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SOCIOLOGISTS IN SCHOOLS OF SOCIAL WORK:
MARGINALITY OR INTEGRATION?*

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ABSTRACT

   In this paper, we examine the responses of 180 faculty members in graduate
and undergraduate social work programs. These faculty members all achieved
their highest degrees in fields other than social work, but approximately half
of them also acquired the M.S.W. degree at some point in their careers. It
was originally hypothesized that sociologists working in social work programs
woulkd exhibit some of the characteristics of marginality, and the
questionnaire contained a number of items on collegiality, conflict,
discrimination, recognition and satisfaction. It was found that sociologists
teaching in social work program suffered no negative effects on any of these
dimensions, and that faculty members lacking the M.S.W. degree suffered only
very limited marginality effects. Taken together, our results suggest that
sociologists in social work programs are alive and well. They may not have
been converted to social work perspectives in a technical sense, but they are
integrated well enough with social work faculty members so that they cannot be
considered to be marginal in any sense of the word.

   The concept of marginality has never received a great deal of attention in
the sociological literature. It had fallen into such disuse by the 1960s that
it was not even listed in Mitchell's (1968) dictionary of sociological
terminology. It is generally agreed that the term "marginal man" was first
developed by Park in his 1928 article, "Human migration and the marginal

man." To him, the marginal man was "a man on the margin of two cultures and two societies which never completely interpenetrated and fused" (Park, 1928:892). Along with Stonequist (1937), who also devoted significant attention to the development of the concept of marginality, Park saw marginality primarily in psychological terms. The consequences of marginality for individuals were analyzed in much greater detail than the structuring of marginal situations (Antonovsky, 1956).

In the past 50 years, other social scientists have contributed to the fullness of the conception of marginality. Goldberg (1941) suggested the possibility of the existence of a marginal culture in which the "marginal" individual would be completely at home, and therefore not truly marginal. Johnston (1976) argued that out-group members must achieve a certain degree of assimilation into the in-group in order to feel marginal. This can be visualized as a bell-shaped curve in which marginality cannot occur at either extreme, but only during an intermediate stage of assimilation. Surie (1970) pointed out the importance of differentiating between marginal people and marginal situations. Marginal situations need not produce marginal people unless they involve barriers to personal development which cannot be bridged. The nature of these barriers is that powerful elites in the in-group create structures that block out-group assimilation. Seen more subjectively, out-group members internalize goals from the in-group which they are unable to achieve. If they do not internalize these goals, then they will not subjectively experience their inability to reach the goals as barriers to human development. In Siu's (1952) terms, they are sojourners rather than marginal people. Marginality may increase the personal freedom that characterizes the status of the stranger (Dewey, 1970), but it is not necessarily true that marginal individuals are unusually quick to adopt innovations (Menzel, 1960).

Although marginality is used today mainly in macro-level descriptions of cultural conflict, it occasionally has been applied in smaller scale social settings, and to non-immigrant groups. Antonovsky (1956) states that marginality has applications beyond immigrant groups and their children, and he cites intellectuals as marginals in a footnote. Bock (1967) applied the concept of marginality to an entire professional group, the female clergy. More recently, Meier and Vaughn (1977) found that marginality, as indicated by lack of tenure, short longevity and lack of career continuity, was associated with faculty receptivity to radical academic ideology. These relationships were mediated by a personal sense of powerlessness on the part of the marginal faculty members. In his study of British physical education teachers, Hendry (1975) argued that the

> ....general problem of marginality for the individual
> within an organizational setting would seem to be one of
> accepting and conforming to the dominant ideology of the
> organization without necessarily gaining any real power or
> influence; or (applying the concept of "looseness" between
> personality and role performance) of using coping

> mechanisms (such as pseudo-ingratiation; or being a strong
> enough personality to withstand or ignore conflict; or
> accepting and enjoining conflict) and being continually
> under a certain degree of role strain. (pp. 473-474)

The recent growth of disciplines such as criminal justice, urban studies, black studies and women's studies has provided many opportunities for sociologists to risk becoming professionally marginal by moving from their "homelands" in sociology departments to these "frontier societies." Social work occupies an intermediate position in this geography of the sociological diaspora. It has existed as a distinct discipline in academic institutions for many decades, and it continues to be combined with sociology in multi-disciplinary departments, especially in small, teaching-oriented institutions. In the present paper, we explore the question of what happens to sociologists who "migrate" to social work programs. Do they live a marginal existence, perpetually unsatisfied in their academic situation, or do they become converted to their new profession, at least as much as is permitted by their in-group social work colleagues?

