IMPORTANT FEATURES IN KEY DATABASES

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Sociological Abstracts *versus* Criminal Justice Abstracts

The field of Sociology is well-served by its core databases – both Sociological Abstracts (SA) – the best source for theory, etc. – and Criminal Justice Abstracts (CJA). However, there are anomalies in CJA that may affect advanced research into the field of Criminal Justice that are worth noting. Last year I spent the summer looking at the contents of both SA and CJA and found a few troubling omissions that would make me want to encourage the use of both databases for comprehensive literature searching, rather than rely upon CJA alone.

SOCIOLOGICAL ABSTRACTS & CRIMINAL JUSTICE ABSTRACTS

"CSA Sociological Abstracts "abstracts and indexes the international literature in sociology and related disciplines in the social and behavioral sciences. The database provides abstracts of journal articles and citations to book reviews drawn from over 1,800+ serials publications, and also provides abstracts of books, book chapters, dissertations, and conference papers. Records published by Sociological Abstracts in print during the database's first 11 years, 1952-1962, have been added to the database as of November 2005, extending the depth of the backfile of this authoritative resource."

The documentation for SA is comprehensive, with clear information on which of the 1800+ journals are 'core' and indexed from cover-to-cover. There are about 800 such titles in SA.

Criminal Justice Abstracts, "the criminology database from SAGE Publications, contains comprehensive coverage of international journals, books, reports, dissertations and unpublished papers on criminology and related disciplines. Prepared in co-operation with the Don M. Gottfredson Library of Criminal Justice at Rutgers University Law Library, Criminal Justice Abstracts covers crime trends, crime prevention and deterrence, juvenile delinquency, juvenile justice, police, courts, punishment and sentencing. The database contains indexes and summaries of international journal articles, books, and governmental and non-governmental reports on a wide range of topics in criminal justice."

CJA documentation does not include any notations about level of indexing for any of their journals. When I called about the anomalies that I discovered, I wasn't given any clear reasoning. There appears to be no written guidelines for determining level of indexing.

CJA VERSUS SA: SOME ANOMALIES

For many years I've noted that often searching in CJA and SA separately, I often came up with what seemed to be appropriate articles in criminology journals that were missing from the CJA database. I spent time going through many core Criminology journal issues comparing the coverage of these in both SA and CJA. Last summer, I used the ISI Journal Citation Reports to determine a set of 'core' Criminology journals and ran searches to see which articles from specific issues were indexed in which database.

In the vast majority of cases, the results were either the same – with both providing cover-to-cover indexing to core titles – or CJA providing more comprehensive coverage. However, there were troubling instances in which some articles, research notes, etc., from core journals were not in CJA, though they were in SA. An example from the journal "CRIMINOLOGY" is given below. For each article, I've indicated which articles are in "SA" and which are indexed in "CJA."

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CRIMINOLOGY

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CRIMINOLOGY

VOLUME 40   NUMBER 1   FEBRUARY 2002
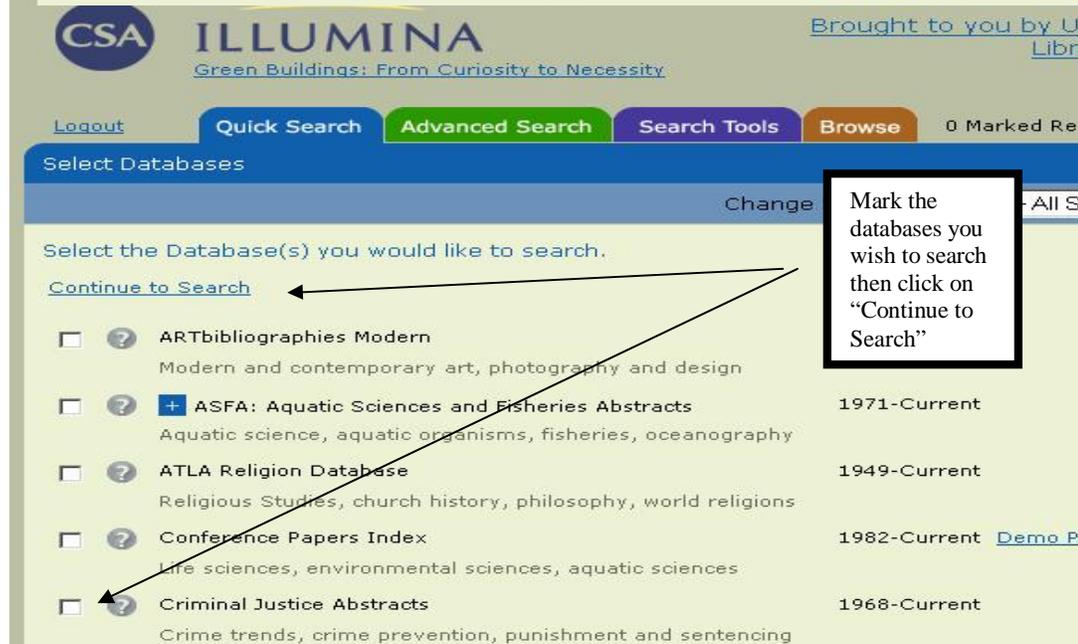
STRATEGIES & ASSUMPTIONS

I've spoken with the editor for CJA at the Rutgers Law Library for reasons or rationale, but didn't get answers that satisfied me. Due to the lack of criteria, issues of consistency, etc., I believe that the best way to guarantee comprehensive secondary research for criminal justice topics is to use the "specific databases" option in order to do a search of both CJA or SA – and potentially also the National Criminal Justice Reference Service Abstracts Database, Worldwide Political Science Abstracts or Social Services Abstracts as well. The CSA software allows for each searching in multiple databases at the same time. Duplicate records are automatically removed from the results (by an algorithm that retains the most complete or largest record). That way, researchers are assured that they are getting a comprehensive search of key literature.

How does multiple database searching work? While in CJA or SA, look for the "Specific Databases" hyperlink and click on it. From the listing of databases that comes up, mark those you want to search in and click on "Return to Search". Type in your search statement and click to run the search and the results will include anything for all of the selected databases.

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OTHER WAYS TO VET YOUR RESEARCH

Other checks for comprehensiveness of your secondary literature searching might include:

- Run your search through **Annual Reviews** to check against any related papers in annual Reviews of Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, Law and Social Science, etc.
- Check for related dissertations on your topic in **Digital Dissertations** – most include a good chapter that reviews relevant literature.
- Check **MNCAT** for a good overview – remember that books are longer than articles and most give good attention to theory, background and methodology – and have bibliographies and indexes to aid your research.
- If there is a specific theory, method, theorist or paper you are interested in, check this in the **Web of Science** to see who has cited this in this work.

Or, for more ideas or assistance, feel free to contact me anytime!

If you would like more information or have any questions, please let me know.