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A Case Study of Applied Scholarship: *The British Journal of Social Work* 1971-2013

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Abstract

The British Journal of Social Work has played a significant role in the development of social work as a practice and discipline for over forty years. For the first three decades of its life the BJSW was the only prominent social work journal published out of the UK and thus is a 'journal of record', holding a mirror to the profession. As such, the BJSW has a rich depository of data, which not only tell the story of the journal itself, but contribute significantly to the narrative of social work as an ever-changing field. In this article we aim to illuminate certain aspects of this narrative by presenting some of the findings from a multiple method historical case study on the BJSW, focusing on the first forty years of the journal. Data consisted of archival records, oral histories, and analysis of journal content for the last full year of each of eleven editorial regimes. Here, we foreground the content analysis, giving particular emphasis to evidence regarding trends. We place these findings in the context of social work as a field, and relate them to the projected identity of the journal, and to the broader identity of social work.

Key words: *British Journal of Social Work*, applied scholarship, case study, social work history.

Introduction

The *British Journal of Social Work (BJSW)* has played a significant role in the development of social work as a practice and discipline for over forty years. Its inception in 1971 came at – and perhaps was a result of – a turning point in British social work, arguably when the role of social work within the welfare state was becoming acknowledged and realised (Turbett, 2014). The many associated developments happening throughout that time period across social work education, practice and research were aimed at shaping social work into a more cohesive and unified profession. The *BJSW* as the 'society journal' of the newly formed British Association of Social Workers (BASW) reflected this shift, becoming the foremost repository of scholarship for social work in the UK. For the first three decades of its life the

BJSW was the only prominent social work journal published out of the UK and thus is a 'journal of record', holding a mirror to the profession. As such, the *BJSW* has a rich depository of data, which not only tell the story of the journal itself, but contribute significantly to the narrative of social work as an ever-changing field. In this article we aim to illuminate certain aspects of this narrative by presenting some of the findings from a multiple method historical case study on the *BJSW*.

It is important to acknowledge that because the *BJSW* reflects the state of social work, it can only be fully understood by referring to the world in which it resides. Therefore, we begin the article by reflecting on the *BJSW's* origins in historical context, and on the significance of historical research for social work. We then give a brief methodological overview of the study, before presenting our findings in relation to one of its main themes – the content of the *BJSW*. Specifically, we analyse journal content over time, mapping trends in social work scholarly writing. By doing so, we bring to the fore where there has been change and continuity in *who* writes on social work, and *what* substantive areas, problems and methods are prevalent in social work writing over time. We conclude by relating these findings to the projected identity of the *BJSW,* and in particular its enduring commitment to pluralism, relevance, rigour and to being a 'British' journal with an international outlook.

The advent of the *BJSW*

The *BJSW* came into being in what can be described as an - albeit short-lived[i] - high water mark for the tenets of liberal social work in UK policy, practice, education and research, during the late sixties to the mid-seventies (Payne, 2005). Legislation under Harold Wilson's Labour government (1964-1970), the publication of the Seebohm Report (HMSO, 1968) in 1968 and the subsequent passing of the 1970 Local Authority Social Services Act heralded a fundamental realignment and integration of services for children and families, older people, people with learning disabilities, and those with mental health difficulties. The new Social Services Departments initially saw a spending increase of ten percent in real terms year on year[ii] (Ivory, 2005) and were premised on a 'generic' approach to social work. Social workers would "take responsibility for the whole range of individual and family social problems" in the provision of "a community-based and family–oriented service" (HMSO, 1968, 180-184). This optimistic and cohesive view of social work was matched by developments in UK social work education, where Eileen Younghusband's[iii] long-held vision for a national and universal framework was being realised through the amalgamation of existing training Councils into the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work in 1971, and the associated introduction of a nationally recognised and regulated professional qualification[iv] for the first time. The formation of the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) in 1970 from seven existing 'specialist' associations further signaled social work becoming more of a united profession and growing in confidence and status.

At the same time as the establishment, expansion and 'professionalisation' of social work, 'cross-currents' were becoming more visible in the field. The 1970s saw the publication of seminal research which raised challenges for how social work was carried out, and specifically on the use of a psychodynamically oriented casework approach. Reid and Epstein's work (1972) in the States on task-centred practice, and Mayer and Timms' influential study, *The Client Speaks* (1970) are two examples which pointed the way to different ways of thinking about and doing social work practice. Indeed, the latter, being

the first major study undertaken of service user perspectives, highlighted the gulf of understanding that could exist between social workers and the people they were working with. In a more directly political sense, tensions in the field were embodied in the development of radical social work. The increasingly vocal nature of rights-based movements such as the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (1972), and a critical reappraisal of poverty spearheaded by new organisations such as Shelter (1966) and the Child Poverty Action Group (1965) were drawing attention to both the limits of the welfare state and to the paternalism of the existing model of social support. The first Women's Refuge was opened in Chiswick (London) in 1971. The Case Con Collective – a group of radical social workers and academics - and their 'house magazine' *Case Con* (1970-77), promoted the role of social workers as activists, who should be challenging the effects of capitalism and working in transformative ways within and alongside the communities they were part of. In sum, this short period of time saw much optimism at the potential of social work, but how that potential was to be realised – what social work's identity was to be – was unclear and contested.

The advent of the *BJSW* in 1971 as the 'society journal' of BASW was as Olive Stevenson[v] the first editor observed in the inaugural editorial, part of this struggle: "…the *British Journal of Social Work (BJSW)* will attract considerable attention. Its links with the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), a new association struggling to achieve an identity for social work which is in itself in ferment, make it inevitably a target for criticism" (1971, 1). As she later reflected, the *BJSW*, "was a symbol of aspiration to professional and academic status", which could put it at odds with those in the social work field who held a "distaste for elitism" (Stevenson, 2005, 570). The *BJSW* may have been part of the debate on the nature of social work, but it also set out to *contain* the debate. The early editorial vision for *BJSW* saw it as a broad church, eschewing specialism and encompassing writing on values, knowledge and skills across all domains and methods of social work practice, including debates on what social work could and should be (Stevenson, 2005). This vision was carried across to the membership of the first *BJSW* Board, who Olive Stevenson noted held "as wide a spread of interests as possible", especially in terms of "fields of practice" (1971, 1). Certainly, a commitment to diversity and inclusivity of position is echoed throughout subsequent editorial tenures; for example a recent Editors' report to the *BJSW* Board stated "We are keen that the Journal should reflect a wide range of constituencies", and "we are positioning the Journal as a broadly based, engaged but not partisan vehicle in which different perspectives and paradigms can exist". For Olive Stevenson, a pluralistic approach also meant maintaining the difficult balance between practice and academia within the content of the journal, through attention to both rigour and relevance. Although all article assessors were to be academics, practitioners and academics were equally represented on the *BJSW* Board, with the practitioners there to ensure "our intellectual aspirations do not run away with us – or run away from the field" (Stevenson, 1971, 1). Again, this stance has been echoed throughout editorial tenures, with a recent editor commenting that "we have been more demanding of authors to show what the implications of their research or theorising are for social work practice…the *BJSW* is about contributions which are both scholarly *and* relevant". This perennial tension has been joined by others over the life of the journal, in particular how the journal positions itself as both representative of the British social work landscape, and as international in scope. The *BJSW* can be regarded as enshrining aspirations to professionalism, academic reputation and capacity for influence in the policy and practice arena within the UK. In these senses it was at its launch a British

journal, addressing a British agenda. Over the years since, the *BJSW* has endeavoured to be more 'outward-looking', with for example international associate editors being appointed in 2010 to encourage global links and profile. This paper does not set out to give a definitive answer to how the *BJSW* has managed such tensions or if it has succeeded in representing the many facets of social work. Indeed, it needs to be acknowledged that the *BJSW* is ever evolving and subsequently cannot be seen as a 'finished' product. Nevertheless, by saying something about continuity and change in the content of the *BJSW* over time, we hope to illuminate aspects of the character of social work writing, and therefore of the social work field.

