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# Judaica Librarianship in the Literature: Assessing the Impact of Our Journal

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# IN THE BEGINNING . . .

## **Judaica Librarianship in the Literature: Assessing the Impact of Our Journal**

**Bella Hass Weinberg**  
Editor

How does one assess the quality and impact of a journal? Standard indicators of quality include peer review and index coverage; citation analysis has been the standard technique for measuring the impact of a journal. These criteria, along with personal assessments of the impact of *Judaica Librarianship*, are the subject of this editorial.

### **Quality Indicators for Journals**

*Impact factor*, a measure of the impact of a journal based on the number of citations to it, is a term coined by Eugene Garfield and I. H. Sher in 1963. Dr. Garfield, who funded the 1991 Reference Book Award of the Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) [see Reference Department in this issue], is the founder and Chairman Emeritus of the Institute for Scientific Information. The Institute, known as ISI, publishes citation indexes for science, the social sciences, and the humanities. Using information from its citation database, ISI produces *Journal Citation Reports* for the pure sciences and the social sciences, in which the impact factors of journals are reported.

*Judaica Librarianship (JL)* is not one of the journals selected for coverage by ISI's *Social Sciences Citation Index*, which indexes about fifty periodicals in library-information science. (One of the reasons for this is that ISI requires a precise publication schedule for the journals that it indexes; the volunteer nature of the editorial staff of *JL* precludes meeting this criterion.) *Judaica Librarianship* is covered, however, by just about all the printed subject indexes and online databases in the field of library science (see list following the table of contents of this volume). In 1993, one of ISI's products, *Index to Social Sciences and Humanities Proceedings* (ISSHP), began to cover the special issues of our journal that contain conference papers, starting with *JL* volume 6, which includes the proceedings of the First International Conference of Judaica and Israeli librarians. As *JL* articles consist largely of papers presented at AJL Conventions, we hope that future issues of *ISSHP* will cover them. Papers from the New York Convention are highlighted in this volume of the journal.

Additional examples of selective coverage of *JL*: articles on Judaica cataloging and classification are often listed in "Indexing: A Current-Awareness Bibliography," a regular feature of *The Indexer*, an international journal. The "Indexes Reviewed" column of the same journal excerpts reviews in *Judaica Librarianship* that comment on the quality of indexes to reference books and professional publications.

Index coverage is considered an indicator of quality of a periodical and is a factor in the selection of serials by collection development librarians. In the information science literature, however, there are many studies demonstrating that use of indexes is *not* a scholar's preferred method of finding information. Evidence for this is the recent publication in a scholarly journal of an article on Judaica collection development (Schwartz, 1994), which failed to cite not only *Judaica Librarianship*, but any Judaica resource, although a search of major indexes would have identified the relevant documents.

Another quality indicator for journals is peer review of manuscripts. *Judaica Librarianship* has from the outset been a refereed journal and is identified as such in a recently initiated serial directory called *Library Periodicals* (1993- ). In a paper presented at an information science conference, however, I observed that popular articles may have more of an impact than refereed research papers, which often go unread (Weinberg, 1992).

In my assessment, *Judaica Librarianship* falls somewhere in the middle of the popular-to-scholarly continuum of journals. The editors put a great deal of time into the amplification and clarification of articles on technical subjects to make them accessible to a wider audience. Ironically, however, in her history of AJL, Posner (1991, p. 130) observed that the editorial quality of *JL* is intimidating to potential contributors from AJL's Synagogue, School and Center Division.

### **Citations to *Judaica Librarianship***

One cannot identify all the references to *Judaica Librarianship* by consulting ISI's cita-

tion indexes, as these tools cover only selected journals and multi-authored books. (It is important to note that even though *JL* is not indexed by the standard citation indexes, references to our journal in the works that are covered by these indexes can be identified from these tools.) Our journal has also been cited in many works not covered by ISI's products. There are, for example, a couple of references to *JL* articles in the chapter by Katherine A. Averette (1992) in *Multicultural Aspects of Library Media Programs*. I find such references serendipitously by browsing through new library science publications that are acquired by my university. I would appreciate it if readers of *JL* would bring citations that they encounter to my attention.