METHODOLOGY

A sampling frame of 346 professors in schools, departments and programs of social work was constructed by sending letters to the deans and directors of all graduate and undergraduate social work programs in the United States in which they were asked to provide the names and ranks "of any faculty members teaching at least 50 percent in the social work program whose highest degree is not social work." Questionnaires were then mailed to the 346 individuals identified by their deans or directors as meeting these criteria, and 180 usable questionnaires were returned by the cut-off date, for a return rate of 52 percent. The questionnaires asked about the background characteristics and professional experiences of the respondents, as well as their attitudes toward their current employment situation and their experiences in their present faculty positions. The attitude and report items on the respondents' work experiences were organized into five dimensions which were assumed to be related to marginality in an academic setting. These dimensions are collegiality, conflict, discrimination, recognition, and satisfaction. It was loosely hypothesized that social work faculty members who had their highest degrees in sociology and other non-social work fields would possess many of the characteristics of marginality, and would therefore experience relatively high levels of conflict and discrimination and relatively low levels of collegiality, recognition, and satisfaction.

The sample did not include a conventional control group. However, it was structured so as to permit two sets of comparisons internal to the sample. These comparisons provide the bulk of the material for this paper. The first comparison is between social work faculty having a graduate degree in sociology and those whose highest degree is in neither sociology nor social work, while the second comparison is between those who have a master's degree in social work and those who do not. The first comparison is intended to allow us to draw conclusions about the marginality of sociologists in social

work programs relative to the marginality of social work professors whose highest degree is in disciplines other than sociology and social work. In our sample, sociology was the most common non-social work doctorate possessed by social work faculty members. Twenty-one percent of the respondents had a doctorate in sociology, 20 percent had a doctorate in education, and 15 percent had a doctorate in psychology. There was no other discipline represented in as many as 4 percent of the respondents. These disciplines included law, mathematics, public health, economics, educational psychology, business administration, political science, anthropology, counseling psychology and criminology. The second comparison is occasioned by the fact that some social work faculty members with their highest degrees in non-social work disciplines have also acquired a M.S.W. at some time in their careers, while others have not. Just over half of the respondents in our sample had completed a M.S.W. degree program in addition to their non-social work degree. Because of the way in which the sample was constructed, none of the respondents had a doctorate in social work.

Sociologists were not much different from other disciplinary representatives teaching in social work units. Forty-six percent of them had an M.S.W. in addition to their sociology doctorates. Almost all of the sociologists without a M.S.W. degree had both their master's and doctor's degrees in sociology. Because of the structure of the field of social work, the M.S.W. degree has greater significance for professional identity than do master's degrees in most other disciplines. A number of the respondents to the survey wrote indignant notes about the inference that we would consider them to be anything but 100 percent social workers just because they had a doctorate in a field outside of social work. Representative comments from these letters are printed below.

> I don't know how you got my name but I am MSW ACSW and have been a practicing social worker since _____.

> While my Ph.D. is in Sociology my MSW is from the _____ School of Social Work. I identify myself as a social worker and am perceived as a social worker.

> ....I was initially employed at my current School on the basis of my MSW degree and social work experience as both practitioner and educator. The Ph.D. came later and was a choice based in good measure on the unavailability of advanced degree programs in the area.

> After 20 years in the field as a practicing social worker and receipt of a Ph.D. I feel that any responses given to the questionnaire would negate the professional status I hold within both the field and the academic community.

The master status created by the receipt of the M.S.W. degree apparently obliterates the effect of a non-social work doctorate. It is probable that most of the M.S.W. respondents acquired their social work degree first, and

then added a non-social work doctorate later after their social work identifications had been fully formed. We cannot say for sure, as the questionnaire did not request information about the dates on which the degrees were acquired. Although data about sociologists teaching in social work programs are certainly of interest to members of the discipline of sociology, the salience of the M.S.W. degree among faculty teaching in social work programs is so great that the only comparison that is really relevant to the subject of marginality is the one between faculty members holding the M.S.W. and those who do not hold the M.S.W.

