

Medien • Kultur • Kommunikation

Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz

# Kommunikations- wissenschaft im internationalen Vergleich

Transnationale Perspektiven



Springer VS

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Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz  
(Hrsg.)

# Kommunikationswissen- schaft im internationalen Vergleich

Transnationale Perspektiven

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# Faulty Reception: The Institutional Roots of U.S. Communication Research's Neglect of Public Sphere Scholarship

Jefferson Pooley und Christian Schwarzenegger

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## 1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on sociology-of-knowledge factors to help explain the peculiar reception of the *public sphere* concept within U.S. American communication research. We emphasize two overarching factors: (1) The institutional emergence of a polyglot, would-be discipline of “communication” from journalism schools and speech departments in the decades after World War II; and (2) the sociology of cross-national academic translation of the public-sphere scholarship of Jürgen Habermas in the 1990s. The chapter argues that these two factors interacted over time to shape the late—and notably partial—uptake of Habermas’s ideas. That is, the U.S. discipline’s institutional underpinnings helped to produce the intellectual conditions that prevented, or at least delayed, a robust engagement with the public sphere by communication researchers. In part because of the intellectual coordinates they inherited from the discipline’s institutional arrangements, U.S. researchers were unequipped to absorb the European import. Instead, Habermas’s (1962/1989) just-translated *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (STPS) was largely ignored by psychologically inclined political communication

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researchers of the 1990s; his work was taken up, in the U.S. at least, by historians, political sociologists and political theorists instead.

Our hypothesis, only partly tested here, is that U.S. communication's *low prestige* relative to neighboring disciplines helped to shape the flow of ideas into and out of the discipline. In the public sphere case, we suggest, Habermas's ideas were picked up first by U.S. scholars in history and the traditional social sciences, who then passed the concept along to communication researchers. To borrow Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1955) well-known model, the path from Habermas's to U.S. communication research was a *two-step flow*. Our broader point is that the geography of relative field prestige has intellectual consequences. For various reasons rooted in its institutional history, U.S. communication research is a low-status discipline relegated to the margins of the university. This persistent and self-reinforcing *prestige gap*, relative to adjacent fields, led us to expect a patterned reception of the public sphere concept:

1. *Lighter engagement*: that the U.S. communication discipline would cite and deploy the public sphere concept less frequently than U.S. scholars in better-established disciplines.
2. *Delay*: that communication researchers would have engaged with *STPS* and the public sphere later than the other U.S. scholars.
3. *One-way direction*: that communication scholars would cite other U.S. scholars' interpretations/applications of Habermas's but that the reverse—the citation of communication scholars by, say, historians—would be comparatively rare.
4. *Key role for ambassadors*: that, in keeping with the two-step flow model, a small handful of communication scholars would act as “opinion leaders”—as importers of the public sphere concept.

In our view, it is relevant that this (expected) reception pattern resembles the general process by which a foreign scholar's work gets absorbed into a new national context. As work on the sociology of cross-national academic translation has suggested, ideas from abroad tend to be selectively imported, decontextualized, and significantly shaped by a small number of native translator-champions. Our hunch was that *STPS* was, so to speak, translated *twice*—once to the better-established U.S. disciplines, and a second time from those fields to communication research. The patterned reception of cross-national ideas, in other words, may have been replicated *within* the U.S. disciplinary mix—and with similar intellectual consequences. As an initial test of our hypothesis, we conducted a comparative analysis of journal articles citing Habermas and the public sphere (HPS) over time. We selected ten U.S. communication journals, and compared these to ten

more-or-less analogous journals in three other U.S. disciplines: political science, sociology and history. Using full-text and title/abstract keyword searches, we measured the timing, frequency and reciprocity of HPS references in the twenty journals.

The chapter first describes the peculiar translation history of Habermas's *STPS*, with special attention to the long gap between the German (1962) and English (1989) editions. The gap itself, along with significant changes in Habermas's own intellectual commitments in the interim, positions the book (and the public sphere concept) as a good test case for our thesis. Next we outline a number of overlapping factors, most rooted in the institutional history of U.S. communication research, that help to explain the discipline's low relative status. In the chapter's further sections, we develop the core argument about international translation, prestige gaps, and the flow of ideas, vis-a-vis HPS. We report on our academic-journal analysis in final section, concluding that our findings provide partial and suggestive support for our initial claims. The chapter can be read as a test, 30 years later, of John Durham Peters's (1986) classic argument for—as his title phrased the point—the “institutional sources of intellectual poverty in [U.S.] communication research.” In that respect, our interest is not in the diffusion and uptake of the public sphere *per se*, but instead what the HPS-to-communication story says about the discipline itself. Our question, which we only begin to address here, is: What are the intellectual consequences of the U.S. discipline's institutionalization? Given that other legitimacy-poor disciplines might exhibit similar consequences, our study may have wider appeal to historians and sociologists of academic knowledge. The geography of relative field prestige, after all, plainly affects the circulation of ideas.

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## 2 Habermas in Translation

Jürgen Habermas published *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* in 1962 as his *Habilitationsschrift*. The book describes the emergence, in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of a bourgeois *public sphere*—a space between private life and the state where a self-understood public gathered for reasoned debate. In the book's second major section, Habermas narrated the bourgeois public sphere's twentieth-century decline in the face of mass media, consumerism and party politics. Though *Strukturwandel* was widely reprinted and influential across a range of German-language disciplines, the book was only translated into English 27 years later, in 1989, as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (*STPS*). The reasons for the long delay are still not adequately explained, though



related at least in part to Habermas's own long-term but unrealized intention to revise the text (Beebee 2002, pp. 193–195; Turner 2009, pp. 225–226; Calhoun 1992a, p. 5). A five-page encyclopedia article (Habermas 1974) published in *New German Critique* was his only English-language treatment until the full 1989 translation appeared. The lengthy translation delay acted as a kind of intellectual time capsule, with some peculiar intellectual consequences. Habermas's own thinking had taken some sharp turns away from *Strukturwandel*'s normative and epistemological position in the intervening years. In *Strukturwandel*, he had mined the history of the public sphere for its critical purchase in the present, while acknowledging the bourgeois public sphere's constitutive exclusions (of women and working-class men); it was, he wrote back in 1962, "ideology and simultaneously more than ideology" (Habermas 1989, p. 88). But by the late 1960s Habermas had already abandoned *Strukturwandel*'s form of immanent ideology critique as inadequate to the task of critical theory. As an alternative, he turned first to Freudian psychoanalysis as an epistemological model (Habermas 1968/1972) and then, in *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas 1981/1984, 1987), to the philosophy of language and the validity claims inherent in speech acts. The reasons for the shifts are beyond the scope of this paper. What's relevant is the leapfrog phenomenon: the books outlining Habermas's new orientation were translated into English *before STPS* appeared. As we recount below, this feature of *STPS*'s translation history has proven useful in gauging the depth and sophistication of U.S. scholars' treatment of the book.