I believe that our journal is known in the larger world of religious and theological librarianship. Citations to *JL* are found in several overviews of the field (Ebersole & Alt, 1993; Harvey, 1987), as well as in an article in the recently established *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* (Krieger, 1993).

Many AJL officials were excited by *Library Journal's* feature on "Religious Magazines" (Katz & Bryant, 1994), which described *JL* as follows: "the most comprehensive of the professional journals, publishes symposia proceedings, topical bibliographies, and even LC subject heading changes." We are also pleased that *Judaica Librarianship* was selected for inclusion in the latest edition of the highly selective reference work *Magazines for Libraries*, which the editors describe as listing "the best and most useful" periodicals (Katz & Katz, 1992, p. ix).

### **Specialized vs. General Periodicals**

Some Judaica librarians prefer to publish in the general library press, perhaps perceiving that their work will have greater impact, visibility, or prestige in such periodicals than in *JL*. This has necessitated the "Scatter of the Literature" column in this journal (introduced in volume 5)—because not every article that is relevant to Judaica librarians is published in *Judaica Librarianship*. The articles outside *JL* tend to cite articles from *JL*, and hence enhance the reputation of our journal.

The scatter of relevant articles is potentially advantageous to us in another respect: ISI citation indexes tend not to cover journals with excessive self-citation. If all articles on Judaica librarianship were to be published in *JL* and would cite only prior articles from that journal, there would be little chance of its eventual coverage by an ISI citation index, as the Institute is interested in links among journals, not in journals that are self-contained and isolated from the citation network.

While doing us a favor, the authors of articles on Judaica librarianship who publish outside *JL* may be reducing the impact of their work. I am not convinced that a Judaica librarian writing on an aspect of his/her specialty reaches a wider audience in a general library periodical, regardless of its circulation figures. There is considerable evidence that people read journals selectively, scanning them for articles relevant to their own specialty. Thus, most catalogers of Spanish materials will not read articles about Hebrew cataloging in a general library periodical. This is evident from the lack of inter-linguistic citations in the literature of cataloging foreign languages, despite the parallel problems that exist for various languages. For example, many of the issues in Hebraica cataloging are similar to those in Chinese cataloging. Chinese librarians do not cite *JL*, however, and we do not cite their serials.

The papers on Judaica librarianship published outside *JL* are probably read most by AJL members who find references to these articles on the Association's electronic newsletter, *HaSafran*, or in the "Scatter of the Literature" column of our journal (cf. my comments on the column in a prior editorial [Weinberg, 1991]).

The editor of the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* has expressed surprise that her journal is not cited much in the general library-information science literature, despite the relevance of so many advances in medical informatics to other branches of library-information science. This struck a chord in me, as so many of the papers in *JL* could serve as models for other specialties in librarianship.

Because of the low use of indexes, I see a need for redundancy in the literature: reporting an advance to the members of one's specialty and then recasting the paper to show how the innovation or research is relevant to a wider audience.

### Personal Impact

The impact of *Judaica Librarianship* is evident to me in ways different from the traditional criteria for the evaluation of journals, mainly from personal feedback. Students in my course on Information Sources in Religion at St. John's University have written term papers modeled on studies published in our journal, e.g., analyses of the subject headings for a religion other than Judaism, based on the methodologies in *JL*. Some of these term papers were so good that I have recommended them for publication—not in our journal, but I hope *JL* will be cited in the articles that may eventually result from these student papers.

***The greatest impact of Judaica Librarianship is, in my view, not measurable from a citation analysis of the literature. It resides in the pride that authors have in being published in JL and in the enhanced image of their profession which so many readers report the journal gives them, in addition to practical guidance in their work.***

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### Conclusion

In sum, according to the standard criteria for quality of journals, *Judaica Librarianship* measures up. It is recognized as a refereed journal; it is widely indexed, and cited quite often in other journals and books. Much of the impact is not measurable, however; it is evident from informal communications, which are the preferred form of scholarly exchange.

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