RESULTS

The data set for the study includes 33 dependent variables, 8 relating to collegiality, 2 to conflict, 11 to discrimination, 2 to recognition and 11 to satisfaction. (One of the variables was used twice, first for collegiality and then for satisfaction.) The descriptive results of the study give little evidence that sociologists working in the "foreign territory" of social work experience feelings of marginality. Table 1 presents the responses of the sociologists in our sample to ten questionnaire items that are representative of the entire set of 33 dependent variables, two from each of the dimensions of colleagiality, conflict, discrimination, recognition and satisfaction. In every case, the preponderance of opinion is on the non-marginal side of the neutral point. Ninety-five percent of the sociologists reported that their relations with social work colleagues were friendly; 62 percent felt that they received considerable recognition from their social work colleagues; and 80 percent were quite satisfied with their current position in a social work program. Only 10 percent felt that their social work colleagues did not seek their cooperation on joint ventures, and less than one-quarter of the sociologists believed that they were not well paid when compared with either their social work colleagues or their non-social work colleagues in sociology.

When the sociologists were compared with the non-sociologists on these variables, the highest correlation was .18, and only four of the Tau b relationships were statistically significant. Furthermore, all of the significant relationships were in the opposite direction from what would be predicted by marginality theory. Sociologists were more likely than faculty with other non-social work terminal degrees to feel that they were well paid relative to their disciplinary colleagues (Tau b = .18, p less than .01), and they were less likely than non-sociologists to feel that there was little recognition for the contributions they could make to social work from their professional expertise (Tau b = -.13, p less than .05). Sociologists were also more likely than non-sociologists to have internally funded research

Table 1. Responses of Sociologists in Social Work Programs to Selected Items Reflecting Five Dimensions of Marginality

Dimensions	Responses					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neu-tral	Dis-agree	Dis-agree	N
Collegiality						
1. In general, my relations with social work colleagues are friendly.	58%	37%	5%	0%	0%	43
2. My social work colleagues seek my cooperation in joint ventures.	40%	10%	25%	10%	0%	42
Conflict						
3. I find the demands of my profession and those of my work in a social work department or school to be in conflict.	0%	19%	12%	45%	24%	42
4. My work in a social work school or department is made more stressful by the fact that I am not a social worker.	6%	15%	15%	38%	26%	34
Discrimination						
5. Relative to my social work colleagues, I am well paid.	26%	23%	28%	14%	9%	43
6. Relative to my non-social work colleagues in my own profession, I am well paid.	26%	40%	14%	12%	7%	42
Recognition						
7. There is considerable recognition by my social work colleagues of the importance of the special contributions I make to the social work profession from my non-social work professional expertise.	22%	40%	20%	18%	0%	40
8. There is little recognition of the contributions I can make to social work from my professional expertise.	--	5%	--	95%	--	42

Table 1. (continued)

Dimensions	Responses					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neu- tral	Dis- agree	Dis- agree	N
Satisfaction						
9. In general, I am quite satisfied with my work in the social work school or department that currently employs me.	40%	40%	7%	10%	2%	42
10. (My present position) pro- vides me with an opportunity to apply my professional skills to social work problems.[1]	--	84%	--	16%	--	43

[1]These items were designed to elicit only dichotomous answers. If they were checked, we show tham as "agree;" if not checked, as "disagree."

projects (Tau b = .14, p less than .05), and they tended to have higher academic ranks than their colleagues (Tau b = .13, p less than .05) despite being two and one-half years younger than them on the average.

The overall situation of sociologists teaching in schools of social work seems to be that they suffer no more of the disadvantages associated with marginality than other faculty with non-social work terminal degrees. They experience no difficulties with collegiality, discrimination or recognition of their contributions to the field, and they do not experience particularly high levels of conflict or unusually low levels of satisfaction as compared with other colleagues whose highest degree is not in social work. Quite to the contrary, sociologists seem to be doing slightly better than many of their non-sociologist colleagues with regard to promotions, internal support for research projects, salary, and receiving recognition for their contributions.

We now turn to the comparison of the M.S.W. faculty with the non-M.S.W. faculty -- an area in which we expected to find significant evidence of faculty marginality. Of the 33 relationships examined, 11 were statistically significant. Eight of these were in the expected direction, with M.S.W. faculty showing lower scores than non-M.S.W. faculty on variables indicative of marginality. Two of the "contrary" relationships reflect the traditionally low involvement of social work faculty members in empirical social science research. The only real surprise is that M.S.W. faculty reported lower general satisfaction with their work than their non-M.S.W. colleagues (Tau b = -.13, p less than .01).