The 1989 translation called forth an avalanche of English-language scholarship—one that continues to gather speed. High-profile edited collections, notably Craig Calhoun's *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Calhoun 1992b), helped to establish lines of interpretive debate among historians, sociologists, political scientists, and—yes—communication scholars.<sup>1</sup> A bibliography of secondary public-sphere literature, published just five years later, ran to 36 pages (Strum 1994). A search of the JSTOR journal database (for "Habermas" and "public sphere") yields just 345 results from 1962 through to 1988. Since 1989 JSTOR records nearly 6,500 articles and reviews, with mentions increasing steadily year by year. There is, in short, a full-fledged Habermas industry in the English-speaking academic world.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Habermas's own writings on the public sphere have

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<sup>1</sup>*Habermas and the Public Sphere* included contributions from two notable communication scholars, one U.S. (Schudson 1992) and the other U.K. (Garnham 1992).

<sup>2</sup>See also the sharp takeoff of appearances of "public sphere" on Google Ngram Viewer in 1989: <https://books.google.com/ngrams>.

continued to appear in English (Habermas 1992, 1992/1996, 2006a). The post-1989 sluice-opening of English-language public-sphere engagement was, for our purposes, a useful case of cross-national academic idea translation. We were curious about whether the U.S. reception was *patterned*—by timing, frequency and referencing—according to discipline. We were, of course, especially interested in U.S. communication research, whose institutional history we outline in the chapter’s next section.

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### 3 The Institutional Roots of the Field’s Low Prestige

The legitimacy problems of U.S. communication research derive, in a fundamental sense, from the discipline’s double mission as an academic field whose teaching, student enrollments, and *raison d’être* are grounded in vocational skills training (Pooley 2011; cf. Pooley and Katz 2008). As British scholar Jeremy Tunstall (1983) observed over 30 years ago, in an essay titled “The Trouble with U.S. Communication Research,” the “fact that a single individual can teach courses in, say, magazine editing and research techniques in social psychology is a tribute to human adaptability, not to a well-conceived academic discipline” (p. 93). The troubled marriage of skills and analysis was consummated in the discipline’s formative years, and exacted a reputational price from the beginning. An array of attendant and follow-on traits of the field—along with self-feeding dynamics—have secured the discipline’s place on the professional-school periphery of the U.S. university system.

#### 3.1 The Post-World War II Emergence of an Organized Discipline

The institutional history of U.S. communication research has yet to be written.<sup>3</sup> The brief account that follows surveys the discipline’s early institutionalization, beginning in the late 1940s through the 1960s. It was during this period that a

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<sup>3</sup>There are a handful of article-length treatments, as well as dissertations that focus on important figures, like Wilbur Schramm, and particular departments. See Cartier (1988), Chaffee and Rogers (1997), Delia (1987, pp. 73–84), Dickson (1999, pp. 60–96), Fish (1984), King (1990), Peters’s (1986), Sproule (2008), Weaver and Gray (1980). The following paragraphs draw on material and language from Pooley (2011).

loose, interdisciplinary field of social scientists working on “communication” topics was largely replaced by newly established programs in professional schools of journalism and speech departments. Both fields converged on the “communication” label as a response to their insecure place in the rapidly changing, post-World War II research university. U.S. social scientists began using “communication” to describe a media-focused field of study only in the late 1930s, though plenty of media scholarship was produced earlier. These sociologists, political scientists and psychologists were already identified with *public opinion research*, which had coalesced in the mid-1930s around sampling-based polling methods (Converse 2009). In part owing to the Rockefeller Foundation’s investment in educational broadcasting, as well as media and marketing firms’ eagerness to commission research on their audiences, a large share of public opinion research was conducted on media and communication-related topics (Buxton 1994; Pooley 2006). From 1939 until U.S. entry into the war, Rockefeller seeded a number of overlapping propaganda and morale research initiatives, drawing on leading public opinion researchers—most of whom subsequently joined the official war effort (Gary 1996; Sproule 1987). Survey methods and communication topics emerged from the war at the center of U.S. sociology as well as important strands of psychology and political science (Pooley 2008; Converse 2009). In the early post-war years, these researchers increasingly referred to their work as “communication research,” even as they remained identified with their home disciplines (Glander 2000, pp. 41–60; Simpson 1994, pp. 15–31).

Often associated with large survey research institutes like Columbia’s Bureau of Applied Social Research and Michigan’s Survey Research Center, the postwar social scientific study of mass communication was a significant component of the wider “behavioral sciences” movement for a nomothetic, quantitative study of society (Pooley and Solovey 2010). Underwritten by large foundations, notably Ford, as well as U.S. government and military contracts, self-identified behavioral scientists worked on applied, Cold War-related propaganda research while also searching for general social laws. “Communication research” was arguably their main topical focus (Simpson 1994; Pooley 2008). This interdisciplinary nexus of Cold War communication research gradually withered, in large part because of major changes in foundation and U.S. government funding priorities in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Crowther-Heyck 2006). Even before the fall-off in interdisciplinary work by social scientists from traditional disciplines, however, literature scholar Wilbur Schramm had begun to establish doctoral programs in communication *within journalism schools*—first at the University of Iowa and soon after at the University of Illinois (Chaffee and Rogers 1997). Schramm, a consummate academic entrepreneur, had hatched the idea for a standalone,

journalism-based communication discipline while serving in the World War II propaganda bureaucracy (Cartier 1988). At Iowa and Illinois, he edited readers, sponsored conferences, drafted a disciplinary history, and worked energetically to establish the scaffolding necessary for a new discipline. Throughout the 1950s Schramm, with the significant help of the so-called “Bleyer children”—a handful of research-oriented former students of an interwar journalism scholar, Willard Bleyer—succeeded in establishing communication doctoral programs within journalism schools at a number of Midwestern land-grant institutions as well as Stanford (Nelson 1987; Rogers and Chaffee 1994; Ross 1957). Schramm and the Bleyer children had, in short, successfully colonized journalism education in the name of “communication research”—in part because skills-oriented journalism schools faced legitimacy problems in the research-oriented postwar American university. The result, however, was a self-recognized scholarly discipline jerry-built atop a pre-existing model of professional education—leading to early and persistent tensions between skills-oriented faculty and the social scientific newcomers.