The case for a case study of the *BJSW*

We have touched on the various reasons why the *BJSW* makes an ideal case study for the analysis of social work as a field, most pertinently its longstanding commitment to represent all aspects of social work as a 'journal of record', its continuity of existence and longevity, its place at the forefront of UK social work scholarly writing, and its established role in the wider social work world in Britain as a BASW journal. To these we can add the methodological reason that it is a 'whole' case in two important aspects: firstly, for most of its life it has been published by the same publisher and so there exists consistency of oversight; secondly, many of the people who have been associated with the editorial direction of the journal are still alive and able to comment on it. However there is also a more wide-ranging rationale for why a historical analysis of the *BJSW* carries significance for social work, namely that examining our history performs the dual role of anchoring us and enabling us to reflect on who we are now.

The study we report on here resides within a broader milieu of social work history and yet is relatively distinct. There has been a modest revival of interest in placing understanding of social work in a historical framework, albeit sometimes rather celebratory in tone.[vi] There has been a *BJSW* special issue on history edited by Caroline Skehill in 2008, and a number of subsequent articles in the journal. There is a Social Work History Network in the UK, BASW keeps an archive, and there is an interesting History of Social Work project led by Jan Steyaert in Belgium.[vii] The NASW website in the USA carries a standing site section on social work history[viii], and also holds a relatively extensive archive of oral history links to interviews undertaken some forty years ago. There has also been a recent interest in a more critical approach to social work history, partly through some interest in applying emerging research methods from the humanities and social sciences (e.g. archival research, visual methods), partly through applications of innovative technology, and partly through the general influence of social theorists such as Foucault and Marx. A major history of sociology in America included careful analysis of the significance of social work (Lengermann and Niebrugge, 2007), and a parallel history of sociology in Britain carries a corresponding chapter (Shaw, 2014a).

Notwithstanding this interest, it is as if we are "too embarrassed to look seriously at our history, afraid of the disorder we might find, too eager to distance ourselves from the pre-professional beginnings" and are, in consequence, homeless and 'disembedded' (Lorenz, 2007, 599). Journals have played a central role in shaping and being shaped by shifts in the identity of the field and yet very little has been written about their significance. US studies have assessed this for the *American Journal of Sociology* (Abbott, 1999, chapter 3-6) and the

Social Service Review[ix] (Diner, 1977), but little has been done in the UK. In this article and the study it draws upon, we take up Lorenz's challenge by offering an assessment of the *BJSW* as one significant 'home' for social work knowledge.

Methodology

Conducting such an assessment necessitated examining the *BJSW* 'in the round'. The methodological approach we took stemmed from seeing this as a multiple method historical case study, focussing on the first forty years of the journal[x], and encompassing archival and documentary analysis, oral histories, and examination of journal content. We understood the term 'journal' widely to include all stakeholders, and adopted a strategy that was intended to avoid treating the journal's history in an unduly homogenous way. To ensure this we divided lead responsibility between three key team members, and kept the main strands of the fieldwork separate. This facilitated the accruing of fieldwork data without emerging ideas about, for example, the content of the journal, shaping how we developed preliminary understandings of issues also represented in archives or in analysis of forms of writing in the journal.

Oxford University Press (OUP) gave access to minutes of and reports to Editorial Board meetings, especially from more recent years. We visited the interesting if patchy records kept on behalf of BASW at the Modern Records Centre linked to Warwick University. Then we undertook a review of two important predecessor journals, *Case Conference* and especially *Social Work.* Oral histories were a central aspect of the study. Lengthy interviews took place with eleven former editors, review editors and other key informants.

We undertook a complete analysis of journal content for the last full year of each of eleven editorial regimes[xi]. We opted to analyse the last complete year of each editorial tenure, on the grounds that it was at this point that any editor-influenced changes would have time to become manifest. The articles published under the eleven regime sample years totalled 483. In analysing the kinds of research published in the journal we adopted an extended categorization of kinds of social work research (Shaw and Norton, 2007), which had been developed originally on a sample of *BJSW* articles. A classification of research methods, also developed by one of the team, was utilized in the analysis.

All necessary ethical approval was obtained and participants gave written consent on the basis that interviews would be anonymised. For that reason, when quoting editors in this article we do not describe them in reference to a specific time period, but instead use 'broad-brush' references to the early or later periods of the journal. The first editor, Olive Stevenson, is the exception to this rule as we were unable to interview her, and have drawn her perspective on the *BJSW* from published sources available in the public domain.

The eventual understanding of the substantive and temporal diverse data settled around four central and interconnected themes:

1. The identity of the journal
2. Journal practices
3. Journal form and content
4. The *BJSW's* wider world

In this article we focus especially on the third theme, giving particular emphasis to evidence regarding trends.[xii] *BJSW* at the time of this study, had published more than two thousand articles over its history. Who were they written by, and what about? Have there been trends and changes over the time of the journal's history? The analysis of the journal content addresses what we learn regarding the substantive focus of research, research problems and inquiry methods, author gender and place of origin. Drawing on the archival materials and oral histories, we contextualise the content analysis with the perspectives of journal stakeholders where relevant.

Inside the *BJSW*

In the following section we examine four general kinds of question.

- How can we describe and profile the journal content?
- Who has written for the journal?
- How far is it possible to differentiate within this general picture?
- Are trends discernible over the history of the journal?

But first a note on data presentation. Although the original content analysis was conducted by editorial regime, most of the statistical tabulated data we present here shows analysis by three time periods – the 1970s to mid 1980s, the late 1980s to mid 1990s and the late 1990s to the present day. The reason for this approach was relatively pragmatic in that it gave sufficiently large numbers to enable statistical comparisons. There were no *prima facie* analytic grounds for proceeding in ways directly driven by theorising. For example, although editors typically sought to place their own stamp on the journal, the analysis by regime yielded limited evidence that such aspirations shaped the profile of journal content. However, presenting the data this way does allow for trends to be highlighted from the beginning years of *BJSW* through to contemporary times. The accompanying graphs give more detailed information on each editorial regime where appropriate.

Profiling journal content

What subjects come under the scrutiny of social work writers? What can we learn regarding social work research methods and practices? Do these subjects and methods fluctuate or change over time? In dealing with the content of the journal we adopted a relatively elaborate scheme. We distinguished the primary *focus* and the primary *question*, *issue or problem* that was being addressed, as well as categorising the primary *method* used in empirically-based articles. 'Primary focus' refers to people, not problems, and hence the judgement refers mainly to the 'subjects' of scholarship.[xiii]

Primary Focus

Table 1 gives information regarding those who were the primary focus of study.

Table 1 Primary Focus of Articles by Editorial Regime

			Sampled regime			Total
			1974, 1976, 1980, 1984	1986, 1991, 1995	1999, 2002, 2005, 2012	
Primary research focus	Children, families, parents, foster carers	Count	12	9	24	45
		% within Regime	12.1%	7.8%	8.9%	9.3%
	Young people (not offenders)	Count	1	0	8	9
		% within Regime	1.0%	0.0%	3.0%	1.9%
	Young offenders/victims	Count	0	0	5	5
		% within Regime	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%	1.0%
	Adult offenders/victims	Count	3	3	5	11
		% within Regime	3.0%	2.6%	1.9%	2.3%
	Adults with housing, homelessness, education or employment difficulties	Count	1	0	1	2
		% within Regime	1.0%	0.0%	0.4%	0.4%
	People with mental health problems	Count	3	1	2	6
		% within Regime	3.0%	0.9%	0.7%	1.2%
	Older people	Count	2	0	2	4
		% within Regime	1.0%	0.0%	0.7%	0.8%
	Adults/children with health/disability difficulties (including learning difficulties)	Count	0	2	7	9
		% within Regime	0.0%	1.7%	2.6%	1.9%
	Adults/children who are drug/substance users	Count	0	0	1	1
		% within Regime	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	0.2%
	Service user/carers	Count	**22**	**15**	**55**	**92**
		% within Regime	**22%**	**13.0%**	**20.4%**	**19%**
	People as members of communities	Count	2	1	8	11
		% within Regime	2.0%	0.9%	3.0%	2.3%
	Service user, citizen or carer populations	Count	1	2	12	15
		% within Regime	1.0%	1.7%	4.5%	3.1%
	Women/men	Count	2	0	10	12
		% within Regime	2.0%	0.0%	3.7%	2.5%
	Citizen, user and community populations	Count	**5**	**3**	**30**	**38**
		% within Regime	**5.1%**	**2.6%**	**11.2%**	**7.9%**
	Social work practitioners/managers	Count	15	29	40	84
		% within Regime	15.2%	25.2%	14.9%	17.4%
	Social work students/practice teachers/university staff	Count	5	3	11	19
		% within Regime	5.1%	2.6%	4.1%	3.9%
	Social work and/or other researchers	Count	1	1	1	3
		% within Regime	1.0%	0.9%	0.4%	0.6%

