article
MORTALITY DIFFERENTIALS BY MARITAL-STATUS - AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON
Author(s): HU, YR (HU, YR); GOLDMAN, N (GOLDMAN, N)
Source: DEMOGRAPHY Volume: 27 Issue: 2 Pages: 233-250 DOI: 10.2307/2061451 Published: MAY 1990

References

Baker, R. J., & Nelder, J. A. (1978). *The GLIM Manual: Release* 3. Oxford, UK: Numerical Algorithms Group.

Bishop, Y. M., Fienberg, S. E., & Holland, P. W. (1975). *Discrete Multivariate Analysis: Theory and Practice*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Cox, P. R., & Ford, J. R. (1964). "The Mortality of Widows Shortly After Widowhood." *Lancet*, 1, 163–164.

Fox, A. J., & Goldblatt, P. O. (1982). *Longitudinal Study: Sociodemographic Mortality Differentials*, Ser. LS, No. 1. London: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Gove, W. R. (1972). "The Relationship Between Sex Roles, Marital Status, and Mental Illness." *Social Forces*, 51, 34–44.

———. (1973). "Sex, Marital Status, and Mortality." *American Journal of Sociology*, 79, 45–66.

Grove, R. D., & Hetzel, A. M. (1968). *Vital Statistics Rates in the United States 1940–1960*. Washington, DC: National Center for Health Statistics.

Helsing, K. J., & Szklo, M. (1981). "Mortality After Bereavement." *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 114, 41–52.

Hu, Y.-H. (1987). "Patterns of Mortality Differentials by Marital Status in Low-Mortality Countries." *Journal of Population Studies*, 10, 97–128.

Kaprio, J., Koskenvuo, M., & Rita, H. (1987). "Mortality After Bereavement: A Prospective Study of 95,647 Widowed Persons." *American Journal of Public Health*, 77, 283–287.

Kiernan, K. E. (1988). "Who Remains Celibate?" *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 20, 253–263.

Kisker, E. E., & Goldman, N. (1987). "Perils of Single Life and Benefits of Marriage." *Social Biology*, 34, 135–152.

Klebba, A. J. (1970). *Mortality From Selected Causes by Marital Status: United States (Part B)*, National Center for Health Statistics, Ser. 20, No. 8b. Rockville, MD: U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Kobrin, F. E., & Hendershot, G. E. (1977). "Do Family Ties Reduce Mortality? Evidence From the United States, 1966–1968." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 39, 737–745.

References as they appear in Web of Science
Times Cited: 228 (from Web of Science)
Cited References: 28 [view related records]
Citation Map

These first two are books. Since books aren't covered in WoS there is no title.

There are 228 articles that cite this one

There are a total of 28 references (a.k.a. Cited References)

<< Back to previous page

Cited References

Title: MORTALITY DIFFERENTIALS BY MARITAL-STATUS - AN
Author(s): HU YR ; GOLDMAN N
Source: DEMOGRAPHY Volume: 27 Issue: 2 Pages: 233-250 DOI:
Citation Map

References: 28

Find Related Records | Clear All Pages | To find Related Records: Clear the che

1. Title: [not available]
Author(s): BAKER RJ
Source: GLIM MANUAL RELEASE Volume: 3 Published: 1978
Times Cited: 6 (from Web of Science)
Find it PUL

2. Title: [not available]
Author(s): BISHOP Y
Source: DISCRETE MULTIVARIAT Published: 1975
Times Cited: 4,603 (from Web of Science)
Find it PUL

3. Title: MORTALITY OF WIDOWS SHORTLY AFTER WIDOWHOOD
Author(s): COX PR; FORD JR
Source: LANCET Volume: 1 Issue: 732 Pages: 163-& Published: 1964
Times Cited: 88 (from Web of Science)
Find it PUL

4. Title: [not available]
Author(s): FOX AJ
Source: LONGITUDINAL STUDY S Published: 1982
Times Cited: 70 (from Web of Science)
Find it PUL

5. Title: SEX, MARITAL STATUS, AND MORTALITY
Author(s): GOVE WR
Source: AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY Volume: 79 Issue: 1 Pages: 45-6
Times Cited: 339 (from Web of Science)
Find it PUL | Full Text