The discipline’s other ancestor, speech programs housed in the humanities, adopted the communication label for remarkably similar reasons. Speech, before World War II, already had one foot in social science with its speech disorders subfield. Rapid advances made during and after the war by psychological social psychologists working on group dynamics and small-group interaction, however, raised the fear that the field’s claim to interpersonal communication might be supplanted. The social psychological literature was joined to a small native tradition of social science-oriented speech inquiry beginning in the late 1940s. The idea was that public speaking courses and the great speeches curriculum weren’t enough to secure the discipline’s place in the postwar university. Communication was a natural fit, in part because speech programs benefitted from another link—to broadcasting education. Starting in the 1920s, some speech departments established coursework in radio announcing as an extension of drama. Radio was joined in the 1950s to TV coursework and then both to film instruction in the 1960s. The result was the establishment of RTF (short for Radio-Television-Film) tracks in many speech programs in the postwar years. The so-called “orality alliance” or “Midwestern model” of speech instruction thus comprised four distinct fields: speech disorders, speech communication, RTF or broadcasting, and theater. At many universities, moreover, the departments’ speech component clung to the field’s roots in classical rhetoric; the result was “two cultures,” the humanistic and social scientific, engaged in prolonged “joint custody” of the field. In the 1960s, the Babel-like field began to embrace the same communication label

that journalism schools were also claiming (Delia 1987, pp. 76–84; Sproule 2008, pp. 169–171). So complete was the substitution of communication for speech that speech-trained scholars were, by the early 1990s, complaining about a discipline left “speechless” (Macke 1991). On both tracks—journalism schools and speech departments—traditional instruction in applied skills was awkwardly merged with scholarship. Both the journalism- and speech-derived ends of the “communication” discipline prospered in the balance of the twentieth century, at least as measured by faculty hiring and student enrollments. But the discipline’s relative prosperity—a product, in truth, of the demand for vocational training—could not dispel the mission incoherence institutionalized by the field’s founders.

### 3.2 Factors Contributing to the Discipline’s Legitimacy Deficit

A number of factors, set in motion by the discipline’s institutional history, have contributed to U.S. communication research’s sustained and intractable legitimacy crisis. Taken together, these factors have opened up a yawning prestige gap between communication and adjacent disciplines.

- *Professional/academic double mission:* As outlined above, most communication departments are in the business of skills training, with academic analysis as a significant but secondary focus. The curricula of these programs reflect their roots in applied journalism and speech courses. Journalism-derived programs train journalists and related trades like advertising and public relations, while speech-oriented departments provide instruction in public speaking (and, often, acting and broadcasting). These units were established with this skills provision in mind, and ongoing and intense student demand merely reinforces that original charge. Especially in the case of journalism-derived departments, media-analysis coursework and faculty subsist as a kind of academic appendage on these programs’ core, history- and enrollment-driven mission to train media workers. The resulting schizophrenia—academic research and coursework in awkward co-habitation with vocational training—contributes to a pervasive sense of confused purpose, which other scholars in the university, and even the educated public, detect.
- *Suspect professional status:* All professional-academic disciplines arguably incur a reputational cost for their applied components (Becher and Trowler 2001). But unlike, say, law or medicine—professions with well-established

scholarly traditions, histories of aggressive boundary work, and legal licensure—journalism’s professional status is questionable at best (Dooley 2000; Aldridge and Evetts 2003; Allan 2010). If journalism’s status as a profession is suspect, the claims for advertising and public relations are weaker still (Marchand 1985). And very few indeed would assert that public speaking constitutes a bona fide profession. The promise of communication education is vocational training and gainful employment, not professional status. In that respect, communication programs resemble business schools—but without the economists and plush carpeting. One byproduct is lower esteem for communication programs within the academy.

- *Late-arriving*: As discussed above, academic units carrying the “communication” label arrived relatively late, with the first doctoral programs appearing in the late 1940s. Communication research has a long past, but a short history: scholarship in speech, rhetoric, journalism and other media topics predated the establishment of formal degree programs. But this work was produced under the sponsorship of fledgling speech and journalism programs, or else within the established social sciences and humanities.<sup>4</sup> As an organized discipline with a recognized identity, communication research is a relative newcomer. Even though the other social sciences were differentiated, in the U.S. case, a mere 50 years earlier (Haskell 1977; Calhoun 1992c), the relative youth of communication has compounded the discipline’s legitimacy challenges.
- *Nomenclature*: A related problem for the new discipline was the word “communication” itself—its novelty but also its nebulosity. References in English to “communication research” only begin to appear in the late 1930s, in the run-up to U.S. involvement in World War II (Sproule 1987). The term was in relatively wide circulation during and especially after the war, on through the 1950s—but as a label for an interdisciplinary field of psychologists, political scientists, and sociologists. Once claimed by journalism schools and, slightly later, speech programs, the term’s referent became increasingly vague. Especially in the hands of disciplinary entrepreneurs like Schramm, the label’s sheer capaciousness—its seeming claim to all of human interaction—opened up a gap between the organized field’s scholarship, on the one hand, and the term’s undefined but expansive reach, on the other. In this light Peters’s (1986)

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<sup>4</sup>Rhetoric, of course, has its own ancient, medieval and early modern history of scholarship that long preceded the late 19th century establishment of the “core” social sciences (e.g. Roach 1950; Reid 1959; Craig 1990; Whalen 1993).

referred to U.S. communication research an academic Taiwan, claiming all of China while confined to a small island (p. 543).<sup>5</sup>

