

Key Trends in Interprofessional Research: A Macrosociological Analysis 1970 To 2010

Elise Paradis, PhD.

Currie Postdoctoral Fellow,
The Wilson Centre, University of Toronto
Faculty of Medicine, Toronto, Canada

Scott Reeves, PhD.

Director, Center for Innovation in
Interprofessional Education,
University of California, San Francisco, USA

Introduction

For over three decades, health policy makers across the globe have identified the key role of interprofessional (IP) education and collaboration in improving health care systems and outcomes. We sought to investigate the key trends in the scholarship produced by IP researchers.

Methods

We combine the macro-sociological approach of the Stanford School of Neo-institutionalism with a Bourdieusian theoretical framework to make sense of the evolution of interprofessional research. The former suggests that social phenomena (including research) have a history and must be contextualized; the latter highlights how power struggles within the academic domain are contests over legitimacy.

Interprofessional-related articles were identified through a PubMed search, restricted to the 1970-2010 time period (n= 100,488 articles). We generated a list of 436 different content-related codes and 202 country codes. Codes found in more than 1% of articles were then analyzed longitudinally and grouped by: theme, total frequency counts and direction of the time trend.

Results

Growth and Reach

Table 1: Number and Growth in Articles, Journals and Countries in the IP Literature

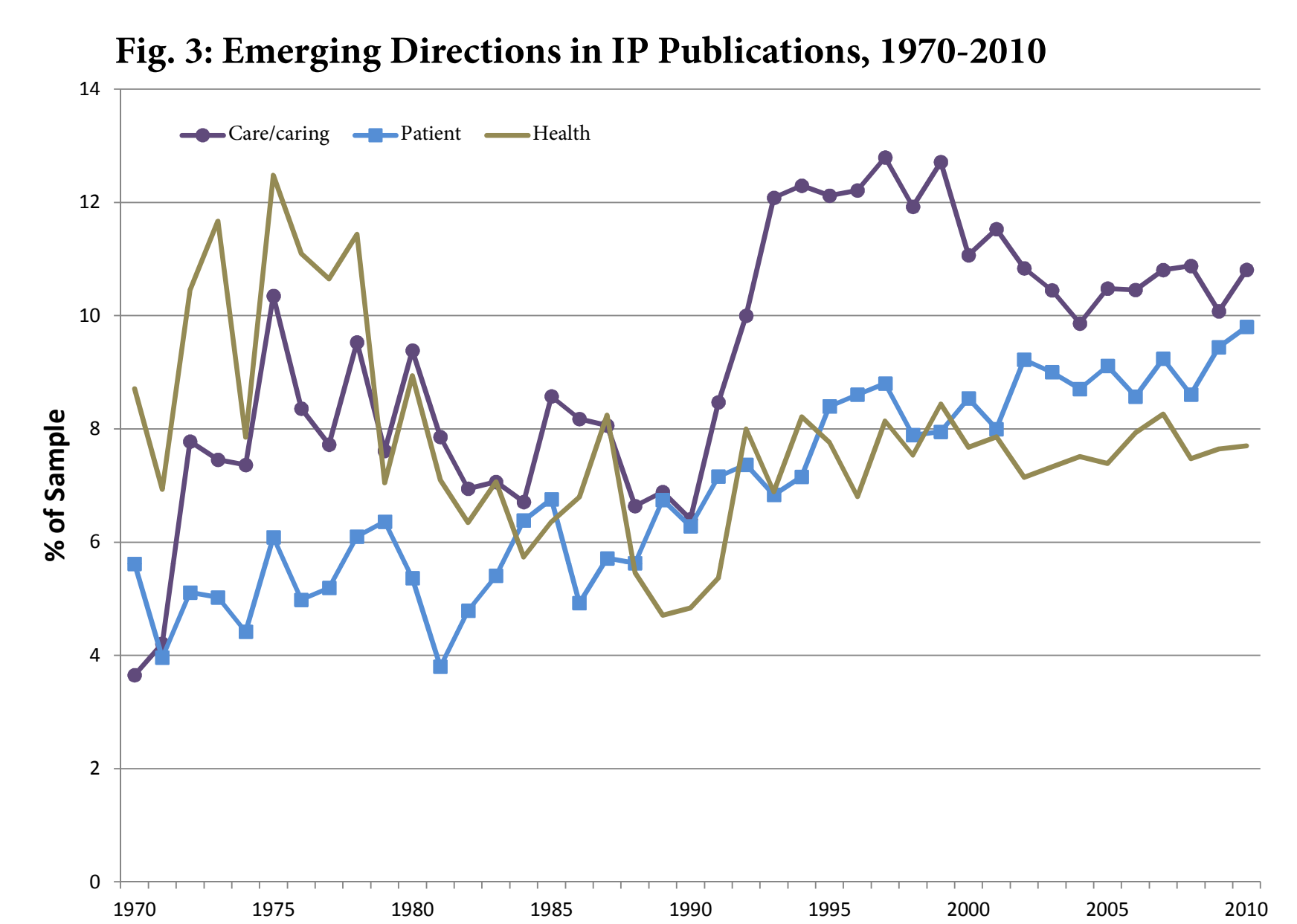
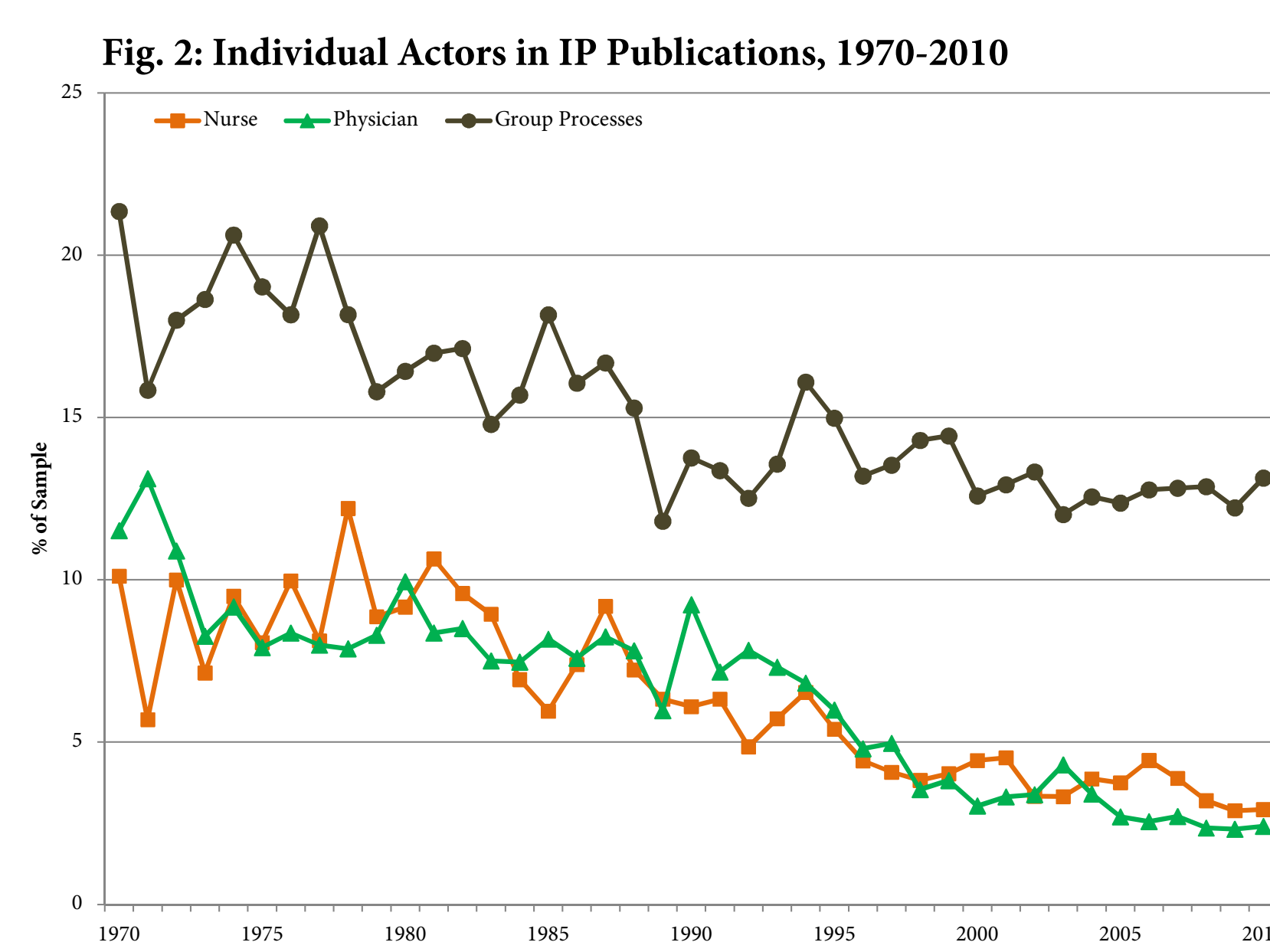
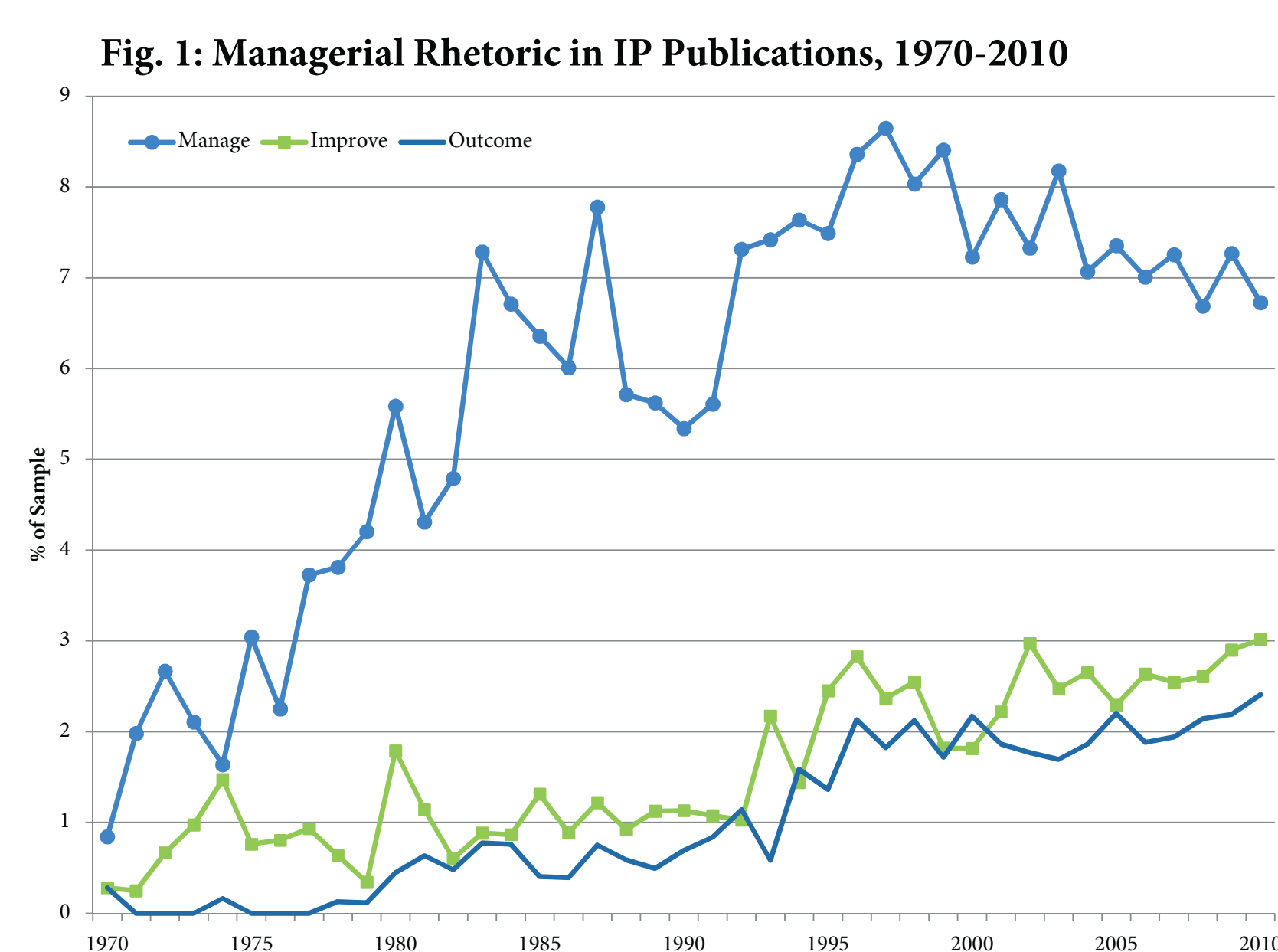
		1970	2010	% Growth
Number of	Articles	356	8,517	2,293
	Journals	209	2,867	1,272
	Countries mentioned /202	6	80	1,233

