

A Study of Departmental and Faculty Eminence in Family Science Reconsidered: A Critique

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Over the past several years, *Family Science Review* has published several attempts to rate the quality of family science departments and recognize the leading scholars in the field. The Meredith, Abott, and Lamanna (1987) study examined twenty journals considered central to the family field over a six year period and determined which family science departments had published the most juried articles with a family focus in that time period. Another study by Meredith and Abbott (1988) profiled the leading family studies scholars based on the numbers of refereed articles published in 24 family oriented journals from 1980-1987. One critique of these two studies was that the quality and impact of the articles were not judged and that only articles with a family focus were considered. Articles in child development or gerontology, for example, were not counted. Another study by Burr, Schvaneveldt, Roleder, and Marshall (1988) evaluated reputational data concerning different departments. The major difficulty with their research design was that retrospective reputational ratings may not be indicative of recent scholarly activity of departments.

The preceding article, "A Study of Departmental and Faculty Eminence in Family Science Reconsidered" by Gerald R. Adams is an attempt to correct errors found in an earlier version of his paper (Adams, Huston, Braeger, & Goff, 1989). This study attempts to evaluate departments objectively by determining first and second authorship based on frequency of authored publications listed in *Social Science Citation Index* (SSCI). Authored publications, one indicator of eminence, included the number of book reviews, books in print, and journal articles. A second indicator (a measure of quality) was the number of times an author's article was cited by others. Adams' study, therefore, was an attempt to examine both quantity and quality of publications, and from that to rank the most productive and influential faculty in 30 family science departments. Previous studies have considered only articles with a family focus. The current article includes child development.

Unfortunately, while the intent of the Adams' paper is commendable, his data based upon citations in the *Social Science Citation Index* is flawed. I have communicated several times with the author regarding the original article and its revision. Upon reading his paper, the reader logically could believe that few errors in counting citations would be possible when the author states that two coders reported interrater reliability ranging from .94 to 1.00 for the full sample. Those correlations would mean little, however, if the two coders were making the same mistakes.

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In SSCI, publications are listed by the last name of the author and surname initial, e.g., B. Smith. In the world of social science, however, there happen to be many "B. Smiths." One must not count just simply the publications under "B. Smith," but examine the article title to verify where the "B. Smith" for each citation was located so that a B. Smith in family science at Nebraska does not become confused with a B. Smith in animal science at Georgia. In my opinion, this problem is the major flaw with the Adams' data.

From Adams' revised study, I personally looked up 15 of the 30 alleged highest ranked faculty and carefully examined the listings under those last names and surname initials in SSCI and BIP for the years 1984 to 1986.

Because of the problems of several people having the same last name and initials, numerous errors in the author's compilations were found. Of the 15 names I reviewed, it is my contention that at least six should not have made the list of eminent family scholars. Let me give several examples. One of the scholars listed actually had only one note and one editorial published in the three year period. Many more citations, however, were listed under that name and initial, but they were for a zoology professor at the University of Alberta. Had the coders doing the counting read the article titles listed, they might have grown suspicious because it is unlikely that a family scientist would write an article entitled, "Evidence of Aggressive Behavior in Female Blue Grouse."

Another of the scholars listed in Table 3 of the Adams' paper had written nothing in 1984, 1985, and 1986 that was listed in SSCI. Scholars with the same name and initials, however, were in the College of Law at Boston College and the Biology Department at Mary Washington College to name a few. Again, a title such as "Bronze-Age Steel Form" likely would tip off a coder who was carefully reading titles.

Thirteen entries in 1984, 1985, and 1986 were listed under another scholar in Table 3. Unfortunately, only two of the publications (both were meeting abstracts) were attributable to the family science scholar. The other publications belonged to professors with the same name and initials at six other universities. Again, those compiling and rechecking the data should have been suspicious of family scientists writing in the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* and the *European Journal of Pharmacology*.

There are other examples included among the 15 names, but I believe I have made my point. Five of the six scholars listed (of the 15 I studied) that I do not believe should have been in Table 3 had a total of only one note, one editorial, 2 meeting abstracts, and 5 second authorships in the three year period. Yet they are included in the list of top family scholars. This group of five had no first authorships on any refereed journal articles or any books.

There are two other issues that troubled me about the methodology used in the Adams' study. The first may be a matter of my personal opinion. From my knowledge, book reviews generally are not counted for promotion and tenure, and they certainly are not refereed. In addition, new ideas or research results are not presented in reviews. In my opinion, book reviews have no place in a study such as this. The sixth person I did not believe should be listed in Table 3 had 19 book reviews in the three year period

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and 3 second authorships. This is not an accomplishment worthy of being ranked as an eminent family scholar.

Lastly, I do not believe the citations made to an author's work in any given year are meaningful for rating current productivity. When I checked the citations, many of those made were citing an article written by the author a number of years ago. For example, one of the Table 3 scholars had 26 citations to their work under their name and initial, however, 15 were written before 1983 (worse yet, 23 of the 26 were in medical journals - - most probably a family scientist did not write those articles).

In summary, with so many individual data errors, it is clear that the department rankings as well as individual rankings are incorrect. I do believe that Dr. Adams has introduced several possible measures that can be used in this type of study in the future. Great care must be given, however, in compiling the data.

As it stands now, one must be very careful with this type of data, as departments and individuals are quick to utilize the data for their advantage. Professors who are listed erroneously can unfairly capitalize on the error and present themselves to others as something they are not.

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