	Policy, regulatory or inspection community	Count	5	4	17	26
		% within Regime	5.1%	3.5%	6.3%	5.4%
	Members or students of other occupations	Count	1	1	2	4
		% within Regime	1.0%	0.9%	0.7%	0.8%
	Jointly social work and other professional communities/agencies	Count	11	8	18	37
		% within Regime	11.1%	6.7%	6.7%	7.7%
	Professional and Policy communities	Count	**38**	**46**	**89**	**173**
		% within Regime	**38.4%**	**40.0%**	**33.1%**	**35.8%**
	Theorising that crosses categories; methodology	Count	**33**	**51**	**96**	**180**
		% within Regime	**33.3%**	**44.3%**	**35.7%**	**37.3%**
Total			99	115	269	483

(Grouped categories) Pearson Chi Square = 13.10. D.f. 4. Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = 0.007.

The primary focus can be expressed more simply by grouping categories, and the bold sum-totals in the table give those figures. The first aspect to note is the significant proportion of articles that were focused on more general theorising or on questions of methodology rather than on people. The 'theorising' category makes up a significant proportion of articles consistently across the life of the journal. In this, the *BJSW* is aligned with what we know about the kinds of knowledge that are circulated within social work as an academic discipline. The role of conceptual work in the knowledge base for social work has been highlighted elsewhere (Hodge, Lacasse and Benson, 2012, Kreisberg and Marsh, 2016). It is interesting to note the disparity between editorial perceptions of content and what this analysis tells us. The general view from editors seemed to be that the *BJSW* had become more empirical over time, indeed perhaps too much so; one editor felt the journal had become "a bit too…narrowly empirical". In this aspect at least the content of the *BJSW* remains broader than even its key actors might consider.

If we look both within and across the grouped categories, a number of other interesting findings stand out. It may be anticipated that focus would shift over time dependent on historical context, but it appears that trends are relatively static, with the only change being the small recent growth in articles focusing on 'citizen, user and community populations', perhaps reflecting the development of participatory approaches in social work. Despite the journal's position as representative of 'generic' social work, it is not unexpected that 'children, families, parents, and foster carers' is prominent within the 'service user or carer' category, given the long-standing emphasis in the UK on children and family social work. After 'theorising', the largest category across time is 'professional and policy communities', with 'social work practitioners/managers' being the most frequent focus. We perhaps can conclude that the 'subject' focus of *BJSW* content is generally reflective of what knowledge is foregrounded in social work as an academic discipline. Kreisberg and Marsh (2016) found a similar proportion of articles addressed 'the social work profession' in their citation analysis, suggesting that the consistent orientation of *BJSW* content to the development of social work as a profession is aligned with the general concerns of social work academics.

Indeed, there is plausible support for inferring quite striking differences in preoccupation between academic, practitioner and service user researchers. Comparisons are restricted, because this analysis has not been undertaken elsewhere to any great degree. However

while only 19% of the *BJSW* articles focus primarily on 'service user or carer' groups, in a study of UK practitioner research the figure was 70% (Shaw, Lunt and Mitchell, 2014: 9-10). No direct studies of these questions in user research are available, although it is plausible to suggest that although there has been a small upwards shift over time, the overall 7.9% of studies looking primarily at 'service user and citizen populations' in the *BJSW* would be much higher in user-research (see Shaw, 2012: chapter 25). This possible disparity may speak to the inherent tension that the *BJSW* holds in relation to social work as a practice and as a discipline[xiv]. Board minutes refer to efforts particularly in recent editorial regimes to 'unsettle' the established tone of the journal and ensure new and under-reported aspects of social work are given greater attention. The promotion of free articles on topical issues[xv] was believed to be important in ensuring the *BJSW* is relevant and able to lead on social work issues of the day. Nevertheless there was some recognition over the history of the journal that it did not reach practitioners, and concerns were shared about "whether we were effectively expressing the profession in the way that we think we are" (mid-period editor). Another former editor commented "The *BJSW* doesn't record the passage of events, but it does record the evolution of thought in social work, to a lesser extent possibly practice". It may be that despite attempts across the life of the journal to address different audiences, its primary tone and content has been 'academic' in orientation.

Problems of Interest

The focus of the writing tells us only so much. We naturally wish also to know something about the ways in which writers seek to interrogate the question – what problems are they endeavouring to illuminate or resolve? The following Table 2 outlines the general picture when articles are analysed in this way.

Table 2 Primary Problem by Editorial Regime

			Sampled Regime			Total
			1974, 1976, 1980, 1984	1986, 1991, 1995	1999, 2002, 2005, 2012	
Primary problem	Understand/explain issues related to risk	Count	9	20	40	69
		% within Regime	9.1%	17.4%	14.9%	14.3%
	Understand/explain issues related to equality	Count	4	5	28	37
		% within Regime	4.0%	4.3%	10.4%	7.7%
	Understand/assess/strengthen user/carer involvement	Count	1	2	9	12
		% within Regime	1.0%	1.7%	3.3%	2.5%
	Understand/promote the nature and quality of informal care	Count	0	1	1	2
		% within Regime	0.0%	0.9%	0.4%	0.4%
	Describe, understand, explain, or develop good practice in relation to social work beliefs	Count	3	1	22	26
		% within Regime	3.0%	0.9%	8.2%	5.4%
	Understand/develop/assess/evaluate social work practices	Count	42	42	66	150
		% within Regime	42.4%	36.5%	24.5%	31.1%

	Understand/evaluate/strengthen social work/social care services	Count	7	2	10	19
		% within Regime	7.1%	1.7%	3.7%	3.9%
	Understand/explain practice or promote good practice in social work/social care organisations	Count	2	2	17	21
		% within Regime	2.0%	1.7%	6.3%	4.3%
	Understand/respond to issues of nationhood	Count	0	0	3	3
		% within Regime	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	0.6%
	Understand/respond to issues of gender	Count	0	0	3	3
		% within Regime	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	0.6%
	Understand/respond to issues about the form and significance of the family	Count	8	9	16	33
		% within Regime	8.1%	7.8%	5.9%	6.8%
	Demonstrate/assess the value of inter-disciplinary or inter-professional approaches to social work services	Count	9	15	8	32
		% within Regime	9.1%	13.0%	3.0%	6.6%
	Demonstrate/assess the value of comparative research	Count	0	1	2	3
		% within Regime	0.0%	0.9%	0.7%	0.6%
	Develop theorising	Count	4	5	17	26
		% within Regime	4.0%	4.3%	6.3%	5.4%
	Understand/appraise/develop the practice and quality of social work research	Count	5	2	14	21
		% within Regime	5.1%	1.7%	5.2%	4.3%
	Understand/promote learning and teaching about social work or related professions, and entry to career	Count	5	8	13	26
		% within Regime	5.1%	7.0%	4.8%	5.4%
Total		Count	99	115	269	483

Drawing conclusions from these figures needs to be done with caution. This is not because they have doubtful validity. The scheme is relatively comprehensive and has been developed over some years. These figures represent probably the firmest available delineation of problems and questions addressed in social work scholarship. It follows that we have very little comparative evidence to know whether the range and spread of scholarly preoccupations are different between journals in the UK, North America, mainland Europe, Asia and so on. Nor do we have much to go on regarding preoccupations of university-based social work, by and large represented in the *BJSW*, compared with those of practitioner or user researchers. In addition, cell size means trend analysis must be considered carefully.