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- **Conference Proceedings Citation Index™**
  — *1990 to present*
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- **Science Citation Index Expanded™**
  — *1900 to present*
  Fully indexes over 8,300 major journals across 150 disciplines
- **Social Sciences Citation Index™**
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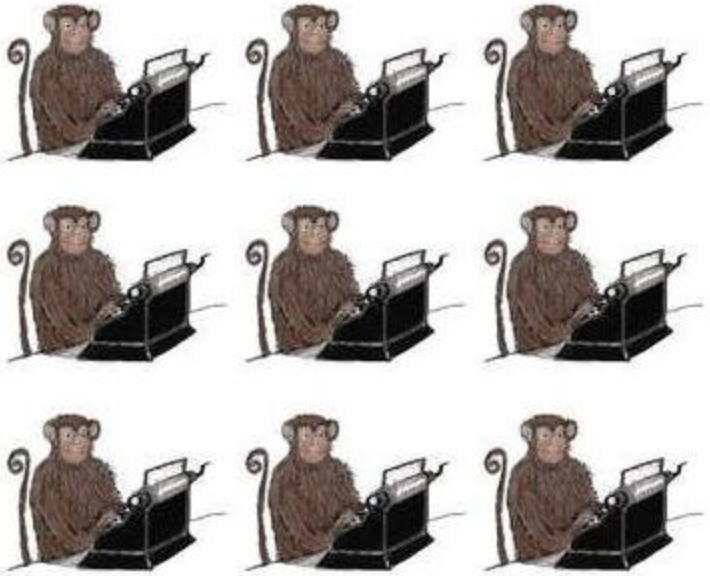
  Fully indexes over 4,500 social sciences journals, covering the most significant social sciences discoveries from all of the 20th century.
- **Arts & Humanities Citation Index®**
  — *to 1975 to present*
  Fully indexes over 2,300 arts and humanities journals, as well as selected items from over 250 scientific and social sciences journals

Coverage is highly selective back to 1900. Still…it is a very large database.

Harvard University, Baker Library, Harvard Business School, W280064_1

Web of Science entries evolved in a time when computer storage was expensive and data entry unsophisticated.

I always think of monkeys entering the references because obvious errors appear that could have been corrected. To correct them would have been too labor intensive.



TITLE: Journal impact factors and self-citations: Implications for psychology journals

AUTHOR(S): Anseel F (REPRINT); Duyck W; De Baene W; Brysbaert M

JOURNAL: AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGIST , 2004 , V59 , N1 (JAN) , P49-51

CITED REFERENCES:

NATURE, 2002, V415, P101
*AM PSYCH ASS, 2001, PUBL MAN AM PSYCH AS
ADAIR JG, 2003, V58, P15, AM PSYCHOL
AKSNES DW, 2003, V56, P235, SCIENTOMETRICS
BOOR M, 1982, V37, P975, AM PSYCHOL
GOTTFREDSON SD, 1978, V33, P920, AM PSYCHOL
LAWRENCE PA, 2003, V422, P259, NATURE
MCGARTHY C, 2000, V5, P1, CURRENT RES SOCIAL P
MOED HF, 1999, V46, P575, SCIENTOMETRICS

This is not meant to be a session on Web of Science, but

- Spelling variations are problematic. They use a standardized list of abbreviations but the citation is only as good as the article they are analyzing.
- Errors in citing articles' citations are perpetuated.
- The increasing role of unpublished working papers articles that may not be indexed by WoS.

One issue of a journal

Article from that journal issue

Article from that journal issue

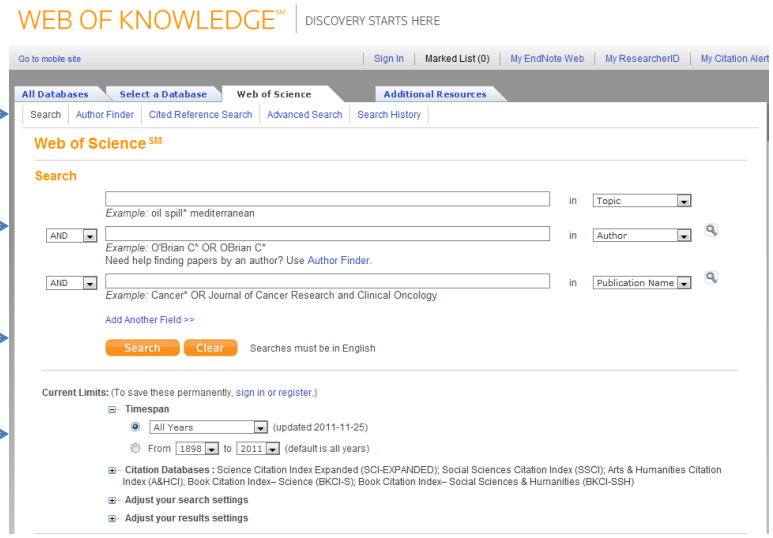
Article from that journal issue

Reference 1

Reference 2

Reference 3

Reference 4



The reference list is used to compute the impact factor for the journals cited in the reference list, not the journal that the article came from (unless they're the same).