M.S.W. faculty members were more likely than non-M.S.W. faculty members to report that their colleagues sought their cooperation on joint ventures (Tau b = .21, p less than .01), that they frequently initiated interaction with their colleagues (Tau b = .15, p less than .05), that their work with their colleagues was productive (Tau b = .16, p less than .05), that they were well paid with respect to their profession (Tau b = .15, p less than .05) and their discipline (Tau b = .19, p less than .01), and that their work conditions were more favorable than those of their social work colleagues (Tau b = .19, p less than .01). They were less likely than their non-M.S.W. colleagues to have research projects funded as part of their social work duties (Tau b = .15, p less than .05) and to enjoy research (Tau b = -.13, p less than .05). However, they were also less likely to agree that they were fortunate to have their present position in view of the poor job market in academia (Tau b = -.26, p less than .001) and they were less likely to report stress associated with their work (Tau b = -.35, p less than .001). Although the M.S.W. degree is evidently more salient to faculty in schools of social work than the discipline in which the doctorate is achieved, the weakness of the correlations reported above and the fact that only a third of the relationships were statistically significant provides only limited support for the marginality hypothesis as applied to non-M.S.W. faculty teaching in social work programs.

Having seen that the evidence of marginality is rather slight for non-M.S.W.'s teaching in social work programs and practically non-existent for sociologists teaching in these programs, we might ask whether these relationships would be any different if we took race/ethnicity and sex into account. Being a woman or a member of racial or ethnic minority might be expected to confer a certain degree of professional marginality. Perhaps sociologists or non-M.S.W. faculty who are also minority group members or women receive treatment typical of marginal people in general. This question was examined using multivariate analysis, and it was generally found that the correlations between degree status (whether sociology or M.S.W.) and variables indexing marginality were higher for minority faculty members than for whites. There was also some tendency in this direction among female faculty members with respect to the sociology doctorate, but no such tendency was observed with respect to the M.S.W. degree.

Table 2 portrays the relationships between the possession of a M.S.W. degree and these same ten items that were included in Table 1. The Tau b correlations are shown for the total sample, and then successively for minority faculty, white faculty, men and women. The minority faculty correlations are higher than the white correlations in seven of the ten relationships presented. However, the number of minority faculty members in the sample was so small (N = 39) that a correlation had to be moderately strong in order to be statistically significant at the .05 level. The most interesting set of relationships in Table 2 is for the second of the two conflict items, "My work in a social work school or department is made more stressful by the fact that I am not a social worker." There was a considerable amount of differentiation on this item because the M.S.W. faculty generally identified themselves as social workers despite having a doctorate

in a discipline other than social work. However, on this particular item, there was much less variation by degree status among minority faculty than among white faculty members. Perhaps minority group status is perceived as the major source of work stress by minority faculty members, so that degree status is relatively unimportant by comparison. The same relationship does not exist among women, where the correlation is little different from that among men.

DISCUSSION

Our results suggest that sociologists need not approach the possibility of employment in social work programs with trepidation. As a group, they experience none of the negativities associated with marginality. This could be partially due to the fact that approximately half of them have completed a M.S.W. degree in addition to their sociological doctorate. To test this possibility, we compared sociologists having the M.S.W. degree with those lacking the degree. We found only one statistically significant relationship in the 33 bivariate distributions examined, and most correlations were + .10 or less. (In the only statistically significant relationship, sociologists with M.S.W.'s were more likely than non-M.S.W. sociologists to be involved in internally funded research projects, Tau b = .29, p less than .05.) We can therefore reject the assertion that the relatively high level of acceptance of sociologists in social work programs is due to the fact that half of them have completed the M.S.W. degree. It is evident that even those sociologists who do not have the M.S.W. degree are unlikely to suffer more than minor pangs of marginality, and there is considerable evidence that their special contributions to social work programs are well appreciated by most of their social work colleagues. In addition, sociologists teaching in social work units may perceive themselves as unusually well paid, since salaries tend to be higher in these units than in departments of sociology.

It is possible to argue that the way in which our sample was selected, when combined with the modest response rate, leaves the external validity of our findings (and therefore our conclusions) considerably in doubt. We can deal with the external validity question to some extent by examining official data accumulated by the Council on Social Work Education, as well as several recent studies published in social work journals. CSWE regularly collects data on the rank and tenure status of professors in graduate and undergraduate social work programs, and breaks down these data by the discipline in which the doctorate and/or master's degree was earned. In Statistics on Social Work Education in the United States: 1979, Rubin (1980) shows no difference at all in the rank of professors in social work programs by the discipline in which they completed their doctorate. There is also no difference in the tenure status of these faculty members. Since CSWE reports only the highest earned degree, there is no way to separate out those who have no social work degrees from those who have a non-social work doctorate but who earned the M.S.W. degree at some time in their careers.