Nevertheless, there are some inferences we can draw from the data. It is evident that social work scholarship in the *BJSW* covers a wide range of kinds of problems and questions, although within this range there are some notable differences. Not too far short of half the articles dealt with either 'understanding, developing, assessing or evaluating social work practices', or attempting to 'understand or explain issues related to risk'. If we look at trends within these two categories, we see that discussions of risk have become more prevalent over the last two regime periods, and discussion of social work practices less so.

There may be contextual rationales for both the dominance of these two categories and shifts in their prevalence over time. It is fair to say that risk and associated critical debates on the rise of managerialism have preoccupied social work over the last two decades (e.g. Warner and Sharland, 2010) and the place of risk in *BJSW* content reflects this. The category of 'social work practices' addresses direct practice, and its predominance particularly in the earlier period of the journal may be associated with the more psychodynamically oriented content of the journal during that time. Its continuing - albeit diminished - primacy over the later period of the journal can be correlated to some extent with the enduring focus we noted earlier on practitioners as the 'subjects' of *BJSW* writers; over half of articles where the primary focus was 'practitioners/managers' were also about 'social work practices'. Taken together, they demonstrate an enduring theme in the *BJSW* of writerly interest in central aspects of professional life such as decision-making and reflection.

There are other trends here worth noting. The categories of 'understand/explain issues related to equality', and 'understand/explain practice in relation to beliefs' both gain ground in the latest period of the journal. Questions of (in)equality, difference, diversity, values and ethics have been present in various guises and with differing emphases throughout social work history (Barnard, 2008). The 1980s saw the development of anti-racist approaches and culturally sensitive practice across a range of European countries which transformed in the 1990s into a broader anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive agenda (see Thompson, 1993). The role of the *BJSW* in furthering this agenda in recent times was acknowledged by one interviewee, coming from an American perspective: "I think one piece of that [the *BJSW's*] voice is certainly anti-oppressive practice which…is not a phrase we hear a lot in the United States. We tend to talk about social justice or empowerment or, you know, working for the disenfranchised or something, but all of that seems to be captured in the nice little British term anti-oppressive practice." The date we present here does pose the question however on why these two categories did not feature more in earlier periods of the journal. We want to be careful not to claim too much, but examining the detail of the sampled articles suggests that – as inferred earlier – the journal has gradually shifted over its existence from a more psychological orientation to one which engages to a greater extent with issues of structure.

Research Methods

Focussing more directly on those articles where first hand data was reported, we looked at the research methods employed. Three out of five of all articles drew directly on empirical work. There have been occasional laments that British social work research is weak in regard to quantitative methods.[xvi] Measured by numbers of studies, it is certainly the case that qualitative methods form a clear majority of research based articles. However, the difference is not, perhaps, as all-embracing as may be thought. Table 3 shows that of these a little under sixty percent were wholly qualitative, and just over thirty percent wholly quantitative. Just over one in ten were mixed methods, in the limited sense of combining both qualitative and quantitative methods (any given study may be mixed in the sense of having more than one quantitative or more than one qualitative method).

Table 3 Qualitative, quantitative and mixed research methods

	Frequency	Percentage of	Percentage of

			all articles	research articles
	Qualitative	166	34.6	57.4
	Quantitative	91	19.0	31.5
	Mixed methods	32	6.7	11.1
	Sub-total	*289*	*60.2*	100.0
Missing	Not research	191	39.8	
		3		
Total		483		

Preferences and fashions in methodology change over time, and the dominant methodologies in *BJSW* articles also show signs of shifts. However, the changes do not appear to be in a linear form. Leaving aside mixed methods, which move about but remain a minority in all periods, quantitative methods had a period of relative ascendancy in the middle years of the journal, but have fallen off rather dramatically since the turn of the century (Table 4 and Figure 1). Qualitative studies have changed in a mirror image, being dominant in the early period, falling off considerably in the middle years, before rising again in the last decade. These are, of course, proportions. The actual *number* of quantitative social work studies has risen steadily, as the size of the journal has grown. But as Table 4 shows, the rise in absolute numbers is even more striking for qualitative studies.

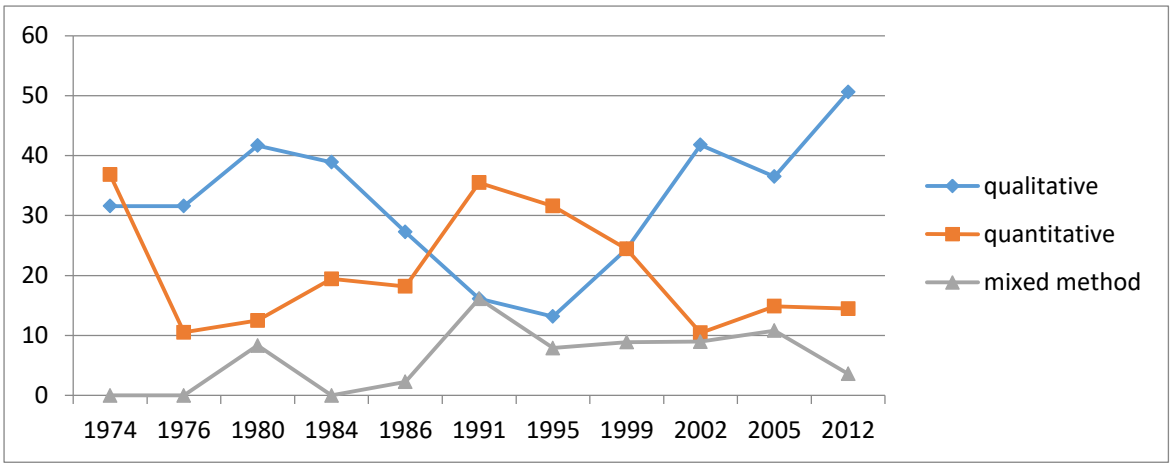
Table 4 Research methods by Editorial Regime

			Sampled regime			Total
			1974, 1976, 1980, 1984	1986, 1991, 1995	1999, 2002, 2005, 2012	
Research category	Qualitative	Count	36	22	108	166
		% within Regime	63.2%	35.5%	63.5%	57.4%
	Quantitative	Count	19	31	41	91
		% within Regime	33.3%	50.0%	24.1%	31.5%
	Mixed methods	Count	2	9	21	32
		% within Regime	3.5%	14.5%	12.4%	11.1%
Total			57	62	170	289

Pearson Chi Square = 20.228. D.f. 4. Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = <.0001.

Figure 1 depicts the distribution of methods by each editorial regime. While the figures are too small to permit statistical analysis, the data may suggest that the changes in qualitative methods were not due directly to conscious or tacit editorial policy.