- *Two (or more) tracks:* As we have seen, the U.S. communication discipline was erected upon two major pre-existing traditions, speech and journalism—both of which converged on “communication” for somewhat opportunistic reasons. In practice this has meant that many large U.S. universities have at least two schools or departments—and often many more—that carry “communication” in their name. The subsequent emergence of “indigenous” programs without professional ancestry—like the two Annenberg Schools—as well as humanities-oriented film studies programs have contributed to the confusion. That motley appearance has only worsened over time, given name changes, administrative realignments, and the sometimes fierce enmity between rival units on a single campus. One result is that the U.S. discipline supports four large professional associations that claim jurisdiction over the field as a whole: the National Communication Association (with roots in speech), the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (with roots in journalism), the International Communication Association (spun off from NCA), and the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (with roots in film) (Pooley 2011, p. 1451–1452). For outsiders this madcap scene provokes understandable head-scratching.
- *On the campus periphery:* Though some speech-oriented communication departments are housed within their universities’ arts and sciences faculties, most U.S. communication programs exist as standalone schools or colleges. In practice this means that most programs are segregated from the other social science and humanities disciplines in both administrative and physical terms. The arts and sciences faculties, especially for their constituent scholars, remain the symbolic (and often geographic) center of the U.S. university, committed to the academy’s traditional truth-seeking mission. By contrast, professional units like communication—but also education, business, and architecture—are often viewed as questionably academic impostors that threaten to corrode the university tradition. Standalone communication programs, housed in their own buildings on the edge of campus, act as a brick-and-mortar drag on the discipline’s legitimacy.

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<sup>5</sup>As Craig (1995) has observed, the U.S. discipline has “scarcely more than a single, culturally very potent symbol, ‘communication’, a word still trendy enough to attract students, legitimate enough to keep skeptical colleagues at bay for a while, and ambiguous enough to serve as a lowest common denominator for our otherwise largely unrelated scholarly and professional pursuits” (p. 178).

- *Midwestern state universities:* For some of the same reasons, most early programs were established in large Midwestern land-grant universities, like Illinois, Iowa and Michigan State. Land-grant institutions, by design, were more receptive to applied education, and remain host to many of the country's leading departments and schools today. With only a pair of exceptions, the elite private universities on the Eastern seaboard have shunned the discipline altogether. The absence of organized communication programs at Harvard, Yale, and the like is doubtless a product, at least in part, of the prestige dynamics already addressed, but communication's exclusion from these elite institutions also doubles back on the field's perceived illegitimacy.
- *Enrollments:* At many U.S. universities, the undergraduate communication major enrolls more students than any other program. These high enrollments in turn finance the discipline, so much so that some institutions apparently treat communication as a "cash cow" for other priorities. All those packed lecture halls, ironically, contribute to the discipline's prestige problem. The sheer popularity of communication study, in concert with the field's quasi-vocational curricula, has fostered suspicion among arts and sciences faculty. By reputation at least, communication undergraduates tend to be weaker—populated by "refugees" from other, more rigorous fields—and unduly preoccupied with aspirations for career-linked media visibility. Arguably unfair, this very real perception of communication majors as lightweight, would-be celebrities weighs down the discipline's relative prestige.
- *Faculty job market:* In large part due to surging enrollments, the job market for communication PhDs remains comparatively healthy, especially in contrast to low-enrollment fields like history, philosophy and even sociology. One result is that there is a closer alignment between the supply of, and demand for, well-qualified tenure-track faculty candidates, relative to "traditional" social science and humanities disciplines. These job market conditions suggest that, *ceteris paribus*, the communication job market is less competitive; the hired faculty pool, as a result, is presumably less impressive than the relative few who successfully navigate the other fields' tougher markets. And communication's low prestige may attract weaker graduate students in the first place. A related by-product of these job-market dynamics is that communication research continues to employ "immigrants" with PhDs from other disciplines, like sociology and English—a pattern that is unthinkable in reverse (Abbott 2010, p. 134).

These factors—many of them traceable to the U.S. discipline's peculiar institutional history—are causally intertwined and self-reinforcing. Communication



research, as a consequence, is the quintessential “insecure science,” to borrow Ian Hacking’s (1996, p. 352) phrase. Our contention is that these dynamics do not merely generate repeated bouts of self-doubt and disciplinary soul-searching—though they surely have this effect (e.g. Corner 2013). The discipline characteristics and interactions we have outlined also give rise to persistent prestige gaps between communication studies and its neighbors. Hard data are hard to come by—ironically because communication research is typically excluded from reputation studies, and was only recently recognized as a doctoral field by the U.S. National Research Council.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, we could locate only a single study that included communication (Downey et al. 2008). Tellingly, the U.S. academic deans surveyed in that study judged communication to have the *lowest* prestige among the 25 disciplines named (pp. 197–199).

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#### 4 The “Public Sphere” and the Geography of Relative Field Prestige

The effect of relative field prestige on the flow of ideas between and within disciplines has been little studied—and outright ignored within the historiography of the social sciences.<sup>7</sup> This is curious in light of the rapid expansion, in the postwar U.S. university, of lower-status professional schools, many of which (business, education, criminology, and social work) identify with the social sciences. In each case, and with U.S. communication as exemplar, the professional schools are forced to reconcile their vocational missions with their claims for disciplinary legitimacy. The reputational consequences are more pronounced for those fields whose vocation is lower status (like social work) or questionably professional (like criminology). It is true that historians of science and social science have highlighted the interdisciplinary circulation of ideas and research tools, yielding useful concepts including Joel Isaac’s (2012) *interstitial academy*, Peter Galison’s (1997) *trading zones*, and Susan Star and James Griesemer’s (1989) *boundary objects*. Yet in each case the analytic tools imply relatively flat relations between

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<sup>6</sup>“Communication” was first included in the 2003 National Research Council doctoral-research assessment study (Ostriker and Kuh 2003, pp. 20–24).

<sup>7</sup>The historiography of postwar U.S. economics is an arguable exception, though work on economics’ relationship to the other social sciences has focused on economists’ indifference, on the one hand, and “imperialism” (especially in the last forty years), on the other. See Backhouse and Fontaine (2010).

the disciplines in question. We need different resources to think carefully about *unequal* conditions of idea exchange, as arguably obtain between U.S. communication research and its social science neighbors. We draw on three bodies of literature that, taken together, furnish some of the conceptual tools needed to make sense of cases like this chapter's.

