

1-1-2007

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Recommended Citation

Holley, R. P. & Heinrichs, J. (2007). Libraries as repositories of popular culture: Is popular culture still forgotten? *Collection Building*, 26(2), 48-53. doi: [10.1108/01604950710742077](https://doi.org/10.1108/01604950710742077)

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/slisfrp/34>

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This is the author's post print originally appearing in *Collection Building*. v. 26 no. 2 (2007)
pp. 48-53.

Available online at: <http://www.emeraldinsight.com>

Libraries as Repositories of Popular Culture: Is Popular Culture Still Forgotten?

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This article is an expanded version of a paper that Author 1 presented at the Midwest Popular Culture Association Annual Conference, St. Louis, MO, October 14-16, 2005.

Abstract

Purpose

To replicate a study done in 1992 on the bibliographic availability of 55 popular culture periodicals sold by a Kroger supermarket in Royal Oak, Michigan. The earlier study asked the question whether time might be a relevant variable for the number of holding libraries.

Design/methodology/approach

The authors searched WorldCat for the number of reported library holdings for the same 55 popular culture periodicals and analyzed the results.

Findings

34 periodicals with holdings during both periods had a median increase of 58.4%; but, when the 83.5% increase in OCLC full membership during the same period was taken into account, holdings had a median decrease of 13.7%. For the nineteen cases with no library holdings in 1992, eight (42.1%) now had library holdings including several high circulation periodicals such as *Star* and *Soap Opera Weekly*.

Practical implications

Popular culture materials read by many American are still not widely available in libraries or are not entered into WorldCat, the prime source for bibliographic holdings.

Originality/value

Provides additional statistical evidence on the availability of popular culture materials in libraries.

Keywords

Popular culture, OCLC WorldCat

Introduction

The following study replicates research done by Author 1 in 1992 on the availability of popular culture materials in libraries. As one of its major sections, the study examined the availability in libraries of printed materials found at a Kroger supermarket in Royal Oak, Michigan. The availability of these materials in libraries was determined from the holdings information found in the Online Computer Library Center's (OCLC) WorldCat database. Author 1 presented his findings at the 1992 International Federation of Library Association and Institution's (IFLA) Conference in New Delhi, India. This article titled "National Bibliography as National Memory: Is Popular Culture Forgotten?" appeared in *International Cataloguing and Bibliographic Control* (Author 1) and was subsequently anthologized in *Alternative Library Literature, 1992/1993* (Author 1) and *Global Trends in Library and Information Science*. (Author 1).

In the original study, Author 1 discovered that ten of the 55 periodicals (18.2%) had no record in the OCLC database and another nine titles (16.4%) had a bibliographic record without any library holdings. (Publishers submit their titles to the National Serial Data Program (NSDP) at the Library of Congress to have an International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) assigned such that a record appears in the OCLC WorldCat database even though no library holds the item.) Author 1 examined circulation figures for all periodicals with fewer than 50 holding libraries and discovered that:

"The average circulation for the five periodicals with no bibliographic record was 625,185. For the additional four periodicals with only one reporting library, usually the NSDP, the average circulation per issue was 1,250,586 including *Star* at 3,102,026. Since the NSDP does not collect the actual materials but only provides a brief bibliographic record, this means that no member of the largest library network in the United States is collecting a publication seen by over 3,000,000 readers each issue." (Author 1, p. 15)

Author 1 did note that "[t]his conclusion does not consider one important variable that could account for the lack of bibliographic records - time. It is possible that these mass market publications do not appear in the national network of bibliographic control because they have been published too recently." (p. 22) The current study tests the time variable by replicating the research in 2005 using the OCLC WorldCat database, thirteen years after the original investigation in 1992.

Research Methodology

Author 1 searched the original list of 55 periodicals found at the Kroger grocery store in the OCLC WorldCat database during September and October 2005. Author 1 consolidated two titles, *Women's Day Super Special: Home Decorating Ideas* and *Women's Day Super Special: Family Celebrations*, into the more generic title, *Women's Day Super Special* though Author 1 was still unable to find any library holdings for this complex bibliographic entity. This provided the 54 periodicals used in this analysis.