Figure 1 Research methods by Editorial Regime (%)



The proportion of qualitative studies fell steadily over four regimes between 1980 and 1995, only to take a fairly constant upward swing, reaching an all-time high of just over 50 per cent for the 2012 regime. The quantitative figures may be less easy to interpret. Between 1976 and 1980 there was a uniform increase in the numbers and proportion of *all* research-based articles. Quantitative articles rose initially slowly but in a constant upwards direction between 1976 and 1991 before taking a downward trajectory and being eclipsed by qualitative articles in 1999. From 2002 they have remained between ten and fifteen per cent. Despite the recent flurry of interest in and writing about mixed methods, social work had not reflected any increase in the frequency of such published research up to the times of the study.[xvii] While it is not possible to offer a simple generalization, the marked changes in distribution of broadly-characterized research methods do suggest a volatility in the identity profile of the journal's output that may be unexpected. One consideration is that shifts in methods may be connected to the position of evidence–based practice as a research movement in social work. As Fisher (2013, 21) points out, the mid-1990s can be seen as "peak EBP" in UK social work, and it may be that, as was noted with the problems writers address, the dominance of influences in the social work field more broadly have played a part in the methodological profile of the journal over time.

***BJSW* authors**

Now we turn to *who* has written in the *BJSW.* We focus specifically on first author gender and country of affiliation. In doing so we sketch an overall picture of changes in author composition over the period of the journal, but also draw out the finer details in how author characteristics relate to the content analysis we have just discussed. We thus highlight connections that gender and country have to the primary focus and problem addressed by authors, and to the methods they used.

Gender

Of the 483 sampled articles, 257 (53.9%)[xviii] were first authored by men and 220 (46.1%) by women. There is limited evidence about the gender of the social work author community. Are writers any different from non-writers? What differences exist from one country to another? In a recent study just over seven in every ten first authors were women - substantially higher than for the *BJSW* (Shaw and Ramatowski, 2013).[xix] However, there do seem to be indications that the gender balance in published social work scholarship has shifted over time, and that in general the proportion of women as first authors is higher

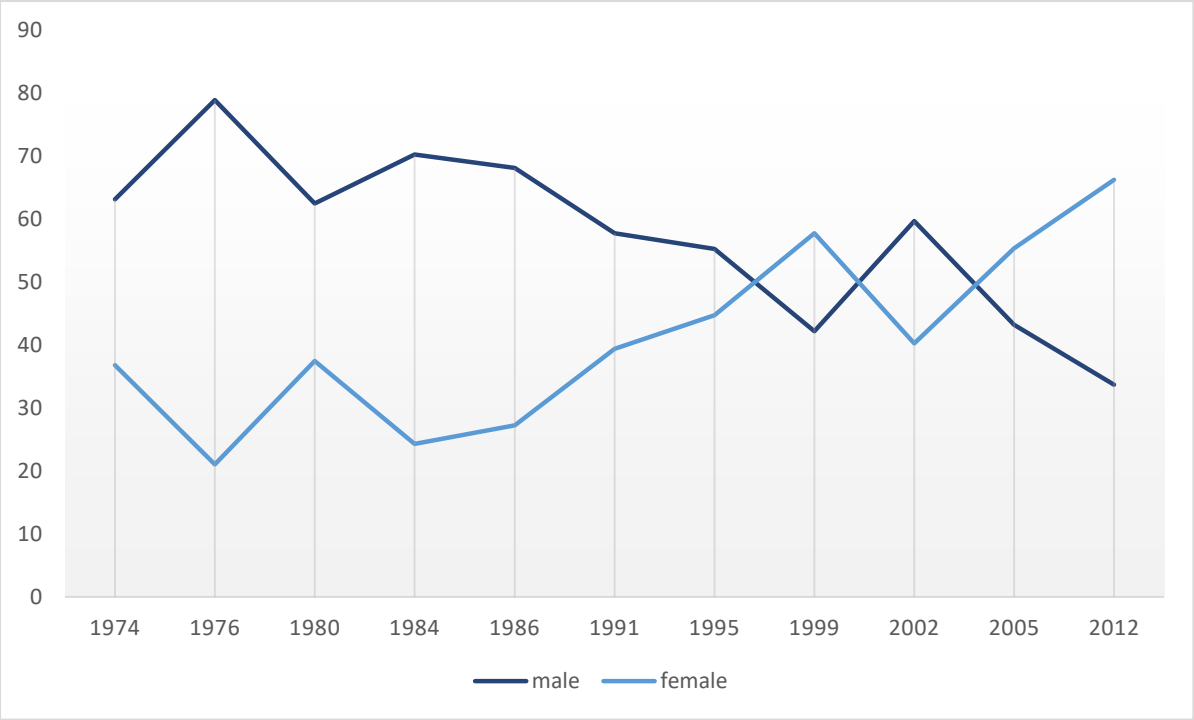
now than at some previous periods. This conclusion gains support from the following table 5 and figure 2 that trace the gender distribution of first authors through the history of the journal.

Table 5: Gender of First Author by Editorial Regimes

			Sampled regime			Total
			1974, 1976, 1980, 1984	1986, 1991, 1995	1999, 2002, 2005, 2012	
Gender of first author	Male	Count	68	70	119	257
		% within regime	70.1%	62.5%	44.4%	53.9%
	Female	Count	29	42	149	220
		% within regime	29.9%	37.5%	55.6%	46.1%
Total		Count	97	112	268	477

Pearson Chi Square = 23.309. D.f. 2. Sig (2-sided) <0.0001

Figure 2 Share of male and female authors by regime year (%)



The proportion of articles first authored by women has significantly grown, with female authors outnumbering male authors particularly in recent years. A similar trend occurred in what may be the only comparable social work study (Shaw and Ramatowski, 2013). There may be a number of explanations for this trend, related to gendered kinds of writing, and review and editorial decision-making. However, it is worth noting that the gender of editors across the life of the journal has been relatively equal (six women, nine men) and evenly spread. Board representation has also generally been mixed. When Olive Stevenson constituted the first *BJSW* board, four out of six members were women, a striking comparison to *BJSW's* immediate predecessor *Social Work*, where the final editor and board

were all men. In recent years, there has been a roughly equal split of women and men on the board. Discussion of gender did not figure in the documentary or interview data, suggesting that it may not have been consciously foregrounded in the journal's internal processes.

A broader explanation may be found in terms of a cross-over between two highly gendered professions – social work and academia. Academia can be seen as a male professional project with significant well-documented systemic challenges for women academics (ECU, 2016, Holosko, Barner and Lloyd-Allen, 2016). This relates not only to the ratio between men and women, but also to the kinds of roles and tasks men and women may undertake in academia, with differentiation between 'high-status' research and leadership activities and 'low-status' teaching, administrative and pastoral activities (Acker, 2014). In contrast, social work has typically been a female-oriented profession, perceived of as 'women's work' embedded within an 'ethics of care', with all that implies for status and knowledge claims (Dahle, 2012). Historically it seems that social work as an academic discipline may have reproduced the patterns that exist within the broader field of academia rather than retaining the characteristics of social work as a profession (Jones, 1984, Oakley, 2014). Writing of the States in the 1980s, Fox and Faver (1985, 539) observed that academic social work is "female-typed but male-dominated". Di Palma (2005), also reporting from the States, finds that particularly from the mid-1990s onwards there was a shift in the discipline, with significant progress made towards greater parity in terms of numbers and roles for women in social work academia[xx]. Whilst any claim made here is necessarily speculative, trends towards more proportionate representation of women in social work academia may at least in part explain the gradual change in gender representation of authors in the *BJSW.*

Gender, research interests and methods

The data in Table 6 suggests more general evidence regarding gender and social work research. If we take the journal content as a whole, it is evident that women tend more to qualitative methods and men to quantitative methods. The trend across the life of the journal is more complex. In the early period of the journal women writers were strongly oriented towards a qualitative approach, whilst male writers invested equally in quantitative and qualitative methods. As noted earlier in the general overview of methods, there was a quantitative turn in the middle period of the journal, and this is evidenced across both genders, albeit to different extents. In the latest period we examined for the journal there was a strong tendency towards qualitative methods across both genders, again reflecting the general overview of methods trends discussed earlier.