## 4.1 Information Science

Exciting work in information science, especially by Blaise Cronin and colleagues (e.g. Cronin and Meho 2008; Yan et al. 2013), has provided a methodological model and conceptual language to map the flow of cited references between and among disciplines. Cronin and his co-authors have employed large-scale citation analysis of sprawling databases like Web of Science to measure cross-disciplinary knowledge flows. Using the metaphor of international commerce, they have measured what they call the “balance of academic trade”: *net exporters* are disciplines whose research cited in other fields (i.e., exports) exceed its reliance on extra-disciplinary sources (i.e., imports) (Yan et al. 2013). Net importers suffer from a *knowledge deficit*, on the assumption that they are relatively dependent on the work of other disciplines. Cronin and colleagues have also tracked *discipline self-dependence*, on the basis of within-field citation rates. Those disciplines whose citations tend to be relatively insular—with few references to outside literature—are deemed by Cronin et al. as relatively *independent*. More promiscuous fields of study—those with a high proportion of outside-discipline references—are classified as *dependent*. Though Cronin and his co-authors do not include communication research in their published findings, there is good reason to believe that U.S. communication research, at least, would qualify as a *net importer* with a sizable *knowledge deficit*. Likewise, using their measure of relative insularity, communication would likely get classified as relatively *dependent*.<sup>8</sup> A number of older, less-comprehensive citation studies have indeed found a significant imbalance between imported and exported references in communication research (Berger 1991; Rice et al. 1988; So 1988; Reeves and Borgman 1983; cf. Leydesdorff and Probst 2009). In addition to suggesting some promising methodological leads,

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<sup>8</sup>One of the telling challenges to including communication in a study of this kind is that many communication journals are not indexed in Web of Science. The database's “Communication” category, moreover, maps poorly onto the field's self-understood boundaries. See Leydesdorff and Probst (2009, p. 1710), Funkhouser (1996) and Rice et al. (1996).

this information science literature supplies a vocabulary to discuss directionality and imbalance in the flow of research. These scholars do not, however, look to reputation or related factors to explain the asymmetries that they have identified.

## 4.2 The Sociology of Academic Disciplines

Sociologists and higher education scholars have spent decades studying the relationship between academic *structures*, like the discipline and the department, and academic *cultures*—researchers’ intellectual output and self-understandings. The two classic books in this field, Whitley’s (2000) *The Intellectual and Social Organization of the Sciences* and Becher and Trowler’s (2001) *Academic Tribes and Territories*, both touch on the mutual influence of reputation and disciplinary institutionalization, though without referring to communication research as such. Whitley, for example, stresses the importance of immediately adjacent fields, as well as the location of a given field within the wider system of the university (Chap. 7). He defines *strategic dependence* as the extent to which disciplinary *reputations* are “governed by norms derived from more prestigious areas in some fields rather than being largely determined by indigenous goals and criteria” (p. 268). Likewise, *functional dependence*, for Whitley, is a measure of the relative reliance of a field on the research tools and approaches of other disciplines. “The less prestigious a field is, and the more it is divided into competing schools which hold divergent conceptions of its subject matter and appropriate ways of dealing with it, the more open it will be to techniques and analytic methods from more prestigious and central fields” (p. 282). Whitley argues that the disciplinary *center* is weakened by these dependencies; they exert, in other words, a kind of centrifugal pull. In particular, reputation-seeking figures in a low-reputation field will seek to bolster their own reputations by adopting fashionable ideas and tools from higher-status disciplines (pp. 274, 282). Becher and Trowler, in turn, distinguish between *convergent* and *divergent* disciplines. The former are tightly knit and cohesive, while the latter are loosely structured and disjointed (pp. 181–185). The authors note that divergent disciplines suffer reputational consequences for their comparative incoherence (p. 192). Becher and Trowler also highlight a distinction between two kinds of disciplinary communication, the *rural* and the *urban* (Chap. 6). Disciplines with an *urban* communication style are characterized by tightly bounded sub-disciplines and research areas with rapid and heavily used information networks; *rural* communication patterns are slower-paced, with fewer researchers working on a given topic, and poorly defined boundaries between specialisms and the field as a whole.

To those pair of *social* categories—relative convergence and urban-rural communication—Becher and Trower relate two additional *cognitive* (or intellectual) distinctions. A discipline may be “hard” (like physics) or “soft” (like literature) and—along another dimension—may be characterized as “pure” (like sociology) or “applied” (like criminology) (pp. 33–40). Here Becher and Trowler’s terminology aligns with the everyday language of academics, as does the authors’ understanding of the reputational implications: There is, they write, a “common tendency for practitioners in fields that are academically well-entrenched and established to look sideways at soft applied researchers (those in public administration, social work, education and the like) because their disciplines are viewed as lacking in proper rigour” (p. 193). Becher and Trowler, finally, mark the contrast between *internally* and *externally generated disciplines* (pp. 171–176). The distinction is a relative one, but applied fields (like nursing) that owe their existence to government and/or market demands they designate as “externally generated.” Though Whitley, Becher and Trowler, and others working on the sociology of academic disciplines have not directly engaged communication, their conceptual resources are plainly relevant to U.S. communication research and its marginal place in the university. In Whitley’s terms, communication research has high dependence in both *strategic* and *functional* terms. In the complementary language of Becher and Trowler, communication is a *divergent, rural, soft, applied, externally generated* discipline. In reputational terms at least, communication is on the wrong side of each of these terminological contrasts.