Author 1 also recorded any available official circulation statistics for the titles in the list. For the 1992 sample, Author 1 used the figures found in the 30th edition of the *Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory, 1991-92*. (Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory, 1991-92 Including Irregular Serials and Annuals) For the 2005 sample, Author 1 used *Ulrich's Online*, (Ulrich's International Periodical Directory) the database that replicates and expands the earlier print resource.

Since an increase in OCLC membership could have had an impact on the comparison of library holdings between 1992 and 2005, Author 1 used official OCLC documents to determine that OCLC had 4,867 full members in 1992 (OCLC Annual Report, 1991-1992: Accessing New Worlds of Information)(p. 3) and 8,931 full members in 2005. (OCLC Annual Report, 2004/2005: 1,000,000,000 Symbols of Library Cooperation) (p. 9). This represents a membership increase of 83.5%.

Results

In 1992, OCLC member libraries subscribed to 35 of the 54 magazine titles or approximately 64.8% of the titles. The 1992 library holdings and circulation data were scatter plotted looking for outliers. One outlier, *Newsweek*, was detected by scatter-plotting the data points and examining which data points were outside of the 95% scatter plot confidence interval. The data point was removed from further analysis.

In 2005, circulation statistics from 32 of the original 54 magazine titles were still able to be found. Of these 32 magazine titles, OCLC member libraries had holdings to 25 of the magazine titles or approximately 78.1% of the titles. One outlier, *Good Housekeeping*, was detected by scatter-plotting the 2005 data points. The data point was removed from further analysis.

A variety of statistical analyses are performed to understand the relationship between the magazine circulation statistics and the OCLC library holdings and the relationship between the change in library holdings and the change in circulation between the identified years of 1992 and 2005.

Table 1: Popular Culture Magazines

Title	1992 Library Holdings	1992 % Libraries Holding	2005 Library Holdings	2005 % Libraries Holding	Unadjusted % Change 1992-2005	Adjusted % Change 1992-2005	Magazine Status	1992 Circulation	2005 Circulation	% Change 1992-2005
Archie Annual Digest Magazine	0	0.00%	7	0.08%	---	---	Active	NA	NA	---
Archie's Stories & Games	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	Unknown	NA	NA	---
Baseball Cards (Sports Cards)	40	0.82%	26	0.29%	-35.00%	-64.58%	Ceased	326,827	187,596	-42.60%
Best of TV Guide Crosswords	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	---	---	Ceased	NA	NA	---
Better Homes and Gardens	3,015	61.95%	4,195	46.97%	39.14%	-24.18%	Active	8,002,000	7,600,000	-5.02%
Betty Crocker Creative Recipes	0	0.00%	7	0.08%	---	---	Unknown	NA	NA	---
Classic Pillsbury Cookbooks	0	0.00%	6	0.07%	---	---	Unknown	NA	NA	---
Cosmopolitan	60	1.23%	1,665	18.64%	2,675.00%	1,412.23%	Active	2,740,000	2,573,096	-6.09%
Countryside	135	2.77%	11	0.12%	-91.85%	-95.56%	Ceased	250,000	NA	---
Easy-to-do Crosswords	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	---	---	Active	NA	NA	---
Elle	226	4.64%	579	6.48%	156.19%	39.61%	Active	825,000	1,014,418	22.96%
Family Circle	61	1.25%	1,599	17.90%	2,521.31%	1,328.50%	Active	5,944,327	4,600,000	-22.62%
Favorite Brand Name Recipe	0	0.00%	6	0.07%	---	---	Active	NA	NA	---
First for Women	31	0.64%	176	1.97%	467.74%	209.39%	Active	NA	1,350,000	---
Glamour	1,911	39.26%	2,830	31.69%	48.09%	-19.30%	Active	2,130,148	2,300,000	7.97%
Globe	1	0.02%	NV	NA	---	---	Unknown	1,600,000	NA	---
Good Housekeeping	141	2.90%	4,282	47.95%	2,936.88%	1,554.96%	Active	5,028,000	4,600,000	-8.51%
Harper's Bazaar	1,602	32.92%	2,118	23.72%	32.21%	-27.95%	Active	720,863	730,665	1.36%
Ladies Home Journal	2,736	56.22%	3,801	42.56%	38.93%	-24.29%	Active	5,043,143	5,000,000	-0.86%
Mademoiselle	2,265	46.54%	2,227	24.94%	-1.68%	-46.42%	Ceased	1,236,392	1,158,274	-6.32%
McCall's	2,662	54.69%	2,732	30.59%	2.63%	-44.07%	Ceased	5,000,000	4,200,000	-16.00%
Mirabella	109	2.24%	210	2.35%	92.66%	4.99%	Ceased	NA	553,298	---
Muscle & Fitness	37	0.76%	104	1.16%	181.08%	53.18%	Active	600,000	477,013	-20.50%
Mystery Word Games	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	---	---	Unknown	NA	NA	---
National Enquirer	15	0.31%	78	0.87%	420.00%	183.38%	Active	4,552,047	2,300,000	-49.47%
National Examiner	2	0.04%	1	0.01%	-50.00%	-72.75%	Active	NA	420,000	---
New Body	4	0.08%	3	0.03%	-25.00%	-59.13%	Ceased	90,000	152,050	69.94%
New Woman	496	10.19%	488	5.46%	-1.61%	-46.38%	Ceased	1,260,000	1,177,730	-6.53%
News Extra	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	---	---	Unknown	NA	NA	---
Newsweek	4,375	89.89%	6,524	73.05%	49.12%	-18.74%	Active	3,057,081	3,100,000	1.40%
People	2,778	57.08%	4,099	45.90%	47.55%	-19.59%	Ceased	3,150,000	3,350,000	6.35%
Prevention	20	0.41%	3,516	39.37%	17,480.0%	9,480.32%	Active	2,875,314	3,200,000	11.29%
Reader's Digest	3,391	69.67%	4,475	50.11%	31.97%	-28.08%	Active	17,884,818	15,000,000	-16.13%
Redbook	NV	NA	2,893	32.39%	---	---	Active	5,000,000	2,407,985	-51.84%

