

Social Problems

Annual Report - New York City

June 2018-May 2019



University of Cincinnati

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The Official Journal of the Society for the Study of Social Problems



Social Problems

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Annulla Linders, Co-Editor
Earl Wright II, Co-Editor
University of Cincinnati

July 12, 2019

To: SSSP Board of Directors, Publications Committee, Associate Editors, Editorial Board

From: Annulla Linders and Earl Wright II, Co-Editors

Re: *Social Problems* Annual Report, 2019

First things first: our work, including this report, would not have been possible without help from a number of people, including especially our graduate assistants, Managing Editor Shaonta Allen and Assistant Editors Marcus Brooks and Kyle Shupe.

At SSSP, we continuously rely on the expertise (and memory!) of Michele Koontz and Hector Delgado. At OUP, we rely on and are supported by Michael Blong (for everything), Brittany Hobson (for marketing), Mary Pelosi Ejlali (for production), and Simone Larche (all things Manuscript Central). And a special thanks to Trenton Haltom, Chair of the Social Media Committee, and to Cindy Carlton-Ford, our Production Editor and English-language magician.

We also take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation for the work done by our Associate Editors and Advisory Board members, and – not in the least – our Student Board members. We could not do this without you!

The Report

In this report, we include a long-term perspective on the journal in order to capture trends over time. *Social Problems* began using the Manuscript Central submission system in mid-2008, which means we can capture basic submission trends over a 10-year period.

For comparative purposes, we have standardized the reporting period to calendar years and also use submitted manuscripts during a given year as the basis for calculating manuscript disposition rates (i.e., deflect, reject, and accept rates). In the recent past, these numbers were calculated using the number of decisions made in a 12 (sometimes 13) month period, which makes sense in the short-run but is too variable to be an effective long-term unit of comparison.

For other parts of the report, these long-term trajectories are not possible to generate due to the limitations of Manuscript Central. For example, when it comes to trends in the content and methods of submitted papers, this information is not available on Manuscript Central, and we use numbers from former Editor Pamela Quiroz's reports to provide a short-term overview in these areas.

The Team

We have retained all Associate Editors and made no changes to the Advisory Board since last year (see: Appendix 2). However, we have expanded the Student Board from 13 to 20 members. We are currently in the process of replacing several students who have served for at least a year. A general call to SSSP graduate student members has gone out. Our fantastic Social Media editor, Trenton Haltom, is staying on (hopefully forever!). Our 3 fantastic graduate assistants—Shaonta Allen, Marcus Brooks, and Kyle Shupe—are also staying with us, as is our Production Editor, Cindy Carlton-Ford.

Work During the Year

By now everyone on our team is well-versed in the online submission system and our editorial routines, which means that the day-to-day running of the journal goes very smoothly.

Thinking more long-term, we have worked on a few specific goals during the past year. First, increasing the number of submissions; second, and related, shortening the time from submission to decision; third, setting in motion a special issue on work inspired by W. E. B Du Bois; and fourth, increasing the attention given to the journal (part of this

work is done by the Social Media Committee led by Trenton Haltom - you receive a separate report from him; another part is done by Oxford University Press (OUP), under Brittany Hobson's leadership – this is part of the OUP report).

Thinking into the future, we are thinking especially about the optimal number of papers for us to publish and also how to even better serve the discipline as a whole.

Submissions

As is evident from Table 1, submissions of new manuscripts dipped below 300 in 2017 for the first time since 2011. It is of course difficult to determine the cause of this decline in submissions, but one possibility is that the recent lengthening of the time from submission to decision has been a contributing factor (see Table 4) - both anecdotal evidence from conversations with colleagues and social media chatter picked up by our graduate students support such a conclusion.

As is evident from Table 1, submissions are up by about 25% in 2019 compared to the same period last year (not counting the special issue submissions). Although good news, it is too soon to tell if this increase reflects our efforts to reverse the recent decline in manuscript submissions or if it simply reflects the shift in editors (the data show submission bumps in 2012 and 2015, which also coincide with new editors).

Table 1: Manuscripts Received, 2009-2019

	New Submissions	Revised Submissions	Total Submissions
2009	307	40	347
2010	287	70	357
2011	262	58	320
2012	329	113	442
2013	327	101	428
2014	323	63	386
2015	375	114	489
2016	335	155	490
2017	295**	43	338
2018	291 (2)***	58	349
2019*	208 (30)***	44	248

*Data for 2019 include the period from January 1st to June 30th.