### 4.3 The Sociology of Cross-National Translation

A growing literature on what is increasingly called “translation studies” examines the conditions that structure the translation of literary, academic and other kinds of work from one linguistic context to another (see Bielsa 2011; Wolf 2007). This body of scholarship has direct relevance, of course, to the German-English public sphere case under study here. But our main focus is on the (two-step) relationship between communication and better-established disciplines like political science within the U.S. context, and in that respect the sociology of translation has analogic—but no less important—implications. One significant cluster of work on cross-national *academic* translation is indebted to the field-oriented framework of

Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>9</sup> As a number of case studies have suggested, scholarly ideas imported to a new national context exhibit a number of common characteristics. First, the work that makes it through the translation filter is almost always a small and often arbitrary subset of a larger, untranslated literature. The translated work, as a result, is *selective* in ways that the receiving academic community normally fails to recognize. Second, the translated scholarship is, by definition, *de-contextualized* from its original, national frame of intellectual reference, and *re-contextualized* in often strikingly local terms in the new language community. Third, a central role is played by *translator-champions* in setting the interpretive agenda and scope for the translated work. These champions may not be the literal translators, but act instead as the ambassador for a given foreign scholar—whose reputational capital they both promote and hitch themselves to. Among Bourdieu-influenced treatments Michele Lamont’s (1987) “How to Become a Dominant French Philosopher: The Case of Jacques Derrida” stands out, both for its nuanced treatment of the U.S. literature-department re-contextualization of Derrida but also because of the many “how to become” follow-on cases it has inspired (Santoro 2009; McLaughlin 1998; Bartmanski 2012). A number of scholars have, fittingly, focused on the cross-national reception of Bourdieu himself (Bourdieu 1997; Gemperle 2009; Wacquant 1993; Robbins 2008). And outside Bourdieu’s framework, impressive case studies of the U.S. reception of Durkheim (Platt 1995), Weber (Scaff 2011, part two), Heidegger (Woessner 2011), and Nietzsche (Ratner-Rosenhagen 2011) have recently appeared—each echoing the three themes outlined above. The broader field of translation studies takes

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<sup>9</sup>Bourdieu’s field-theory framework, even before getting filtered through the translation lens, has arguable relevance to the questions we are asking here. The field metaphor provides a way to conceptualize relative position within a social structure. Bourdieu himself frequently wrote (e.g., 1999) about the peculiar reputational consequences of the academic field’s proximity to other kinds of fields—say the broader field of power. But his focus was typically on the effects of this kind of proximity on the reputations internal to fields, not between disciplines. Intellectual or academic fields are treated in most of his work—though with the notable exception of *Homo Academicus* (1988)—as relatively autonomous and by implication in a more or less equal relationship with one another. It is easy enough to imagine, however, the creative re-deployment of the idea of heterodoxy, as typically defined in relation to individuals, to the prestige and power dynamics between academic disciplines. This is indeed what the Bourdieu-oriented sociology of translation work suggests, if only in terms of differently positioned national disciplines. For insightful applications of Bourdieu to the history of German and U.S. American communication research, see, for example, work by Michael Meyen and his students (Meyen 2012; Meyen and Löblich 2007; Löblich and Scheu 2011; Scheu and Wiedemann 2008).

literature as its main subject, with substantial attention to the center-periphery dynamics engendered by the Anglo-American literary sphere.<sup>10</sup> Pascale Casanova's (2004) magisterial *The World Republic of Letters*, also indebted to Bourdieu, is notable for its sophisticated treatment of small-language dilemmas, where authors on the linguistic periphery must choose between invisibility or—acceding to large-language translation—cutting themselves off from their compatriots (Chap. 9).

We suggest that these analyses of intellectual and literary translation can be applied—directly or analogically—to the chapter's communication-research case study. Habermas's public sphere concept was, of course, translated into English, and thus recontextualized within the American academy in a selective manner guided, to a large degree, by translator-champions like Craig Calhoun. But we also want to posit that similar dynamics helped to shape the reception of HPS within U.S. communication research—not directly, from the German, but instead via the mediation of better-established U.S. disciplines. Because of U.S. communication's comparatively low status, Habermas's public sphere ideas were, in effect, translated *twice*—first by the traditional social sciences, and only after by communication researchers. The second translation was not—or so we postulate—a direct engagement, but instead a reading of HPS as filtered through the higher-prestige fields. If the initial translation was characterized by selective appropriation, decontextualization, and a prominent role for translator-champions, so was the second—all over again. On these grounds we expected the communication-research reception of HPS to be patterned in the following five ways: (1) infrequent references, relative to the better-established disciplines; (2) delayed treatment; (3) one-way directionality, with little citation reciprocity; and (4) a prominent role for field-specific translator-champions. We tested these expectations with a comparative analysis of communication and non-communication journals, to which we now turn.

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## 5 Journal Analysis

When we set out to test our initial two-step flow hypothesis, we faced a major methodological challenge: how can something as complicated and slippery as the flow of ideas get measured? Plainly the toolkit of intellectual history is not adequate

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<sup>10</sup>See Snell-Hornby (2006) for a superb history of translation studies up through the turn of the century.

to the task: synoptic close readings of selected texts cannot capture the wide-scale, multi-disciplinary diffusion of a popular scholarly concept. We opted instead to conduct a comparative analysis of academic journals in communication and the other, better-established disciplines. Our method was to track the (1) frequency and (2) timing of Habermas's and the public sphere references for the two sets of journals, using full-text databases like JSTOR. We supplemented the large-scale, full-text analysis with a second, smaller sample: articles that mentioned HPS in their titles. We used this more manageable collection of articles to measure (3) the directionality of citations, and (4) the role of early HPS-citing importers. We selected ten U.S. communication journals, and attempted to match these with ten analogous titles from history, political science and sociology. For the communication journals, we identified titles that met three criteria: (1) the journal's full-text search extends back to 1985 or earlier; (2) the journal is based in the U.S.; and (3) the journal's aims and scope are unambiguously centered on communication research. The 1985-and-earlier criterion is justified by our intent to measure the HPS uptake at least a few years before the *STPS* translation.<sup>11</sup> Our ten selections were also guided by an intention to represent the scope of the U.S. field (including speech and rhetoric); other journals were included on the expectation that their topical focus would overlap with HPS engagement.

The ten U.S. communication journals selected were *Communication Research* (*CR*; searchable back to 1974), *Communication Theory* (*CT*; 1991), *Critical Studies in Mass [Media] Communication* (*CSMC*; 1984), *Journalism [and Mass Communication] Quarterly* (*JMCQ*; 1955), *Journal of Broadcasting [and Electronic Media]* (*JBEM*; 1957), *Journal of Communication* (*JoC*; 1951), *Journal of Communication Inquiry* (*JCI*; 1974), *Political Communication* (*PC*; 1980), *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (*QJS*; 1915), and *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* (*RSQ*; 1968). Note that one journal, *Communication Theory*, was included despite its not meeting the 1985-or-earlier criteria; we judged the journal, founded in 1991, to

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<sup>11</sup>One of the revealing challenges of our research design was that full-text database search capabilities—especially in terms of depth of backfile—are weaker and more decentralized than their counterpart journals in political science, history and sociology. In the better-established disciplines, all ten journals included for study had their entire publishing run (often exceeding 100 years) available on the gold-standard JSTOR service. By contrast, just one of the communication journals—*Rhetoric Society Quarterly*—is searchable on JSTOR. The other communication journals' full-text search capabilities are restricted to proprietary publisher databases that, in many cases, do not include the full print-run. The lack of communication-research representation in JSTOR, we contend, is itself a reflection of the low-prestige dynamics we identified above.

be a likely and significant source of HPS engagement and on those grounds opted for inclusion.