From Times Cited to the Impact Factor

- The counts of Times Cited becomes the basis for the Impact Factor. Web of Science citations are compiled in a related database called Journal Citation Reports (JCR). The impact factors are available in JCR.
- The Impact Factor seems to have taken on a life of its own, from a very simple number to a oft-cited (pun intended) badge of honor.

Impact factor bragging rights

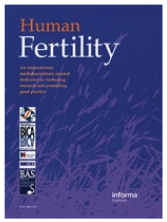
Impact Factor

- The Impact Factor is a an attempt to measure the impact a journal has had
- It is designed to “scale” the number of times a journal has been cited
- The older an article is, the more opportunities it has to have been cited.
- Some disciplines have more people working in them (child psychology vs. demography; surgery vs. mycology)

View this in your web browser View this on your mobile device

Human Fertility

Human Fertility now indexed by ISI



Dear Colleagues,

Informa Healthcare is pleased to announce that ***Human Fertility*** is now indexed by ISI and will receive its first **Impact Factor in 2012**!

Human Fertility *is a leading international, multidisciplinary journal dedicated to furthering research and promoting good practice in the areas of human fertility and infertility. Topics included span the range from molecular medicine to healthcare delivery, and contributions are welcomed from professionals and academics from the spectrum of disciplines concerned with human fertility.*

Editor-in-Chief:
Professor Henry Leese
University of Hull, UK

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Two-thirds of Wiley-Blackwell's Journal F Impact Factor

SEARCH PRESS RELEASES

SEARCH

June 29, 2010 Share This Printer-ready version

Two-thirds of Wiley-Blackwell's Journal Portfolio now has an Impact Factor

Hoboken, N.J.

Wiley-Blackwell, the scientific, technical, medical, and scholarly business of John Wiley & Sons, Inc., today announced that two thirds of its journals (67% and 1,013 titles) have an Impact Factor according to the Thomson ISI® 2009 Journal Citation Reports (JCR). This is a higher proportion of the list than any other major journals publisher. Of these ranked titles, nearly a quarter are in the top ten of their subject category (332 titles) whilst two thirds are in the top half of their category.

ISI Web of Knowledge℠

Journal Citation Reports®

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2010 JCR Social Science Edition

Journal: FUTURE OF CHILDREN

Mark	Journal Title	ISSN	Total Cites	Impact Factor	5-Year Impact Factor	Immediacy Index	Citable Items	Cited Half-life	Citing Half-life
☐	FUTURE CHILD	1054-8289	968	1.535	4.213	0.500	18	7.5	5.7

Cited Journal | Citing Journal | Source Data | Journal Self Cites

CITED JOURNAL DATA | CITING JOURNAL DATA | IMPACT FACTOR TREND | RELATED JOURNALS

Journal Information

Full Journal Title: FUTURE OF CHILDREN
ISO Abbrev. Title: Future Child.
JCR Abbrev. Title: FUTURE CHILD
ISSN: 1054-8289
Issues/Year: 3
Language: ENGLISH
Journal Country/Territory: UNITED STATES
Publisher: PRINCETON UNIV
Publisher Address: 277 WALLACE HALL, PRINCETON, NJ 08544
Subject Categories: FAMILY STUDIES — SCOPE NOTE | VIEW JOURNAL SUMMARY LIST | VIEW CATEGORY DATA
HEALTH POLICY & SERVICES — SCOPE NOTE | VIEW JOURNAL SUMMARY LIST | VIEW CATEGORY DATA
SOCIAL SCIENCES, INTERDISCIPLINARY — SCOPE NOTE | VIEW JOURNAL SUMMARY LIST | VIEW CATEGORY DATA

Journal Rank in Categories: JOURNAL RANKING

***Eigenfactor*™ Metrics**
Eigenfactor™ Score
0.00324
Article Influence™ Score
1.775

Additional Links
GO TO ULRICH'S

Journal Impact Factor

Cites in 2010 to items published in: 2009 = 9, 2008 = 57, Sum: 66
Number of items published in: 2009 = 26, 2008 = 17, Sum: 43