Table 1: Popular Culture Magazines (continued)

Title	1992 Library Holdings	1992 % Libraries Holding	2005 Library Holdings	2005 % Libraries Holding	Unadjusted % Change 1992-2005	Adjusted % Change 1992-2005	Magazine Status	1992 Circulation	2005 Circulation	% Change 1992-2005
Self	479	9.84%	1,299	14.54%	171.19%	47.79%	Active	1,124,129	1,314,270	16.91%
Seventeen	2,704	55.56%	3,868	43.41%	43.05%	-22.05%	Active	1,750,000	1,950,000	11.43%
Shape	167	3.43%	767	8.59%	359.28%	150.29%	Active	700,000	1,692,690	141.81%
Soap Opera Digest	92	1.89%	209	2.34%	127.17%	23.80%	Active	1,300,000	1,110,000	-14.62%
Soap Opera Weekly	0	0.00%	25	0.28%	---	---	Active	NA	450,000	---
Star	0	0.00%	31	0.35%	---	---	Active	3,429,855	1,752,557	-48.90%
Success	523	10.75%	922	10.32%	76.29%	-3.93%	Ceased	423,019	275,000	-34.99%
Sun	NV	NA	NV	NA	---	---	Unknown	NA	NA	---
TV Crosswords	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	---	---	Active	NA	NA	---
TV Guide	637	13.09%	718	8.04%	12.72%	-38.57%	Active	15,800,000	13,000,000	-17.72%
TV Word Games	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	---	---	Unknown	NA	NA	---
Us: The Entertainment Magazine	310	6.37%	351	3.93%	13.23%	-38.30%	Unknown	9	1,000,000	---
Victoria	151	3.10%	557	6.24%	268.87%	101.02%	Ceased	750,000	971,888	29.59%
Weekly Worlds News	2	0.04%	8	0.09%	300.00%	117.98%	Active	NA	385,000	---
Woman's Day	1,124	23.09%	1,885	21.11%	67.70%	-8.61%	Active	6,590,000	4,279,375	-35.06%
Woman's Day Favorite Home Plans	0	0.00%	32	0.36%	---	---	Active	NA	NA	---
Woman's Day Special	0	0.00%	74	0.83%	---	---	Unknown	763,000	NA	---
Woman's Day Super Special	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	---	---	Active	NA	NA	---
Woman's Day Your Body / Health	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	---	---	Unknown	NA	NA	---
Woman's World	26	0.53%	81	0.91%	211.54%	69.77%	Active	NA	1,500,000	---

NV = Not verified. Author 1 was not able to verify several titles in both samples because of the large number of records retrieved from the OCLC database.