**In 2017, *Social Problems* published an additional 7 papers as a special issue based on a 2016 ASA Plenary Panel organized by Aldon Morris. These papers were not processed in Manuscript Central.

***The numbers in parentheses refer to the manuscripts that were submitted to the Du Bois special issue.

Another important consideration when it comes to submission patterns is their impact on the proportion of papers that are accepted and rejected. Acceptance rates are no longer the only measure that captures the standing of journals in the discipline, which is a good thing. But it is still something we monitor as it is a measure that prospective authors care about and also an indication of the journal's attractiveness as a publishing destination.

Table 2 provides an overview of the distribution of decisions on manuscripts submitted since 2009. Overall, the table shows that the acceptance rate, while fluctuating from year-to-year, is still fairly stable over time (ranging from 5% to 15%, with an average of 9.5%). The deflection rate varies a bit more over time and probably captures variations in editorial preferences rather than the quality of papers submitted.

Table 2: Final Decisions on Original Manuscripts by Year* First Submitted, 2009-2019					
	MS without Decisions**	Deflect	Reject	Accept	Total
2009	8	139 (45%)	131 (43%)	29 (9.4%)	307
2010	10	53 (53%)	102 (36%)	22 (7.7%)	287
2011	3	101 (38%)	125 (48%)	33 (12.6%)	262
2012	1	88 (27%)	211 (64%)	29 (8.8%)	329
2013	2	105 (32%)	203 (62%)	17 (5.2%)	327
2014	7	93 (29%)	180 (56%)	43 (13.3%)	323
2015	8	80 (21%)	232 (62%)	55 (14.7%)	375
2016	2	120 (36%)	195 (58%)	18 (5.4%)	335
2017	0	120 (41%)	150 (51%)	25 (8.6%)	295
2018	47	110 (38%)	105 (36%)	29 (10%)	291****
2019***	110	58 (32%)	38	2	208****

*Counts all MS decisions by year they were originally submitted, regardless of year a final decision was made on the manuscript.

**Manuscripts without a decision include MS that received Revise & Resubmit decisions but were never resubmitted, MS that were unsubmitted and never resubmitted, MS that did not complete the review process for another reason, or MS still under review.

***2019 includes MS submitted between January 1, 2019 through June 30, 2019.

****Data for these 2018-2019 are preliminary as many of the submitted manuscripts are still under review. These totals do not include the manuscripts submitted for the Du Bois special issue (2 in 2018 and 30 in 2019).

Looking at the final disposition of revised manuscripts, Table 3 shows fairly extensive variation regarding the final decision, both reject and accept ranging from about 30% to 70% (we have no theory for why that is). But on average about 45% of resubmitted manuscripts have ended up getting accepted over the past decade.

Table 3: Final Decisions on R&R MS by Year Originally Submitted, 2009-2019

	MS without Decisions*	Reject	Accept	Total**
2009	2	15 (33%)	28 (62%)	45
2010	0	15 (42%)	21 (58%)	36
2011	0	51 (61%)	32 (39%)	83
2012	0	54 (65%)	29 (35%)	83
2013	1	17 (49%)	17 (49%)	35
2014	0	25 (37%)	43 (63%)	68
2015	1	71 (56%)	55 (43%)	127
2016	0	29 (62%)	18 (38%)	47
2017	1	10 (28%)	25 (69%)	36
2018	28	4 (7%)	28 (47%)	60
2019	3	0	0	44

* Manuscripts without decision primarily reflects papers under review. We are not entirely sure what happened to the older papers.

** Revised manuscripts are counted only once, so all Conditionally Accepted manuscripts (.R2s) are not double counted.

Additional submission data are available in Appendix 1, including manuscript topic areas, methods of submitted papers, and countries of submitting authors.

Time from Submission to Decision

Under the assumption that it might matter for the attractiveness of the journal, one of our main goals this year has been to shorten the time from submission to decision for manuscripts we send out for review. In 2017 that time was just over 180 days, in 2018 it was about 140 days, and so far in 2019 it is about 95 days (see: Table 4). We find a similar pattern for time from submission to decision of revised papers (see Table 5).

Table 4: Average Time from Original Submission to First Decision (in Days), 2015-2019*

	Deflect	Reject	Revise & Resubmit
2015	29	164	168
2016	43	160	164
2017	51	185	183
2018	36	137	141
2019	37	96	92

*Less than a handful of manuscripts are accepted after the first round of reviews. Those MS are not included here.