Calculation: Cites to recent items 66 / Number of recent items 43 = **1.535**

Computing Journal Impact Factor

Journal Impact Factor

Cites in 2010 to items published in: 2009 = 9, 2008 = 57, Sum: 66

Number of items published in: 2009 = 26, 2008 = 17, Sum: 43

Calculation: Cites to recent items / Number of recent items = 66 / 43 = **1.535**

5-Year Journal Impact Factor

Cites in {2010} to items published in: 2009 = 9, 2008 = 57, 2007 = 39, 2006 = 181, 2005 = 110, Sum: 396

Number of items published in: 2009 = 26, 2008 = 17, 2007 = 18, 2006 = 17, 2005 = 16, Sum: 94

Calculation: Cites to recent items / Number of recent items = 396 / 94 = **4.213**

Journal Self Cites

The tables show the contribution of the journal's self cites to its impact factor. This information is also r

Total Cites	968
Cites to Years Used in Impact Factor Calculation	66
Impact Factor	1.535

Self Cites	13 (1% of 968)
Self Cites to Years Used in Impact Factor Calculation	0 (0% of 66)
Impact Factor without Self Cites	1.535

Social Science Subject Categories for Journal Citation Reports (JCR)

- **Anthropology**
  Area Studies
  Business
  Business, Finance
  Communication
  Criminology & Penology
  Demography
  Economics
  Education & Educational Research
  Education, Special
  Environmental Studies
  Ergonomics
  Ethics
  Ethnic Studies
  Family Studies
  Geography
  Gerontology
  Health Policy & Services
  History
  History & Philosophy Of Science
  History of Social Sciences
  Industrial Relations & Labor
- **Information Science & Library Science**
  International Relations
  Law
  Linguistics
  Management
  Nursing
- **Planning & Development**
  Political Science
  Psychiatry
  Psychology, Applied
  Psychology, Biological
  Psychology, Clinical
  Psychology, Developmental
  Psychology, Educational
  Psychology, Experimental
  Psychology, Mathematical
  Psychology, Multidisciplinary
  Psychology, Psychoanalysis
  Psychology, Social
  Public Administration
  Public, Environmental & Occupational Health
  Rehabilitation
  Social Issues
  Social Sciences, Biomedical
  Social Sciences, Interdisciplinary
  Social Sciences, Mathematical Methods
  Social Work
  Sociology
  Substance Abuse
  Transportation
  Urban Studies
  Women's Studies

Journals are assigned to one or more categories.
That is how the impact factor takes on bragging rights

Impact factor vs. total cites for Demography Journals

TOTAL Cites

Mark	Rank	Abbreviated Journal Title (linked to journal information)	ISSN	JCR Data				
				Total Cites	Impact Factor	5-Year Impact Factor	Immediacy Index	Articles
	1	DEMOGRAPHY	0070-3370	3530	2.465	3.817	0.226	62
	2	POPUL DEV REV	0098-7921	1910	1.507	2.381	0.250	28
	3	INT MIGR REV	0197-9183	1837	1.188	2.145	0.188	32
	4	POP STUD-J DEMOG	0032-4728	1098	0.974	1.723	0.222	18
	5	STUD FAMILY PLANN	0039-3665	954	1.778	1.818	0.259	27
	6	J BIOSOC SCI	0021-9320	948	1.217	1.330	0.196	51
	7	J ETHN MIGR STUD	1369-183X	918	1.041	1.424	0.330	97
	8	PERSPECT SEX REPRO H	1538-6341	913	2.075	3.842	0.289	38
	9	J POPUL ECON	0933-1433	805	0.948	1.357	0.281	57
	10	DEMOGR RES	1435-9871	648	1.531	1.582	0.159	69

Impact factor

rom: subject categories DEMOGRAPHY VIEW CATEGORY SUMMARY LIST

: Impact Factor SORT AGAIN

1 - 20 (24) [1 | 2]

UPDATE MARKED LIST

Ranking is based on your journal and sort selections.