Descriptive Statistics, Correlation, and Regression

The descriptive statistics for the OCLC library holding and magazine circulation statistics are reported in Table 2. In 1992, the mean number of OCLC member libraries holding popular culture magazines was 20.1%. This mean number of holding libraries decreased to 18.3% of OCLC member libraries by 2005. The mean circulation of these held magazines was 3,289,143 in 1992 and decreased slightly to 3,241,961 by 2005. The descriptive statistics indicate that the circulation statistics are positively skewed and that they are peaked. However, the Shapiro-Wilk test indicates that all data are normal thus permitting correlation and regression analysis.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Active Magazines

		1992 Percent of Libraries Holding	1992 Circulation	2005 Percent of Libraries Holding	2005 Circulation
Mean		20.1%	3,489,143	18.3%	3,241,961
Median		7.2%	1,675,000	12.0%	1,851,278
Minimum		.02%	90,000	.01%	385,000
Maximum		69.67%	17,884,818	52.05%	15,000,000
Skewness	Statistic	.887	2.26	.668	2.203
	Std Error	.441	.441	.472	.472
Kurtosis	Statistic	-.903	5.27	-1.063	4.639
	Std Error	.858	.858	.918	.918
Shapiro-Wilk	Statistic	.772	.710	.846	.703
	Df	28	28	24	24
	Significance	.010**	.010**	.010**	.010**

* p<0.05, ** p<.01, ns = not significant at the 0.05 level

Table 3 shows that the percentage of OCLC libraries holding actively published magazines is positively correlated to the circulation statistics for that magazine. In 1992, the percentage of OCLC libraries holding the magazine was positive correlated to the magazine circulation with a value of .423. In 2005, the percentage of OCLC libraries holding the magazine was positive correlated to magazine circulation with a value of .515. The change in holdings between 1992 and 2005, however, was not correlated to the change in circulation between those years. The change in percentage of OCLC libraries holding magazines that were no longer being published was positively correlated to the last reported circulation statistic.

Table 3a: 1992 Correlation Results for Active Magazines		
	1992 Percent of Libraries Holding	1992 Circulation
1992 Percent of Libraries Holding	1.000	.423*
1992 Circulation	.423*	1.000
Table 3b: 2005 Correlation Results for Active Magazines		
	2005 Percent of Libraries Holding	2005 Circulation
2005 Percent of Libraries Holding	1.000	.515**
2005 Circulation	.515**	1.000
Table 3c: 1992-2005 Correlation Results for Active Magazines		
	Change in Percent of Libraries Holding	Change in Circulation
Change in Percent of Libraries Holding	1.000	ns
Change in Circulation	ns	1.000
Table 3d: 1992-2005 Correlation Results for Ceased Magazines		
	1992 Percent of Libraries Holding	2005 Percent of Libraries Holding
Change in Percent of Libraries Holding	1.000	.963**
Change in Circulation	.963**	1.000

* p<0.05, ** p<.01, ns = not significant at the 0.05 level

Table 4 provides the regression results for the percentage change in library holdings as the dependent measure using the magazine circulation statistics as the independent measure. The R² was .168 for the 1992 regression equation and the R² was .265 for the 2005 regression equation. The 1992 circulation coefficient was .0000023 implying that there was a 2.3% change in library holdings for every million issues circulated. The 2005 circulation coefficient was .0000025 implying that there was a 2.5% change in library holdings for every million issues circulated. The regression equation for the change in holdings from 1992 to 2005 did not have a significant coefficient for the change in circulation. The regression results for the percentage change in library holdings of magazines in 1992 to the library holdings of magazines that were no longer published in 2005 had a significant coefficient of 63.9% with an R² of .928.