The ten non-communication journals were also required to have searchable back-files to at least 1985 and a U.S. location. We chose the journals with the aim of representing the three disciplines while also “matching” the communication journals by scope and/or status—as flagships, “theory”, or “critical” titles. This was an imperfect process, to be sure, but struck us as the best available option to set up a fair comparison. The selected journals were the *American Historical Review* (AHR; searchable back to 1895), *American Political Science Review* (APSR; 1906), *American Sociological Review* (ASR; 1936), the *Journal of American History* (JAH; 1914), *Political Theory* (PT; 1973), *Review of Politics* (RP; 1939), *Sociological Theory* (ST; 1983), *Telos* (TL; 1968), *Theory and Society* (TS; 1974), and *William and Mary Quarterly* (WMQ; 1892).

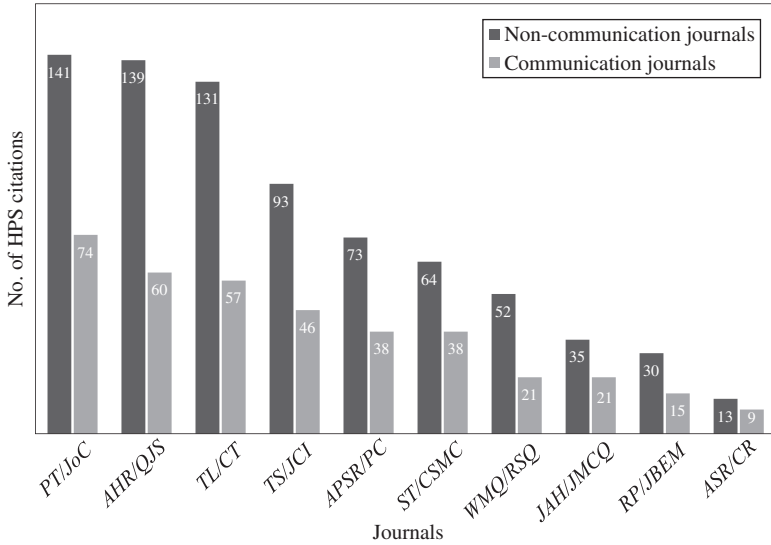
## 5.1 Frequency

In order to measure the frequency of HPS references, we searched full-text JSTOR and proprietary publisher databases for articles or reviews that included both “Habermas” and “public sphere.” Both journal sets produced a wide range of frequency counts: the *Journal of Communication*, for example, had 74 article/review matches, as compared to just nine in *Communication Research*. *Political Theory* logged 141 references, while the *American Sociological Review* had only 13.

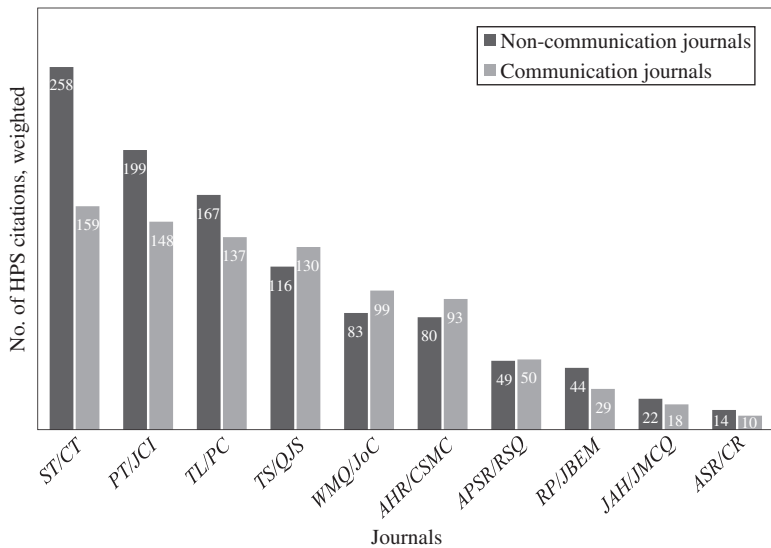
A side-by-side comparison of the journal sets (Fig. 1) shows that the non-communication titles were substantially more likely to reference HPS. The top three non-communication journals, for example, produced about twice as many HPS items as their top-three communication counterparts. On average, the ten other-discipline journals yielded 77 HPS matches, as compared to just 38 for the communication titles. The sociology, history and political science journals were, in other words, more than twice as likely to reference HPS as the communication titles. These results suggest some initial support for our expected finding that the other, better-established fields would engage Habermas and the public sphere more frequently.

We decided to weight the results according to journal page count, on the theory that the communication journals’ smaller average issue length and frequency could account for the disparity. The full-volume page-length of each journal in 1990 (the year after translation) was used to generate a weighted HPS frequency measure. As expected, the size of the gap shrunk considerably (see Fig. 2). Even accounting for journal page-count, a gap remained: the non-communication journals were about 15 percent more likely to cite HPS.