Table 6 Gender of First Author by Methodology within Editorial Regime

Sampled regime	Gender of first author		Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed Methods
1974, 1976, 1980, 1984	Male	Count	16	16	1
		% within regime	48.5%	48.5%	3%
	Female	Count	19	3	1

		% within regime	82.6%	13%	4.3%
1986, 1991, 1995	Male	Count	9	20	4
		% within regime	27.3%	60.6%	12.1%
	Female	Count	11	11	4
		% within regime	42.3%	42.3%	15.4%
1999, 2002, 2005, 2012	Male	Count	40	19	7
		% within regime	60.6%	28.8%	10.6%
	Female	Count	68	22	14
		% within regime	65.4%	21.2%	13.5%
Total	Male	Count	65	55	12
		% across regimes	49.2%	41.7%	9.1%
	Female	Count	98	36	19
		% across regimes	64.1%	24.1%	12.4%

Pearson Chi Square = 10.74. Df = 2 Asymp. Sig (2-sided) = 0.002.

How can we make sense of these findings? Feminist research has traditionally aligned with qualitative methods as a response to the "hierarchical, deductive approach to knowledge building often found in conventional forms of research" (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 144). At the same time, it has been widely acknowledged that feminist research is not constrained to any particular method, but is instead about the perspectives, principles and ideas brought to the field (Gringeri, Wahab and Anderson-Nathe, 2010). Furthermore, we cannot assume that the women writing in the *BJSW* take an explicitly feminist approach. If we look to other applied disciplines a similar pattern of gender-method correlation emerges. Plowman and Smith (2011) reviewed gender and method across three top management journals and found that women were over-represented and men were under-represented in articles that included qualitative methods. They posit a number of explanations for this, most persuasively in terms of social identity. In essence, they argue that women authors in organisational studies belong to a small group, and therefore may be more likely to act as mutually reinforcing guides in terms of methods used. A similar argument could be made in particular for the early period of the *BJSW*. As noted earlier, women were a minority of authors in the early days of the journal, and we know that tight networks existed at this time for women social work academics (Oakley, 2014). It may be that a gradual alignment between the genders in terms of methods employed has occurred across the life of the journal, as the representation of women in the social work scholarly community has increased. As such, the methodological interests of both genders may have become more indicative of general trends in social work research as the 'effect' of gender is diffused.

What of the primary focus of women and men authors? Table 7 suggests there are several variations by gender. For example, women authors are consistently more likely to write about 'service users/carers' and 'citizen, user and community populations'. However the differences are less *within* research, but rather between research studies and those that deal, sometimes in a more general way, with methodology and theorizing. This suggests that women are more likely to write about work that involves direct focus on and perhaps contact with, people, but we would not wish to state this in too dogmatic a way.[xxi] It may be however that this particular finding relates to the broader evidence we have presented in this article on the interaction between gender and academia, and the complex relationship between gender and roles/outputs in academic life. Certainly, it is plausible to say that gendered differences may exist broadly across academic disciplines in terms of the value placed on different kinds of knowledge (Leslie et al, 2015).

Table 7 Gender of First Author by Primary Focus within Editorial Regime

Sampled regime	Gender of first author		SU/Carers	Populations	Prof/Policy	Theory
1974, 1976, 1980, 1984	Male	Count	13	3	21	31
		% within regime	19.1%	4.4%	30.8%	45.6%
	Female	Count	9	2	17	2
		% within regime	30%	6.6%	56.6%	6.6%
1986, 1991, 1995	Male	Count	6	1	27	37
		% within regime	8.5%	1.4%	38%	52.1%
	Female	Count	9	2	19	14
		% within regime	20.4%	4.5%	43%	31.8%
1999, 2002, 2005, 2012	Male	Count	19	10	37	53
		% within regime	16%	8.4%	31%	44.5%
	Female	Count	36	20	52	43
		% within regime	23.8%	13.2%	34.4%	28.4%
Total	Male	Count	38	14	85	121

		% across regimes	14.7%	5.4%	32.9%	47%
	Female	Count	54	24	88	59
		% across regimes	24%	10.7%	39%	26.2%

Pearson Chi Square = 25.30. Df = 3 Asymp. Sig (2-sided) = <0.0001

The analysis we undertook of the relationship between gender and the problem addressed by authors supports this general picture. Take for example the following three problems as a group:

- Demonstrate/assess the value of comparative, cross-national, cross-cultural research; and of cultural distinctiveness/awareness.
- Develop theorising.
- Understand/appraise/develop the practice and quality of social work research.

Of the 49 articles in this group of three 'problems' 36 (73.5%) were first authored by men and 13 (26.5%) by women. By contrast, there were 26 articles that aimed to 'understand/promote learning and teaching about social work or related professions, and entry to career.' Of these 19 (73%) were first authored by women and 7 (27%) by men.[xxii] Taken together, these findings give some insight into the position of men and women in *BJSW* writing and probably in social work academia more generally. It seems that as women's representation has increased in the journal, the methodological approaches taken by both genders have become more synchronised. Yet there remain differences in the focus and questions addressed by men and women authors, perhaps due to gendered positioning within the broader context of the academy, rather than the social work field.

Country of author affiliation

Turning to where authors come from, within the documents and editor interviews much was said about the aspirations of the journal to become and be seen as an international journal. The majority of past editors referred to internationalisation of the journal across a range of dimensions including authorship, readership and reputation. Being international was framed as both a claim and an ongoing aim for *BJSW,* with for example an editor from an early period commenting that the decision to increase the number of issues during their tenure had been due to "a clear focus on trying to extend international readership". Raising the journal's profile in the USA has been an enduring project, and a North American associate editor was appointed in 2006, four years prior to the creation of the roles of international editorial advisors. However during the later period of the journal in particular, editors also made comment about shifting the journal from its position in the 'global north'. In this sense, the inclusion of international content is related to the global-local nexus that social work increasingly operates within, with one editor saying "There are a variety of social works, and we shouldn't try, we shouldn't only think of it in national terms. So it's supranational rather than international, and I think that's a real strength of the journal". As one indicator of being international we examined the country of affiliation of the first author of each article, taking this as a proxy for the country from whence the work had been done.[xxiii]

Table 8 Region of Affiliation of First Author by Editorial Regime

			Sampled regime			Total
			1974, 1976, 1980, 1984	1986, 1991, 1995	1999, 2002, 2005, 2012	
Region of author affiliation	UK	Count	83	89	178	350
		% within regime	83.8%	77.4%	66.2%	72.5%
	USA	Count	3	4	12	19
		% within regime	3.0%	3.5%	4.5%	3.9%
	Rest of the world [xxiv]	Count	13	15	78	106
		% within regime	13.1%	13.0%	29.0%	21.9%
	Missing		0	7	1	8
Total			99	115	269	483

Fisher's Exact Test = 30.645. Significance < 0.0001.

Several apparently straightforward inferences may be drawn from Table 8. First, the *BJSW* remains largely a record of UK social work scholarship. Second, the interest in developing an identity for the journal within the USA seems relatively unsuccessful, insofar as this is measured by affiliation of authors. Third, the *BJSW* is far from being *only* a UK journal. More than one in four articles over its history have been first authored by those outside the UK and the data suggests that there has been a clear trend towards increased inclusion of articles by authors from outside the UK; aside from Commonwealth countries (46), the largest representation in the 'rest of the world' category came from Ireland (18) and Israel (13). However, interpretation once again catches our heels. It would make good sense, for example, to index such figures against the population of social work academics in a given country or at least the general population. Factor in populations of 65 million for the UK, five million for the Republic of Ireland, and just under nine million for Israel, and the contrasts do not seem quite so dramatic.[xxv]

