

## ASR's Greatest Hits EDITOR'S COMMENT



The 100th anniversary of the founding of the American Sociological Association provides an auspicious occasion for reviewing some of the accomplishments of the *American Sociological Review*. *ASR* has been the official journal of

the ASA since 1936, when it replaced the *American Journal of Sociology* in this role (Abbott 1999). Since its very first volume, *ASR* has featured articles that have helped to shape the discipline. By examining its most influential articles, we can see *ASR*'s remarkably consistent influence as well as obtain a glimpse of the evolution of sociological scholarship.

Citation counts<sup>1</sup> for *ASR* articles dating back to 1936 were obtained from the online ISI *Social Sciences Citation Index*<sup>2</sup> (*Thompson Scientific 1956–2004*). Table 1 displays, by decade of publication, the number of high impact articles—those cited at least 100 times. As of November 2004, *ASR* featured 379 such articles. Between 1955 and 1995, a typical year saw just over eight articles attain this elite status. High impact articles thus represent a small but predictable fraction of articles. This pattern varies little from decade to decade despite the regular rotation of editors and broad historical changes in sociological theory and methods.

While it may appear from Table 1 that the 1960s and especially the 1970s were *ASR*'s golden years in terms of influence, the smaller representation of high impact articles in the earliest and most recent decades may well be spurious. The discipline was much smaller in the 1930s and 1940s; consequently the chances of

a given article garnering 100 or more citations would be lower than those in subsequent years. More importantly, the data from the ISI *Social Sciences Citation Index* only begin in 1956. As a result, citations by articles published before this date are not included in these data. The dearth in Table 1 of articles published since 1990 reflects the fact that these articles are still too recent for their full impact to be assessed. More than half of the citations to sociological articles typically occur more than 10 years after publication. Since 1995, at least 25 articles have been cited between 50 and 100 times, and thus the pattern for the 1990s may eventually resemble those of earlier periods.

Table 2 lists the members of the “*ASR* 500 Club”—those articles cited at least 500 times. The articles listed in Table 2 offer a brief walk down sociology's memory lane. *ASR*'s first extremely high impact article was Robert K. Merton's essay “Social Structure and Anomie,” published in *ASR* in 1938, which followed Merton's influential essay on the unintended consequences of social action in *ASR*'s first volume.

A number of famous papers just failed to reach the 500 mark, including Louis Guttman's paper on scaling (1944), Dennis Wrong's “Oversocialized Conception of Man” (1961), Gerhard Lenski's 1954 paper on “status crystallization” and William M. Goode's “A Theory of Role Strain” (1960). Since these papers con-

**Table 1.** High Impact *ASR* Articles, by Decade

Decade	Number of Articles with 100 Citations or More
1930s	3
1940s	11
1950s	46
1960s	90
1970s	115
1980s	85
1990s	29
Total	379

Source: ISI Social Sciences Citation Index (November, 2004).

<sup>1</sup> Citation counts represent the number of times an article has been referenced in subsequent studies.

<sup>2</sup> The Social Sciences Citation Index was developed by the Institute for Scientific Information in Philadelphia, which is now a division of Thompson Scientific, Incorporated.

**Table 2.** *ASR's 500 Club: Papers Cited at Least 500 Times*

Year	Authors	Article Title	Citations
1983	Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell	The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields ( <i>ASR</i> 48:147–60)	1,753
1960	Alvin W. Gouldner	The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement ( <i>ASR</i> 25:161–78)	1,320
1950	W.S. Robinson	Ecological Correlations and the Behavior of Individuals ( <i>ASR</i> 15:351–57)	1,261
1962	Richard M. Emerson	Power-Dependence Relations ( <i>ASR</i> 27:31–41)	925
1968	Marvin Scott and Stanford Lyman	Accounts ( <i>ASR</i> 33:46–62)	790
1959	Melvin Seeman	On the Meaning of Alienation ( <i>ASR</i> 24:783–91)	749
1967	Charles Perrow	Framework for Comparative Analysis of Organizations ( <i>ASR</i> 32:194–208)	743
1984	Michael Hannan and John Freeman	Structural Inertia and Organizational-Change ( <i>ASR</i> 49:149–164)	733
1957	Gresham Sykes and David Matza	Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency ( <i>ASR</i> 22:664–670)	709
1956	Leo Srole	Social Integration and Certain Corollaries: An Exploratory Study ( <i>ASR</i> 21:709–716)	699
1963	Stewart Macaulay	Non-Contractual Relations in Business: A Preliminary Study ( <i>ASR</i> 28:55–67)	699
1986	Ann Swidler	Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies ( <i>ASR</i> 51:273–86)	619
1979	Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson	Social-Change and Crime Rate Trends: Routine Activity Approach ( <i>ASR</i> 44:588–608)	586
1975	Duane Alwin and Robert Hauser	Decomposition of Effects in Path Analysis ( <i>ASR</i> 40:37–47)	562
1938	Robert K. Merton	Social Structure and Anomie ( <i>ASR</i> 3:672–82)	532
1986	David Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Jr., Steven K. Worden and Robert D. Benford	Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation ( <i>ASR</i> 51:464–81)	525
1965	Norman B. Ryder	The Cohort as a Concept in the Study of Social-Change ( <i>ASR</i> 30:843–861)	513
1940	C. Wright Mills	Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive ( <i>ASR</i> 5:904–913)	509

Source: ISI Social Sciences Citation Index (November, 2004).