Table 4a: Regression Results for the 1992 Percent Change in Holdings Dependent Measure				
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Significance
	B	Std. Error		
Constant	12.00	5.420	2.21	.036*
1992 Circulation	.0000023	.000	2.38	.025*

Table 4b: Regression Results for the 2005 Percent Change in Holdings Dependent Measure				
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Significance
	B	Std. Error		
Constant	10.01	4.440	2.25	.035*
2005 Circulation	.0000025	.000	2.82	.010**

Table 4c: Regression Results for the 1992-2005 Percent Change in Holdings Dependent Measure				
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Significance
	B	Std. Error		
Constant	787.04	343.900	2.29	.038*
1992 Circulation	-.000313	.000	-1.03	.320
2005 Circulation	.0004025	.000	1.08	.296

Table 4d: Regression Results for the 2005 Library Holdings for Ceased Magazines				
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Significance
	B	Std. Error		
Constant	.591	1.852	.319	.758*
1992 Library Holdings	.639	.063	10.154	.000

* p<0.05, ** p<.01, ns = not significant at the 0.05 level

Discussion and Conclusions

While the data are correlated and the regression equations are significant for the two years of the research study, the time series regression equation between the two years was not significant. It appears that once the library has made the hold/no hold decision, that decision is not re-evaluated for changes in the circulation, popularity of the magazine, or ceased publication of the magazine.

The mean circulation numbers for both years in the study were over 3,200,000 magazines. *Reader's Digest*, with circulation in excess of 15,000,000 issues, was the most widely held popular culture magazine being reported held by 69% of the libraries in 1992 and 52% of the libraries in 2005. *Reader's Digest* is a popular culture, general-interest family magazine. It contains stories on a variety of topics including sports, travel, education, humor, and health. The second most widely held magazine in 1992 was *Better Homes and Garden* (62%) followed by *Good Housekeeping* (50%) in 2005. The least held popular culture magazine in 1992 and 2005 was *The National Examiner* (4% and 1% respectively) with a 2005 estimated circulation of 420,000. *The National Examiner* is a

weekly publication with stories that range from information about entertainment stars to general human-interest.

This study includes both good and bad news for proponents of the view that libraries should collect popular culture. For the 34 periodicals with library holdings during both review periods (1992 and 2005), 28 periodicals (82.4%) had an increase in libraries holdings with a median percentage increase of 58.4%. The picture is less positive when the increase in OCLC membership, defined in this paper as the number of full members, is taken into account in comparing the two survey years. With an adjustment for this 83.5% increase in membership, only 15 periodicals (44.1%) had an increase in the number of library holdings with the median change turning into a 13.7% decrease.

The more heartening result is the fact that almost half the periodicals (8/19 or 42.1%) with no library holdings in 1992 (either no holdings or a NSDP bibliographic record only) had holdings in 2005. In 2005, a significant number of libraries reported holdings for *Star* (31 libraries) and for *Soap Opera Weekly* (25 libraries). This is especially important because both items have a relatively high reported circulation statistic--*Star* at 1,752,557 and *Soap Opera Weekly* at 450,000.

The authors wish, however, to caution researchers in the area of popular culture that even these modest improvements may be illusory. First, the inclusion of a holdings symbol in OCLC's WorldCat database does not necessarily mean that the library keeps back issues of the magazine. The library may retain only current issues for a limited amount of time before discarding them. Conversely, the library may have limited back files with no current subscription. Second, while OCLC expects libraries to delete items that are no longer held by the library, this often does not occur so that some OCLC WorldCat database records may include phantom holdings. Researchers are advised to verify physical holdings before planning any visit to consult these periodicals.

Overall, the authors conclude that these popular culture magazines remain underrepresented in American libraries. While *Star*, the *National Enquirer*, *Soap Opera Weekly*, and the *Weekly World News* may lack intellectual respectability, these publications are important parts of popular culture and can help document American reading habits. Their continued existence and high circulation statistics are testaments of their importance within the American cultural landscape. While the authors are not suggesting that every library should have subscriptions to these items, several libraries of record should collect current issues and take the necessary preservation measures to preserve them for future generations of scholars.

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