With that caveat in mind, a number of factors can be drawn on in examining this picture. The position of the *BJSW* as embedded within the British social work field, including its institutional link with BASW, emphasises its specific place in the world. However, it may be that the increasingly globalised nature of communication and associated shifts in academic and publishing networks over the lifetime of the *BJSW* have supported the trend in internationalisation of its content to a certain degree. At the same time, differences in research, writing and practice cultures can sustain divides in publishing. There are widespread, if rather under-developed, arguments to the effect that scientific cultures between the USA and Europe may differ, meaning that writers publish in distinct spheres (Kreisberg and Marsh, 2016, Slater, Scourfield and Sloan, 2012). It certainly is the case that one is likely to encounter considerable preoccupation in the social work community in the USA regarding the merits of a scientific status for social work (e.g. Brekke, 2012, 2014) and

that empirically oriented articles are more valued (Kreisberg and Marsh, 2016). Delegates to the annual conference of the Society for Social Work and Research conferences will note the prevalence of structured, quantitative methods in both presentations and posters. It also is the case that research writing in the USA is to a very great degree self-referential and hardly at all mindful of social work research undertaken, for example, in Nordic countries (Ghanem et al, 2017, Shaw, 2014b). This may help to explain the consistently low number of articles from the USA in the *BJSW.*

Further, challenges particularly for academics where English is not a first language need to be accounted for (Harrison, 2006). It is evident that the large majority of articles accepted for publication in the *BJSW* are from countries where English is a dominant language. We know from the documentary evidence that editorial aspirations to include authors from a wide range of countries could sometimes be limited by pragmatic concerns. For example a relatively recent editor's report noted that "rejection rates for overseas manuscripts are of interest" with reasons given for rejections including "lack of relevance of topic…and/or insurmountable problems with written English". Board papers show that rejection rates for articles from North America and 'the Rest of the World' track consistently higher than the average for the Journal. Such issues can be related not only to problems of translation but also to rhetorical academic practices embedded in culture (Lillis and Curry, 2006), and contextual differences in definitions of social work. Whilst editors may have a vision for the *BJSW* which seeks to be more inclusive of countries outside the 'global north'[xxvi] it could be that similarly to gender, broader patterns of knowledge production can act to constrain change. With that in mind the increase in the most recent period of authors from 'the rest of the world' to 29% can be seen as an achievement.

Country, research methods and interests

Given the arguments we have advanced on the place of cultural norms in research communities, we might expect to see certain patterns being reproduced in the approaches taken by authors from different countries. Table 9 gives a summary picture, but it is unexpected.

Table 9 Region of Affiliation of First Author by Methodology

		Region of affiliation					Total
		UK	USA	Common-wealth	Rest of world	Not specified	
Qualitative	Count	110	6	22	27	1	166
	% within region	53.1%	66.7%	91.7%	60.0%	25.0%	57.4%
Quantitative	Count	71	2	1	16	1	91
	% within region	34.3%	22.2%	4.2%	35.6%	25.0%	31.5%
Mixed methods	Count	26	1	1	2	2	32
	% within region	12.6%	11.1%	4.2%	4.4%	50.0%	11.1%
TOTAL	Count	207	9	24	45	4	289

Fisher's Exact Test = 21.193 Significance = 0.003

The cell sizes are small but the appropriate test does signal that a clear association exists between broad methodological approaches and the region of domicile of first authors.

However the variance is hardly in the pattern that might be anticipated. Articles by authors in Commonwealth countries are overwhelmingly qualitative in orientation. Those from the USA and also the larger number from other countries both slightly exceed the proportion of qualitative articles from UK authors. Of the thirteen experimental or quasi-experimental studies in the sample, ten were from the UK and none from the USA. One relatively plausible explanation may be that articles submitted to the *BJSW* by authors in USA universities are untypical of research in that country. This may be due to some kind of selection bias, for example following from a conscious decision that USA qualitative papers may obtain a more positive response from a UK-based journal. In addition – and this was hinted to us in one interview by a well-placed key informant – it is possible that some USA authors submit to the *BJSW* after unsuccessfully sending to a USA journal.

We pursued this line of analysis further, to find that there was no apparent relationship between the *primary focus* (see Table 10) or the *questions* addressed and the region of domicile of first authors. While this may seem surprising – surely, one might think, research topics in Hong Kong are different from those in the UK – it is quite likely that this represents another instance of selection and choice, such that writers submit to journals that are thought to favour work of the kind dealt with in their articles. It might also reflect, as noted earlier, screening processes to ensure articles fit within the remit of the journal.

Table 10 Region of Affiliation of First Author by Primary Focus

		Region of affiliation					Total
		UK	USA	Common-wealth	Rest of world	Not specified	
Service users/carers	Count	59	2	4	13	0	78
	% within region	16.9%	10.5%	8.7%	21.7%	0%	16.1%
Populations	Count	21	0	5	8	0	34
	% within region	6%	0%	10.9%	13.3%	0%	7%
Prof/policy communities	Count	139	6	15	25	6	191
	% within region	39.7%	57.9%	47.8%	23.3%	75%	39.5%
Theory	Count	131	11	22	14	2	180
	% within region	37.4%	57.9%	47.8%	23.2%	25%	37.3%
TOTAL	Count	350	19	46	60	8	

Fisher's Exact Test = 12.152. Significance = <0.0001

BJSW Content and Identity

The general rationale for this study was premised on the expectation that the *BJSW* represents in some way the identity and direction of the field of social work, as a profession, occupation and discipline. Our findings point to a number of joint conclusions on both this hypothesis, and the closely connected question of continuity and change in the identity of the journal itself. Returning to the editorial vision for *BJSW* described at the beginning of this article, there is a strong sense of continuity in how the journal's identity is understood in terms of content, readership and reputation. Across the life of the *BJSW* there is

commitment to a pluralistic representation of social work, to relevance and rigour, and to being a 'house' journal with an international outlook. Such commitments are not easily realised; there are inherent - indeed we might say *essential* – tensions manifested in the deployment of rhetorical arguments and pleas. Given the ambiguities that they contain, how do enduring perspectives on what the *BJSW should* be correspond with what it *is* in terms of its content?

Taking internationalisation first, our findings suggest the *BJSW* is the home of *British-led* applied social work scholarship, and is likely to remain so, though this is not the same as saying that it is simply a British journal. In the apt terms of a key informant from across the Atlantic, it is the *British Journal of Social Work*, rather than the *Journal of British Social Work*. In that sense the BJSW is distinct from, and we think more to be esteemed in this regard than, its USA cousins, where scholarship remains parochial and inward looking, albeit across a very large 'parish', and shows little aspiration to be 'international' (Ghanem et al, 2017, Shaw, 2014b) We can go further and posit that the slow shift to greater inclusion of authors from outside the UK may have been mediated by divisions and disparities in localised academic cultures that are beyond the influence of the *BJSW,* and indeed beyond the scope of the journal's position in the social work work field.. At the same time, such distinctions may mean that some non-UK authors approach the *BJSW* as a good 'fit' for their work.

The question of rigour and relevance is not a straightforward one to address. There is nothing to say that these two objectives need be in conflict, and yet our findings do suggest that the *BJSW* content broadly aligns with the interests of social work academics rather than practitioners, and is coherent with social work as an *academic* pursuit. The analysis of the foci and problems that *BJSW* articles contain coheres with what is known about the abiding interest by social work academia in the professional practices of social work, and in approaching social work via a conceptual lens. However, the meta focus of *BJSW* writers on the 'work' of social work means that the *BJSW* does hold up a mirror to social work as a profession and has provided a sustained narrative for the development of social work. In this sense, although the content may be academically rather than practice-oriented, the *BJSW* retains relevance in tracing the development of social work practice over time. We can also say that incremental changes in *BJSW* content – for example the growing number of articles addressing questions of risk, inequality and beliefs – reflect broader trends in the field, which in turn have been driven by social, political and cultural drivers. Whether the *BJSW* leads or follows in this is an open question, as is whether these trends would be replicated in service user or practitioner research. Indeed it is notable that one trend in social work which perhaps surprisingly does not feature greatly in *BJSW* content is that of service user and carer involvement.

