

Editorial: Multiple Submissions

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In my last chance to speak from the editorial vantage point I would like to discuss the problem of multiple submissions, which has been a concern for journal editors for a number of years. Although the American Sociological Association has stated a formal policy on multiple submissions, their position is not unanimously held, as evidenced by Peters' (1976) article attacking the ASA policy.

Multiple submissions present a processing problem for journals but are advantageous for the author who desires a fast favorable response from any one of a number of journals. (In some cases an editor's suspicions may be aroused by a mimeographed letter which begins "Dear Editor.") The CJE informs all reviewers of the disposition of articles they have reviewed, including articles withdrawn because of a parallel submission. It is hoped by this procedure to educate the reviewers, who of course are potential authors, to the disadvantages of multiple submissions. If the practice reduces the workload for reviewers, we may even be able to increase the number of reviewers per article. This in turn will help to reduce the number of instances where the fate of an article is primarily determined by the chance effects of reviewer selection (see Glenn, 1976). A second form of multiple submission, less frequently discussed, is probably more serious in its implications for scholarly publishing. It is the practice of publishing several variations of one article in a number of related journals. Reviewers sometimes encourage authors to indulge in this form of multiple submission (for example, the CJE reviewer who suggested that a manuscript was publishable but would be better handled as four or five separate articles).

The desire for multiple publication has an obvious cause. Even though we often hear that the quality of an individual's publications is more important than the quantity, we have ample evidence to the contrary. The articles by Arlin (1977, 1978) and Cox and Catt (1977) indicate that quantity of publication is the valued objective and that "more is better." Arlin (1977) notes disapprovingly that the 135,546 education research articles

indexed by the Current Index to Journals in Education for 1966–77 were written by more than 100,000 authors, and attacks “one-shot” publishing. Arlin (1978) also notes that 50% of the associate professors in Canadian faculties of education had no articles listed in CIJE for 1969–77, and Arlin uses this data to rank the Canadian faculties of education. Cox and Catt (1977) ranked psychology departments on the average number of publications (in APA journals for 1970–75) per faculty member and found a range of 1.4 to 9.3 publications per faculty member for the top 76 departments.

Pursuing the logic of this type of rating scheme, one can envision disturbing results. For example, Arlin (1978) suggests that two publications over the 1969–77 period are necessary to indicate a serious commitment to research and scholarly publication. Only 23% of his sample of 568 associate professors met this criterion. Bringing the remaining 77% up to the criterion level would require a total of 732 publications, or the output for *eight years of four* journals the size of the CJE/RCE (which publishes about 24 articles per year). Note that these four journals would take care only of the “needs” of associate professors in 22 Canadian faculties of education.

A cursory examination of the financial prospects for new journals in education indicates that the creation of new journals is not an answer, and that we should not be urging faculty members to increase their publication rates; indeed we might advocate just the opposite. However, in view of the ground rules in the promotion and tenure games, incentives to decrease publication frequency will have to be powerful.

At the same time, there are ways in which the availability of publications such as *Current Contents* and the various indexing services, including those that provided the grist for Arlin’s mill, may contribute to decreasing an author’s publication frequency. Authors have sometimes justified yielding to the pressure for quantity publications because of the need to bring their findings to the largest possible audience. There once was substantial validity to this reasoning, but the argument is no longer compelling. Today’s reader can locate varied sources in a short period of time by using new indexing services to find all articles which cite the key article in the field. (This reliance on indexing services raises an issue that is of special concern to Canadian readers — the state of indexing for Canadian journals, as described by Sawyer [1976].) Another way to diminish the frequency of multiple publication may be through the co-operative action of journals and their editors — for example, in rejecting an article because the author has published a similar article in another journal. Alert reviewers and editors can contribute to an increase in this kind of action. (In the past few years, at least two initiatives have been taken which may lead to increased communication and co-operation between editors of different journals. The Social Science Federation is considering the formation of a

council of editors, and the CSSE has been encouraging a similar type of network for education journal editors.)

A further possible effect of the meta-journals on publication frequency is suggested by Arlin's (1977) use of citations as indications of "impact." He mentions one author, the most prolific in his sample, who had 41 "first author" articles but had been cited by other authors only once over a two-year period. There is insufficient evidence to determine whether the 41 articles were on the same theme; but the sheer quantity makes it likely that they were closely related. The important point to be noted is that the *citation* figures provide the basis for Arlin's estimate of the amount of impact that an author is having on readers (in the case of Arlin's most prolific author, practically nil). If promotion and tenure committees start using "impact" as an indicator of quality, they may cause authors to become more concerned with quality than quantity of publication.

In this writer's view, there has been too much emphasis in scholarly publishing on the desire of authors to write, and insufficient emphasis on the topic preferences of readers. If the type of evidence produced by the citation indices can be used to reverse this emphasis, our journals may become more effective in achieving their primary goals.

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