**Data for 2019 cover the period from January 1st to June 30th and are, of course, preliminary.

Table 5: Average Time from R&R Submission to Final Decision (in Days), 2015-2019*

	Reject	Conditional Accept	Accept
2015	142	159	113
2016	139	137	99
2017	140	190	122
2018	105	104	57
2019	71	86	27

*Because different editors have used the Conditional Accepts in different ways, we only include data for the years during which editors have used it in the same way.

**Data for 2019 cover the period from January 1st to June 30th and are, of course, preliminary.

We have used several strategies to reduce the time from submission to decision, including:

- **Reducing the time it takes for the editorial office to handle the papers,** especially in terms of how we use the Student Board and by relying more on the Editors to select reviewers. We now make deflected decisions before papers go to the Student Board, we no longer return manuscripts to Student Board members after 3 reviews are submitted, nor do we solicit additional reviewer suggestions from Student Board members if their original recommendations do not accept. As we show in Table 6, these changes have reduced the time from submission to decision by about 3-to-5 weeks.

Table 6: Average Time from Submission to Decision

	Average Time (in Days) in Internal Processing	Average Time (in Days) in External Review*	Average Time (in Days) from Submission to 1st Decision**
2009	--	--	166
2010	--	--	138
2011	--	--	138
2012	--	--	147
2013	--	--	127
2014	--	--	131
2015	69	96	165
2016	81	79	160
2017	95	89	184
2018	51	85	136
2019	42	54	96

*Time in external review captures the time from when the first reviewer is invited to when the last review is submitted. Manuscript Central is not able generate these numbers automatically, so we have calculated these times by hand. This is a time consuming process, so we have only calculated these rates from 2015 to 2019.

**These do not include deflected papers. But both original and revised manuscripts.

- **Reducing reviewing time** by giving reviewers 5 weeks, rather than 6 weeks, to complete their reviews, which has produced a shorter turn-around time (see: Table 7). We also revised the automated reminder prompts generated in Manuscript Central as well as decreased the number of reviewers invited to secure 3 reviewers (see Table 8) and, hence, shortened the time spent securing reviewers.

Table 7: Average Time for Reviewers to Complete Reviews (in Days), 2009-2019

	Days
2009	41
2010	43
2011	42
2012	41
2013	40
2014	40
2015	38
2016	38
2017	40
2018	38
2019	31

Table 8: Average Number of Reviewers Invited per Manuscript to Secure 3 Reviewers, 2009-2019*

	Average	Median
2009	7.4	7
2010	8.3	8
2011	7.8	7
2012	7	6
2013	7	6
2014	8.2	7
2015	7.8	7
2016	8.2	7
2017	9.1	9
2018	6.6	6
2019	5.9	5

* Includes both original and revised submissions

Special Issue

A special issue on contemporary uses of the Sociology of W. E. B. Du Bois, co-edited by Earl Wright II and ASA President-Elect Aldon Morris, is in the works. Our call for papers generated 32 submissions; half of these papers have been sent out for review, and the rest were deflected. Because we still do not know how many papers will be favorably reviewed and eventually accepted, we have not yet determined how many papers will be part of the issue, or how to fit the special issue papers into the publishing queue. Additional publishing space to accommodate the issue would need to be negotiated with OUP.

Content Attention and Marketing

Our goal is to continue the wonderful work that the student-run Social Media Committee, chaired by Trenton Haltom, University of Nebraska, has accomplished. We have worked with Trenton and Brittany to stabilize the quality and utility of the **Author Attic** interviews, in part with the help of new branding/artwork and in part by making them more accessible on the website. Trenton and Brittany will have more to say about this, but check out the latest interviews with [Paul Froese](#), [Ranita Ray](#), and [Kasey Henricks](#).

We also keep working with OUP on assembling **Virtual Issues** (curated collections of papers previously published in the journal). An issue on [Sexual Violence](#), curated and introduced by Nicole Bedera and Trenton Haltom was published in the spring of 2019. And we have just submitted the next virtual issue on [Immigration](#), curated and introduced by Student Board member Sevsem Cicek-Okay. The purpose of these issues is to keep generating interest for the content of the journal, in this case by bundling together papers that speak to similar issues. Brittany's report will contain more information about this.