The overarching ambition of the *BJSW* to be an inclusive, eclectic and representative home for social work knowledge encompasses questions of internationalisation and rigour/relevance. It also relates to other findings we have presented here, including patterns in methods used, and in the gender of authors. Turning to methods, it seems that in general, the journal has not followed the 'narrowly empirical' route some of our key informants feared. Instead, it has retained a markedly consistent balance between broadly conceptual and empirical content. In contrast with the relative stability of the substantive focus of BJSW articles, the methodological foci have shifted significantly during the life of the journal. What can be said is that although the journal's qualitative turn in more recent

times reflects the methodological orientation of UK social work research, the place of quantitative research in the journal should not be underplayed.

The findings on gender are perhaps more distant from the conscious positioning of the journal than the others, but they do illuminate how the *BJSW* represents the strongly gendered field of social work. As with author country of origin, our analysis can be plausibly understood in terms of broader academic culture, and specifically in the confluence of the two very distinct professional worlds of social work and the academy. The growth of women authors and shifts in methods used indicate temporal changes in social work academia. Yet we do not know if social work academia in turn is representative of the profession. It may be that continuing differences in author focus dependent on gender have been shaped by structural influences within the academy rather than by the *BJSW's* social work foundations.

To conclude, we have aimed to illuminate the role and significance of the *British Journal of Social Work* as the major and at periods of its history the only significant repository of social work scholarship in the UK. In this sense, our approach has been one of mapping and understanding the strongly applied scholarship that the journal characteristically includes. In doing so, we have kept to the fore the question of social work as a field which has taken and found shape/s within the journal over approaching half a century. The content analysis brings to the fore the ways in which the BJSW has fulfilled its ambitions over time, as well as how it is embedded in the social work landscape. In this particular sense the journal *is* a journal of record. Although there is no reason to imagine that the *BJSW* now is in some finished state of arrival, social work scholarship, at least in the UK, would have been dispersed and more fragmented without the home base that the journal has provided over its history. Returning to Lorenz's (2007) challenge, it is possible to see that the BJSW has told the story of social work as it has gradually taken shape as a profession and discipline in modern times. In this sense it is significant that the *BJSW* came into being at a turning point in time when social work was being deliberately shaped into a cohesive profession, certainly in the UK. Therefore, although we have eschewed the honorific 'let us now praise famous (wo)men' study, we believe honour *is* due to the *BJSW* for the role it has played, and continues to play in the social work field.

Archives

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Figures

Figure 1 Research methods by Editorial Regime (%)

Figure 2 Share of male and female authors by regime year (%)

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[i] It is beyond the remit of this paper to scope the various ways the much anticipated changes in social work became unstuck, but Olive Stevenson (2005) provides an interesting analysis from the standpoint of being editor of *BJSW* at that time, particularly on the failure of generic social work.

[ii] Until the IMF debt crisis of 1976, which led to significant budgetary constraints.

[iii] Eileen Younghusband (1902-1981) was a pioneer of social work education and was instrumental in developing social work as a profession both in the UK and internationally.

[iv] The Certificate of Qualification in Social Work

[v] Olive Stevenson (1930-2013) was one of the leading social work academics of her generation. She is perhaps best known for her role in the inquiry (1974) into the death by abuse of Maria Colwell – a landmark case in UK social work history. Olive sadly died before we were able to interview her for this project.

[vi] Associated, for example, with centenary celebrations for social work programmes.

[vii] http://www.historyofsocialwork.org/eng/index.php

[viii] http://www.socialworkers.org/pressroom/features/general/history.asp

[ix] This history of the British Journal of Social Work invites comparison with one of the few comparable journal histories in social work, that by Diner of the American journal Social Service Review (Diner, 1977; c.f. Diner, 1997). The comparison is slightly misleading. The two journals are deeply different in their identities and orientations to the world of social work. Social Service Review was established in 1927 by Edith Abbott and Sophonisba Breckinridge to provide a voice for the social welfare policy approach to social work associated with the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago. The journal was under a close-knit editorial policy, with the same editor for much of the period Diner covers. Throughout its history it has been edited out of the same university school and with an editorial policy that has changed only in marginal details. As such, very unlike the British Journal of Social Work, it never set out to be a journal of record or speak for the wider identities of social work, but has sustained a stance – indicated by its title - that locates it in some ways akin to the British Fabian welfare policy position (C.f. Shaw: 2010; Deegan and Hill 1991) of which Edith Abbott was deeply enamoured. It is also worth noting that the Chicago domicile of the journal has afforded a rich university archive of material that is unequalled for any comparable journal.

[x] Research for the study commenced in 2013. Transitions in OUP, BASW, the research team and editorial tenures each extended the duration of the project.

[xi] The eleven Editorial regimes studied were: 1971-74, 1975-77, 1977-80, 1981-84, 1985-87, 1987-91, 1992-95, 1996-99, 2000-04, 2004-10, 2010-15.

[xii] The results relating especially to the first and second themes can be seen in Shaw (forthcoming). A full account of both the methodology and the results can be seen in the final report at www.york.ac.uk/spsw/staff/ian-shaw.

[xiii] Usually primary research focus will mean the people from whom data was obtained, but if it is clear that these are simply being used as 'proxies' for another set of people (e.g. practitioners being interviewed to learn about children, rather than to learn about practice with children) then the primary focus is children. Detailed guidance has been developed to apply the classification, which is available from the second author. Slightly

earlier versions have been applied in various earlier papers including Shaw and Norton, 2007; Shaw and Ramatowski with Ruckdeschel, 2013; Shaw, Lunt and Mitchell, 2014.

[xiv]This is not to simplify the complex relationship between different forms of knowledge, and how they inform each other in the social work field as a whole (see Shaw, 2012, introduction), but it is to begin from the relatively straightforward starting point that the *BJSW* has long-held ambitions to include and engage social work academics and practitioners.

[xv] For example, giving free access to papers on two nationally high profile topics – the Peter Connolly case in 2009 and the Munro Review in 2011.

[xvi] The 2008 Research Assessment Exercise concluded that 'Quantitative research in social work is small in volume but of high quality. This is an area which would benefit from continued investment and development' (Cited by Sharland. http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Main_report_SW_and_SC_tcm8-4647.pdf Section 4.3.3). Sharland concluded in her later report that 'most consultants agreed that good examples are few and far between.'

[xvii] It is just possible that exigencies driven by the UK's quinquennial research assessment programmes may have increased the frequency of what sometimes is called 'salami-slicing', where projects are written up in several papers, and where qualitative data may appear in one and quantitative in another. Thus these figures *may* under estimate the prevalence of mixed methods research projects.

[xviii] When speaking of gender of author we are referring to gender of first author. There were six missing cases.

[xix] A more appropriate comparison would be to hold constant the time period. For the *BJSW* editorial tenures from 1999 to 2012 55.6% of first authors were women. This is still lower than the 70% in the study by Shaw Lunt and Mitchell, which covers a similar period.

[xx] This trend does not mean that women social work academics are now in an equitable position to their male colleagues however (Bent-Goodley and Kiss-Sarnoff, 2008). In some ways this might be surprising given the assumptions that can be made about the values base for social work, but social work as an academic task is embedded within existing academic structures and institutions.

[xxi] For example, we have an indicator of who the first author was and not who actually undertook fieldwork.

[xxii] For the table including the whole sample, Pearson Chi Square = 17.075. Df = 4. Asymp significance (2-sided) = 0.002.

[xxiii] There are various reasons why the proxy may not be a one to one measure of country of origin. Authors from one country may move to another; first authors may be domiciled in a country other than where the research was undertaken. However, we believe the measure is good enough for our purposes.

[xxiv] 'Rest of the world' comprises the two categories of 'Commonwealth countries' and 'other countries'. We do not mean to be demeaning in using these terms; in doing so we follow the categories used by OUP in their reports to the *BJSW* board.

[xxv] And of course factor in the USA population of almost 320 million and the USA presence of the journal seems tiny.

[xxvi] See the *BJSW* list of special issues for examples of this - www.academic.oup.com/bjsw/pages/special_issues