Table 2. Relationships Between Possession of a M.S.W. Degree and Selected
         Items Reflecting Five Dimensions of Marginality, by Race/Ethnicity
         and Sex

Dimensions	Tau b Correlations				
	Total Sample	Minority	White	Men	Women
Collegiality					
1. In general, my relations with social work colleagues are friendly.	.10	.11	.09	.10	.08
2. My social work colleagues seek my cooperation in joint ventures.	.21**	.32*	.17*	.25**	.12
Conflict					
3. I find the demands of my profession and those of my work in a social work department or school to be in conflict.	-.03	.12	-.07	-.04	-.01
4. My work in a social work school or department is made more stressful by the fact that I am not a social worker.	-.35***	-.17	-.39***	-.37***	-.32*
Discrimination					
5. Relative to my social work colleagues, I am well paid.	.15*	.22	.12	.14	.18
6. Relative to my non-social work colleagues in my own profession, I am well paid.	.19**	.16	.20**	.21**	.14
Recognition					
7. There is considerable recognition by my social work colleagues of the importance of the special contributions I make to the social work profession from my non-social work professional expertise.	.05	.23	.00	.06	.01
8. There is little recognition of the contributions I can make to social work from my professional expertise.	-.11	-.18	-.09	-.10	-.11

Table 2. (continued

Dimensions	Tau b Correlations				
	Total Sample	Minority	White	Men	Women
Satisfaction					
9. In general, I am quite satisfied with my work in the social work school or department that currently employs me.	-.13*	-.28*	.08	.12	.18
10. (My present position) provides me with an opportunity to apply my professional skills to social work problems.	-.01	.00	.00	.00	-.04
N [1]	180	39	136	122	58

* significant at p less than .05
** significant at p less than .01
*** significant at p less than .001
[1]Five respondents did not report their racial or ethnic status.

A recent study of patterns of deployment among graduate faculty in social work programs by Burke (1979) found (as we did) that sociology was the most common non-social work discipline represented in these programs. In fact, only half of the faculty members were trained entirely within the discipline of social work, and a quarter had no social work degree at all. Those faculty members lacking a social work degree were more likely than their colleagues to teach in the curriculum areas of social research, and human behavior and social environment; equally likely to teach social welfare and policy; and less likely than their colleagues to teach in the curriculum areas of practice and field instruction. Burke concluded that she had found "....strong signs in graduate social work education of cooperation with other disciplines...." (1979:68). Although there is apparently a belief among some social workers that students learn curriculum content on human behavior and the social environment better when taught by social workers than when taught by faculty from other disciplines, a study by Sze, Keller and Keller (1979) found no evidence to support this idea. Students taught by non-social workers showed no difference from those taught by social work faculty members with regard to "(1) the range of theoretical orientation learned, (2) the ability to apply knowledge to practice, and (3) the awareness of human relations" (1979:107). These findings are consistent with our own results, which suggest a widespread acceptance and appreciation of the contribution made by non-social work faculty members in social work programs.

One factor that may explain the relatively easy integration of sociologists in social work programs is that social work itself may be a professionally marginal discipline. The addition of sociologists may be seen by social work faculty as raising rather than lowering the status of their programs. Chatterjee (1971) compared social work graduate students with law and medical students in a large midwestern university, concluding that social work is high on class-marginality, medium on performance-marginality, and high on role-marginality. In a follow-up study on the same topic, Chatterjee, Hamlyn and Gutierrez (1978) concluded that:

> Social Work....still appears to be a profession for those who fall outside this demographic classification (white men)....Entering social work students still are women, come from less high-quality colleges and universities, have (a) lower grade-point average, and still tend to wait longer before entering school. (p. 53)

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have examined the responses of 180 faculty members in graduate and undergraduate social work programs. These faculty members all achieved their highest degrees in fields other than social work, but approximately half of them also acquired the M.S.W degree at some point in their careers. It was originally hypothesized that sociologists working in social work programs would exhibit some of the characteristics of marginality, and the questionnaire contained a number of items on colleagiality, conflict, discrimination, recognition and satisfaction. However, it was found that sociologists teaching in social work programs suffered no negative effects on any of these dimensions, and that faculty members lacking the M.S.W. degree suffered only very limited marginality effects. Taken together, our results suggest that sociologists in social work programs are alive and well. They may not have been converted to social work perspectives in a technical sense, but they are integrated well enough with social work faculty members so that they can not be considered to be marginal in any sense of the word.

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