Thinking About the Future

Everything about the journal is good, even great, so our ideas here are not about fixing something that is broken. On the contrary, it is more about how to leverage our strengths. These are just a few ideas, some of which require board and, in some cases, OUP involvement.

- As we discussed last year, we would like to do away with the **publishing fee**. This is a \$100 fee that authors who are not members of SSSP, and who are not students, must pay in order to be published. Upon acceptance, authors are given a choice of joining SSSP or paying the fee.

Apart from being an outlier in the world of sociology journals and causing confusion (among our Managing Editor, the SSSP office, and authors), it has negligible financial impact on SSSP and/or OUP. Hence we do not think this change requires contract renegotiations. With only a handful of authors paying the fee, most revenue is generated through memberships, but the numbers are fairly small (we publish about 28-30 papers a year, several of which are authored or co-authored by PhD students). We expect the Editorial and Publications Committee to bring a recommendation to the SSSP board during the New York meetings.

- As we also discussed last year, we would also like to do away with the \$25 **submission fee**, although this issue is a bit more complicated, and less out of sync with other sociology journals, some of which have a submission fee (e.g., *Social Forces*) and others do not (e.g., *Gender & Society*), than the publishing fee issue for a number of reasons. Financially, this would be more impactful and probably require some contract negotiations; with about 350 new submissions every year, this fee generates about \$8,750 annually (these dollars are collected by OUP, but are reflected in the contract).

When it comes to submissions, we suspect that the elimination of the fee would increase new submissions. This could be a good thing, giving us more papers to choose from, but it could also become a somewhat unnecessary extra burden on the editorial office if it led to an increase in the number of papers that are not quite ready and hence are typically deflected (i.e., desk rejected). In so far as there is any risk that a prospective author chooses another journal over *Social Problems* because of the submission fee, then the submission fee is an obstacle to our larger mission. Perhaps this issue requires a more in-depth investigation than we have been able to do at this point? We expect the Editorial and Publications Committee to bring a recommendation to the SSSP board during the New York meetings.

- If the increase in original submissions is sustained, we think it would be appropriate to re-negotiate our **page budget** with OUP. It would give us an opportunity to publish more papers but without undermining the attractiveness of the journal. With the current page budget, we publish about 28-30 papers per year, or 7-8 papers per issue (not counting the Presidential Address). If we aim to keep the journal highly competitive at an acceptance rate below 10%, a modest page increase (amounting to about one more paper per issue, for example), would then require an average of about 350 new submissions every year. This we think is doable.
- On the initiative of Assistant Editor Kyle Shupe, we are planning a set of **teaching resources** anchored in the papers published in the journal. We are in the early stages here, so nothing set in stone yet, but we are thinking along the lines of a mix between sample syllabi and virtual issues. We welcome ideas and suggestions from you all.

Appendix 1: Additional Information About Papers and Authors

Table 9: MS Submissions by Author's* Region and Country						
Region/Country	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
Africa	1	1	2	2	0	6
Egypt	0	0	0	1	0	1
Nigeria	0	0	0	1	0	1
South Africa	0	1	2	0	0	3
Tunisia	1	0	0	0	0	1
Asia	20	18	17	18	16	89
Azerbaijan	0	1	0	0	0	1
China	2	0	2	2	1	7
Hong Kong	2	1	2	4	0	9
India	0	2	0	0	1	3
Iran	1	0	0	1	1	3
Israel	10	8	8	7	6	39
Japan	2	1	0	0	2	5
Jordan	0	1	1	0	0	2
South Korea	2	2	0	1	0	5
Pakistan	0	0	2	0	1	3
Russia	0	0	0	1	0	1
Saudi Arabia	0	0	0	0	1	1
Singapore	0	1	2	2	3	8
Taiwan	1	1	0	0	0	2
Australia and Oceania	5	9	8	9	1	32
Australia	4	8	6	9	1	28
Fiji	0	0	1	0	0	1
New Zealand	1	1	1	0	0	3
Europe	36	44	24	33	10	147
Austria	0	0	0	1	0	1
Belgium	2	1	2	0	2	7
Croatia	0	0	0	1	0	1
Czech Republic	1	0	0	1	0	1
Denmark	3	4	0	2	1	10
Estonia	1	0	0	0	0	1
Finland	2	1	0	0	0	3
France	2	1	2	1	1	7
Germany	4	4	5	6	0	19
Hungary	1	1	0	0	0	2
Iceland	1	0	0	0	0	1
Ireland	0	0	1	1	0	2
Italy	1	2	1	0	0	4