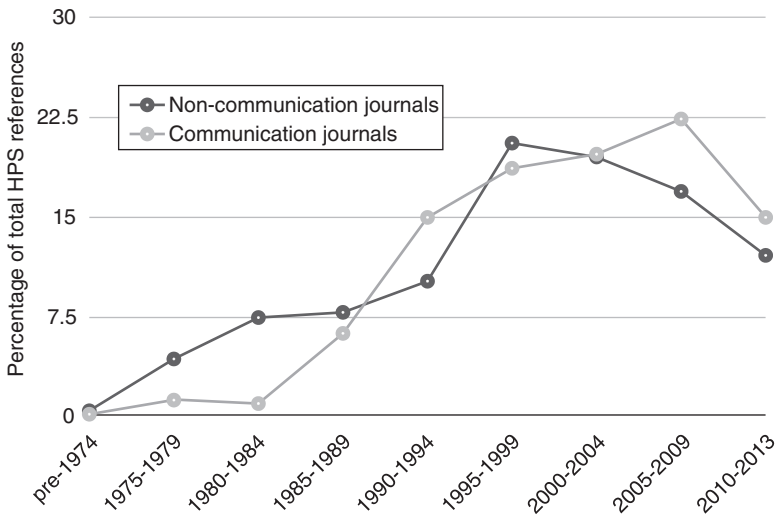
**Fig. 1** Comparison of journal sets by number of HPS references



**Fig. 2** Comparison of journal sets by number of HPS references, weighted by annual-volume page totals

### 5.2 Timing

We also measured the *timing* of the HPS references, again relying on full-text searches for “Habermas” and “public sphere”. Each article/review was tallied into five-year increments (e.g., 1975–1979 or 1995–1999) by journal and by journal set. Each five-year increment was then expressed as a percentage of the journal or journal set’s search-match total. As expected, the non-communication journals’ timing curve—the percentage distribution of matched items over time—was relatively skewed toward earlier publication, as compared to the communication journal set (see Fig. 3). Twenty-three percent of the other-discipline items appeared before the *STPS* translation, while only 6 percent of the communication journals items were published by then. Likewise, 49 percent of the non-communication journal articles/reviews were published recently (after 2000), compared to 57 percent for the communication titles. Though the difference was relatively small, the communication literature arrived *later*. Put another way, communication scholars were more likely to reference HPS after the translation—and after their counterparts in other, better-established disciplines.



**Fig. 3** HPS references over time, by journal set

### 5.3 Directionality

We generated a subset of articles mentioning “public sphere” in their titles, 37 among the ten communication journals, and a few more (40 articles) among the other disciplines’ ten. Within these 77 articles, we counted the number of times that the communication literature referenced non-communication journals, and vice versa. We broke these references into two categories: citation to one of the ten included journals, and citations to other journals affiliated with the discipline(s) in question. For example, Dahlberg (2005), published in *Theory and Society*, cited three communication journals: *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, *Javnost/The Public* and *Media, Culture and Society*. One of those, *CSMC*, is among the ten journals included in the study; the other two are not. We tallied both figures for the 37 communication and 40 non-communication articles in the sample. We found, as expected, a substantial gap in reciprocal referencing. In other words, the history, political science and sociology journals were far less likely to cite communication journals than the reverse. Among the entire 40-article non-communication sample, a communication article was cited just nine times. By contrast, 101 history, sociology, and political science journals were cited—more than 10 times the communication total. Perhaps the comparison is misleading since the communication-journal count measures citations to *three* disciplines, as opposed to just *one* in the reverse direction. With this point in mind, we divided the other-discipline references in communication journals among the three counterparts, and the pattern held: nine references to history journals, 26 references to political science journals, and 53 references to sociology. With the exception of history, communication articles were far more likely to refer to their better-established peer disciplines. Only rarely did a political scientist or sociologist reciprocate. Indeed, 85 percent of the sampled articles—even those (like Koopmans 2004) on media topics—did not make any reference to a communication title. A complementary measure is the relative rate of cross-citation between the two sets of included journals themselves. Here again the communication articles were much more likely to cite the ten non-communication journals than the reverse: 15 times, more than three times the number (four) of references to one of the ten communication journals.

In order to test our suggestion that communication journals would be comparatively neglected by other scholars, we tracked (using Google Scholar’s citation count) the number of times each of the 77 sampled articles were referenced. As expected, the history, political science and sociology articles garnered substantially more citations (74 on average) than the communication pieces (59 on average). Both groupings contained a highly referenced outlier—Dahlgren (2005)

(764 citations) from communication and Somers (1993) (424 citations) from the other disciplines. Excluding those two articles, the gap widened significantly: the non-communication journals averaged 63 citations as compared to just 38 for the communication titles. Though this reference-count measure does not account for directionality per se, the discrepancy is consistent with our other findings: communication scholars are net importers, in part because their scholarship goes unnoticed by researchers beyond the field.

## 5.4 Importers

We speculated, in keeping with the two-step flow analogy, that a few figures inside communication would act as intellectual opinion leaders, by “translating” Habermas for the rest of the field. We identified four such figures in our search for early HPS treatments, two from the discipline’s rhetoric wing and two others closer to its mass communication tradition: G. Thomas Goodnight (1992), Gerard Hauser (1987), Ed McLuskie (1977, 1993), and Peters (1993). Interestingly, only John Durham Peters (1993) was cited (in four of the communication papers). The other early treatments—notably McLuskie’s, whose engagement with Habermas precedes the rest of the field’s by at least a decade—are never cited in the 37-article sample. Our conjecture that a few border-dwelling ambassadors would act as Habermas’s relay points is not supported by the evidence. Indeed, and in keeping with the broader argument that non-communication disciplines absorbed Habermas first, overviews like sociologist Craig Calhoun’s (1992a) were frequently cited (8 times) in the communication literature, even more often than among the other disciplines’ sample (6 times).

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## 6 Conclusion

In 2006 Habermas himself addressed communication researchers, in a plenary lecture at the International Communication Association meeting in Dresden. An edited version of the talk, “Political Communication in Media Society,” was published in *Communication Theory* the same year (Habermas 2006b). The published version, fittingly, contains just a single reference to a communication journal (Lee 2005), compared to ten citations to sociology and political science journals. In the U.S. context at least, communication studies is a “pariah discipline”<sup>12</sup>—a low-status

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<sup>12</sup>The phrase is Bourdieu’s (1997), as applied to sociology (p. 452).

field at the margins of the university. Our claim is that the discipline's legitimacy problems have intellectual consequences. In particular, ideas flow in from the outside, but the field's own ideas tend not to travel back. As a result, very little of the work communication researchers produce gets cited, or even read. The Habermas /public sphere case, at any rate, supports this claim, at least in crude bibliometric terms. The German "public sphere" concept arrived late, and seems to have passed through other, higher-prestige U.S. disciplines first. Communication scholarship on the public sphere, once underway, has since been meagerly cited outside the field's boundaries.

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