Rising Managerial Rhetoric

Over the 1970-2010 time period, 'manage' is the sixth most common code in our sample. It grew from 0.8% to around 7% of articles (*Figure 1*). Other management-inspired words such as 'improve' (2.2%) and 'outcome' (1.7%) have also grown.

Changing Units of Analysis and Emphasis

Throughout the time period, the number of articles about individual professions shrank by more than half (*Figure 2*). Meanwhile, the prominence of group-related keywords has also shrunken, as we can see from an aggregate group process variable. Other stakeholders ('student' and 'staff', not shown) first saw an increase, then a decline. The only individual whose share of publications grew is the 'patient' (*Figure 3*). 'Care/caring' has also grown in prevalence, while focus on 'health' first declined until 1989, before reaching about 8% of the sample.



Conclusion

The continuing rise in health care costs over recent years led governments to pressure professionals to reduce costs, enhance efficiency and improve value for money, leading to a shift from professional to managerial i.e. the rise in the 'new public management' of health care services (e.g. Ferlie et al. 1996).

We documented a shifting focus and emphasis in IP research – away from individual professions (e.g. nurse, physician) and group dynamics 'team' and towards 'care/caring' and 'patient' (8.2%). This shift may be the result of increasing patient advocacy, user involvement and patient-centered care (Reeves et al. 2010).

The IP field has seen an impressive growth and reach over the past 40 years. Taking stock of the past of IP research as a field helps frame its history but also suggests ways for researchers to help shape its future trajectory. First, researchers in the field need to streamline their language and identify key areas for investigation. Second, we need to ensure we have good evidence for the IP activities we create and implement, including rigorous research designs and theoretical underpinnings.

References

Ferlie, E., L. Ashburner, L. Fitzgerald, and A. Pettigrew. 1996. *The new public management in action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Reeves, S., S. Lewin, S. Espin, and M. Zwarenstein. 2010. *Interprofessional teamwork for health and social care*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.