Luxembourg	1	0	0	0	0	1
Netherlands	5	7	2	4	1	19
Norway	0	3	0	1	1	5
Poland	1	0	0	0	1	2
Portugal	0	2	0	0	0	2
Slovenia	1	0	0	1	0	2
Spain	1	1	1	3	0	6
Sweden	1	2	1	4	0	8
Switzerland	1	2	1	0	1	5
United Kingdom	7	13	8	7	3	38
North America	309	258	242	225	181	1,215
Canada	15	15	8	10	4	52
Mexico	1	0	0	2	0	3
United States of America	293	243	234	213	177	947
South America	0	2	1	1	0	4
Chile	0	2	0	1	0	3
Ecuador	0	0	1	0	0	1
Unknown Country	4	3	1	0	0	8

*Author's country refers to the submitting author's listed country of residence on Manuscript Central.

Table 10: New MS Submissions by Method, 2016-2019

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Qualitative	52%	48%	43%	50%
Quantitative/Mixed/Other	48%	52%	57%	50%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 11: Original MS Submissions by Topic Area, 2016-2019

MS Topic Area	2016	2017	2018*	2019**
Children & Youth	6 (1.8%)	8 (2.7%)	4 (2.1%)	2 (1.1%)
Crime & Juvenile Delinquency	25 (7.4%)	24 (8.2)	13 (6.7%)	11 (6.2%)
Deviance	2 (.6%)	6 (2%)	0	0
Disabilities	1 (.3%)	0	0	0
Education	19 (5.7%)	17 (5.8%)	16 (8.5%)	14 (7.8%)
Environment & Technology	15 (5.5%)	8 (2.7%)	6 (3.2%)	11 (6.2%)
Family	9 (2.7%)	6 (2%)	8 (4.2%)	15 (8.4%)
Gender	7 (2.1%)	16 (5.4%)	14 7.4%)	11 (6.2%)
Global Issues	4 (1.2%)	5 (1.7%)	0	0
Health	17 (5.1%)	17 (5.8%)	12 (6.4%)	8 (4.5%)
Identity	6 (1.8%)	0	3 (1.6%)	1 (.6%)
Immigration	16 (4.8%)	18 (6.1%)	8 (4.2%)	8 (4.5%)
Law & Society	10 (3%)	18 (6.1%)	2 (1.1%)	7 (3.9%)
Life Course	3 (.9%)	3 (1%)	2 (11%)	2 (1.1%)

Media	7 (2.1%)	5 (1.7%)	3 (1.6%)	1 (.6%)
Methods	2 (.6%)	0	0	0
Politics	22 (6.6%)	12 (4.1%)	6 (3.2%)	2 (1.1%)
Poverty, Class, & Inequality	22 (6.6%)	15 (5.1%)	16 (8.5%)	14 (7.9%)
Race & Ethnicity	24 (7.2%)	31 (10.5%)	28 (14.8%)	19 (10.7%)
Religion	10 (3%)	7 (2.4%)	3 (1.6%)	3 (1.7%)
Sexuality	12 (3.6%)	7 (2.4%)	2 (1.1%)	8 (4.5%)
Social Movements	11 (3.3%)	16 (5.4%)	12 (6.4%)	5 (2.8%)
Social Welfare Policy	1 (.3%)	0	3 (1.6%)	4 (2.2%)
Social Problems Theory	20 (6%)	6 (2%)	0	0
Work & Economy	20 (6%)	18 (6.1%)	12 (6.4%)	13 (7.3%)
Other	31 (9.3%)	21 (7.4%)	16 (8.5%)	19 (10.7%)
Not Coded	12 (3.6%)	1 (.3%)	0	0
Total	334	294	189	178

*Includes data only for the period from May 1st to December 30th

** Includes data for the period from January 1st to June 30th. Special issue submissions are not included.

Appendix 2: Social Problems Advisory Board, 2018-2019**Co-Editors**

Annulla Linders, University of Cincinnati

Earl Wright II, University of Cincinnati

Managing Editor: Shaonta Allen, University of Cincinnati

Assistant Editors: Marcus Brooks and Kyle Shupe, University of Cincinnati

Production Editor: Cindy Carlton-Ford

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Sevsem Cicek-Okay, University of Cincinnati
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