Mark	Rank	Abbreviated Journal Title (linked to journal information)	ISSN	JCR Data				
				Total Cites	Impact Factor	5-Year Impact Factor	Immediacy Index	Articles
	1	DEMOGRAPHY	0070-3370	3530	2.465	3.817	0.226	62
	2	INT FAM PLAN PERSPEC	0190-3187	602	2.118	2.575		0
	3	PERSPECT SEX REPRO H	1538-6341	913	2.075	3.842	0.289	38
	4	STUD FAMILY PLANN	0039-3665	954	1.778	1.818	0.259	27
	5	DEMOGR RES	1435-9871	648	1.531	1.582	0.159	69
	6	POPUL DEV REV	0098-7921	1910	1.507	2.381	0.250	28
	7	POPUL SPACE PLACE	1544-8444	267	1.429	1.500	0.176	34
	8	J BIOSOC SCI	0021-9320	948	1.217	1.330	0.196	51
	9	J REFUG STUD	0951-6328	306	1.191		0.074	27
	10	INT MIGR REV	0197-9183	1837	1.188	2.145	0.188	32

om: subject categories DEMOGRAPHY VIEW CATEGORY SUMMARY LIST

5-Year Impact Factor SORT AGAIN

- 20 (24) [1 | 2]

UPDATE MARKED LIST

Ranking is based on your journal and sort selections.

ark	Rank	Abbreviated Journal Title (linked to journal information)	ISSN	JCR Data				
				Total Cites	Impact Factor	5-Year Impact Factor	Immediacy Index	Articles
	1	PERSPECT SEX REPRO H	1538-6341	913	2.075	3.842	0.289	38
	2	DEMOGRAPHY	0070-3370	3530	2.465	3.817	0.226	62
	3	INT FAM PLAN PERSPEC	0190-3187	602	2.118	2.575		0
	4	POPUL DEV REV	0098-7921	1910	1.507	2.381	0.250	28
	5	INT MIGR REV	0197-9183	1837	1.188	2.145	0.188	32
	6	EUR J POPUL	0168-6577	417	1.049	1.966	0.350	20
	7	STUD FAMILY PLANN	0039-3665	954	1.778	1.818	0.259	27
	8	POPUL BULL	0032-468X	164	1.182	1.741	0.500	2
	9	POP STUD-J DEMOG	0032-4728	1098	0.974	1.723	0.222	18
	10	DEMOGR RES	1435-9871	648	1.531	1.582	0.159	69

You do the math!

- Impact factor=

  $$\frac{\text{Cites to recent items}}{\text{Number of recent items}}$$

- For journals with a few articles, the impact factor is easily influenced by the number of citations
- The latency (time to get published) makes using the previous two years of citations problematic.
- All citations count in the numerator, but certain types of articles are excluded from the denominator.
- A citation counted in the numerator may be a critique of the article in questi on.

Alternatives to impact factor

- 5 year impact factor
- Eigenfactor Score™ (see West et al., 2008)
- H-index (see Hirsch, 2005 in References)

- Calculations that may make sense in science, don't seem relevant in social science.
  - Cited half life
  - Immedicacy
  - H-factor

Sins of Omission

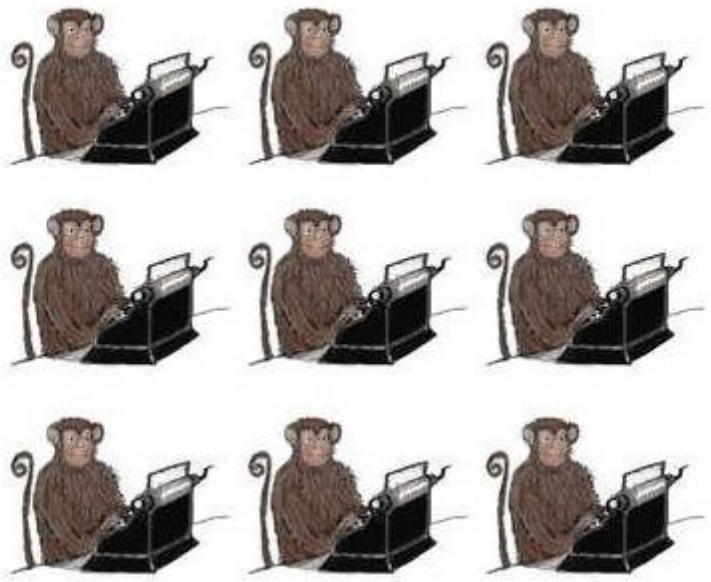
- One of my proudest moments at Princeton was when I realized that a certain journal's low ranking was due to a failure to send issues of the journal to the people who produce Web of Science.
- Fortunately this was before every impact factor became a household word.