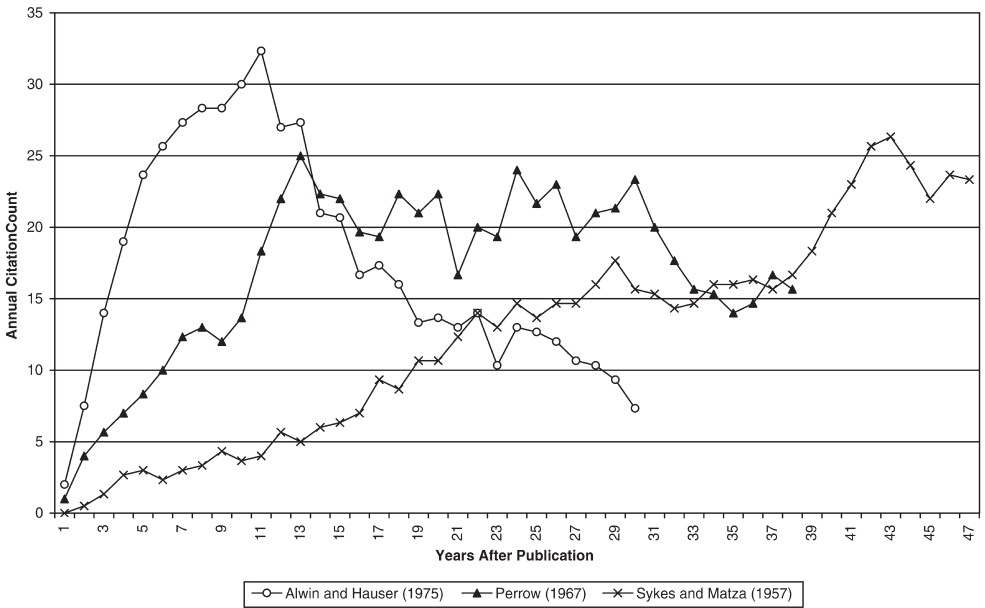
tinue to be cited, several of these may well pass the 500 mark before long.

The most frequently cited article in *ASR* history is Paul Dimaggio and Walter Powell's (1983) essay on institutional isomorphism, with some 1,700 citations to date (and still accumulating). Other relatively recent additions to this list include Ann Swidler's (1986) "culture as tool kit" essay and David Snow et al.'s (1986) piece on frame analysis and social movements.

The list highlights some familiar themes, such as the prominence of functionalist theory before 1970 and the rise of multivariate statistics since that time. The prominence of theoretical and methodological articles on this list may be surprising, as is the relative scarcity

of status attainment articles (these are better presented in the list of the *ASR* articles cited 100 times or more). *ASR* is known for its carefully crafted research reports, yet it is the theoretical and methodological articles that dominate this list of greatest hits.

The data also address whether the decline of a set of core precepts has made it impossible for seminal works to be visible across the discipline. In this light, the presence of four *ASR* articles from the 1980s on this list of top-cited articles is heartening. The 1980s total equals that of the 1950s, trails the 1960s (six entries), but exceeds the 1970s (two entries). In short, a select group of special articles continue to garner interest from researchers working on far-ranging topics.



**Figure 1.** The Citation Life Course of 3 *ASR* Articles

The *ASR* 500 Club articles have a particularly long shelf-life, but the profile of influence varies. The number of citations in the second decade after publication is typically greater than in the first decade. The exception is revealing: Duane Alwin and Robert Hauser's methodological article (1975), "Decomposing Effects in Path Analysis," was influential almost immediately. Other articles are late bloomers. Citations to Gresham Sykes and David Matza's (1957) "Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency" have been gradually increasing over the last 47 years, with no sign yet that its peak has been reached. A middle-ground is typified by Charles Perrow article (1967), "Framework for Comparative Analysis of Organizations," which had a 20-year period of consistent citations. Figure 1 depicts the citation life course of these three high-impact *ASR* papers. This figure displays each article's annual citation count by the number of years after an article was published. It contrasts the rapid ascent of the Alwin and Hauser article, the long plateau of the Perrow article, and the late-blooming Sykes and Matza article.

The many high-impact articles with enduring influence suggests that there is much to celebrate in *ASR*'s history. This list of *ASR*'s greatest hits also offers much food for thought for sociological practitioners, historians of sociology,

and future editors alike. Scholars can consider who is omitted and what lines of inquiry appeared more prominently in other outlets. A longer essay, entitled "Further reflections on *ASR*'s greatest hits," along with a list of *ASR*'s 379 most cited articles, sorted by both citation frequency and year, can be found on *ASR*'s website (<http://www.asanet.org/journals/asr/>).

—Jerry A. Jacobs, Editor

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