Google Scholar vs. Web of Science

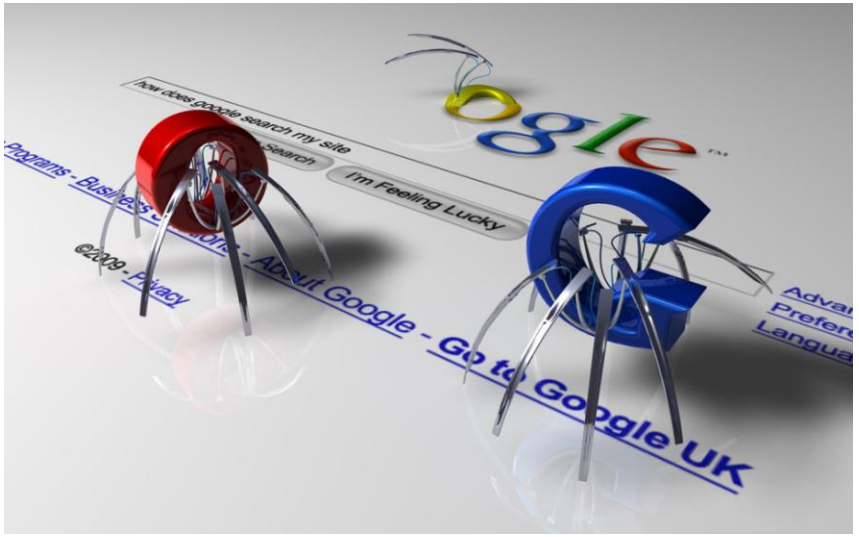
- Web of Science is the rich man's Google Scholar.
- We pay more than $100,000 for Web of Science. We have the full-blown version.
- Remember how Web of Science is created (data entry of each reference in a complete issue of a journal). Google is created much differently.

Google Scholar vs. WoS

Being indexed in Wos requires admission to the "in crowd."



Google Scholar includes everything that its robots can crawl on the internet.



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This powerful and disturbing book clearly links persistent poverty among blacks in the United States to the unparalleled degree of deliberate segregation they experience in American cities. American Apartheid shows how the black ghetto was created by whites ...
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The dimensions of residential segregation [PDF] from jstor.org
DS Massey... - Social forces, 1988 - sf.oxfordjournals.org
Abstract This paper conceives of residential segregation as a multidimensional phenomenon varying along five distinct axes of measurement: evenness, exposure, concentration, centralization, and clustering. Twenty indices of segregation are surveyed ...
Cited by 1164 - Related articles - Findit@PUL - All 7 versions

Complete citation analysis requires both GS and WoS

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THE DIMENSIONS OF RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION

Author(s): MASSEY, DS (MASSEY, DS); DENTON, NA (DENTON, NA)

Source: SOCIAL FORCES **Volume:** 67 **Issue:** 2 **Pages:** 281-315 **DOI:** 10.2307/2579183 **Published:** DEC 1988

Times Cited: 559 (from Web of Science)

Cited References: 68 [view related records] Citation Map

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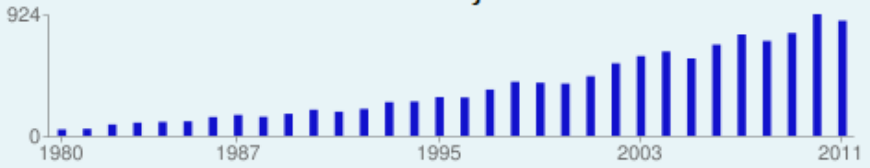

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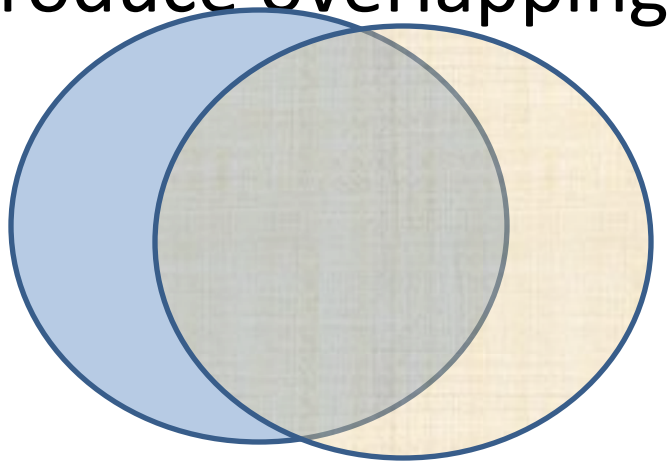

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Conclusions

- Journal Impact Factor is a very crude measure of a journal's impact in a discipline

- Do not make important decisions about submitting to a journal based on it

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