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## SOCIAL WORK, SOCIOLOGY, AND SOCIAL DIAGNOSIS

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The relationships between social workers and sociologists are almost unique among the professions. Although they started with common interests, from the beginning there was a division of labor between science and practice; between sociology and social work. Charles Horton Cooley, one of the great armchair sociologists, typifies this reciprocal association; he cites Jane Addams observations on juvenile gangs as evidence for his classic definition of primary groups.<sup>1</sup>

This early collaboration was fruitful; it has not stood the test of time. The two occupations are similar enough so that the public, to their mutual pain, frequently mistakes one for the other. They prefer to emphasize their separation. This works to both professions detriment because it interferes with knowledge building. How this happens is most clearly seen in the lack of collegueship between sociologists and social workers when they are university faculty members. A comparative analysis of educational organization and faculty norms will illumine the problem.

Sociologists are anchored in the academy. The great majority work in universities and generally have the Ph.D. In the problem areas such as criminology or the family there are a few separate schools and institutes modeled on the professional school. There is no great pressure to further develop this method of educating sociologists.

Social workers are not closely tied to the university. Many people without professional training are recognized as social workers. Many faculty members move between practice and academic appointments without seeing the university as the basis for their career. Professional schools tend to be physically isolated from the campus or in professional school complexes. Wherever they are they are socially isolated because the relative lack of scholarly production by the faculty leaves them without much standing in the university. If the faculty member has a degree beyond the professional masters it tends to be the doctorate. The field has a fear of being accused of intellectuality; in selecting and promoting faculty members there is a tendency to emphasize emotional qualities and community activities. There is no indication of any movement to make the preferred degree for faculty members the doctor of philosophy rather than the doctorate.

Sociology departments emphasize teaching and research which adds to theoretical knowledge. To be identified with applied problems is not the way to acquire academic prestige. Yet it is often difficult to separate theory building from practice in the "research" of many sociologists.<sup>2</sup> Sociologists mask their practice involvement by continuing to make contributions to the theoretical literature.

Social work schools are committed to quality teaching and research. Yet faculty members rarely engage in projects which involve them in direct practice. Few service innovations are identified as emanating from professional social work schools. Social work faculty use committee meetings to disguise their non-participation in practice research.

Departments of sociology have professors. At the graduate level students often select a school because of their desire to work with a particular professor. Students work with their professors on projects, publish with them, and in later years are identified with their mentor.

Schools of social work have few professors. Even at the doctoral level students talk about selecting a "good" school and not about the professor or the system of ideas they are interested in. Students are almost never known by the professors they studied under.

Finally, there is an educational continuity between what sociologists learn and what they do. What students acquire in school they continue to use the rest of their life if they become professional sociologists. What they can't do is demonstrate that their theories are meaningful.

There is little educational continuity in social work. The bulk of the student's learning effort is concentrated on acquiring direct practice skills. Social work is one of those incomplete professions where success is marked by how far one gets away from direct practice. The student is not acquainted with the ideas that will be most relevant to what he will do for most of his career.

This last point is the critical one for this analysis. The emphasis which sociologists place on university ties, theory construction, and on being professors and the corresponding dilution of these professional characteristics by social workers only reflects the structural differences originally built into both fields. Educational continuity is another matter. Sociologists are relatively cut off from a practice arena where they can systematically test their ideas over time and social work faculty is not utilizing theory which will help organize and substantiate practice.

Other fields have avoided the difficulties that stem from this partition. Clinical psychology is located in the same college of arts and sciences as sociology. About fifty years ago clinical psychology tried but abandoned offering the doctoral degree. It has shown little inclination to develop separate professional schools. Faculty in clinical psychology are expected to make contributions to the literature and to retain practice skill so that they can teach students. Most psychology departments have little clinics where faculty practice and supervise students. The best sociology can manage is a research lab. Clinical psychology faculty don't have the strictures against practice that concern their sociological counterparts.

Medical education is organized in ways that are similar to social work. To become a professor in a clinical field in a medical school one must develop and maintain practice skill and make contributions to the literature. In medicine as in clinical psychology opportunities for

direct practice are built right into the faculty members workload. This is not done in social work. Faculty members create the illusion of practice by supervising students and with something called consultation. At least the sociologist has research to fall back on. Social work faculty is doubly caught because it neither engages in direct practice nor scholarship.

No profession is satisfied with its educational structure and content and not all sociology and social work faculty and educational settings fit the ideal type just described in the comparative analysis. All professional educators and learners must solve the problem of balancing their commitments to learning, service, and scholarship.<sup>3</sup> There are particular difficulties in sociology and social work that are related to the separation of theory building and practice in both fields.

Sociology worries about the quality of its instruction and the drag that comes from being so closely associated with undergraduate social work programs.<sup>4</sup> It can point to verified empirical propositions which it accepts but it has doubts as to whether its theoretically based knowledge is cumulative.<sup>5</sup> While the graduate student in sociology knows that what he has learned is imperfect he also feels that he has acquired the tools to achieve greater clarity in the future.

Social work would like to be concerned about the quality of its education. It is still at the stage where it questions whether it can present students with enough cogent material so that they can develop an adequate sense of professional identity and expertise.<sup>6</sup> Social work students seldom leave school feeling that they are equipped to make a contribution to the profession; they expect to be supervised for several years.

The way to overcome the effects of the separation between sociology and social work is to build useful typologies. The principles of classification are scientific canons. To be systematized things must have something essential in common, only one theoretical position should be used as the basis for division, and the categories should be mutually exclusive and exhaustive.<sup>7</sup> Wilkins has concisely stated the reasons why classification systems are needed. They chiefly relate to replicability:

If we require to communicate most effectively we should use the most common language consistent with the required degree of accuracy in communication. If we require to use thought processes, we should use any system of symbols which proves most effective. ...Eventually all researchers must submit to the trial by publication; they must be able to communicate their results so that a sufficient number of other qualified persons may examine their work.<sup>8</sup>

The requirements for building diagnostic systems are not particularly difficult to understand. Typologies are not difficult to develop. Sociologists have produced so many that they have been published as bibliographical books.<sup>9</sup> They don't seem able to get others, especially social workers, to use them consistently and in many situations so that efficient explanatory systems are developed.

Ideological considerations seem to persistently intrude. A large segment of both the sociological and social work communities are concerned about labeling, the medical model, anything else that might turn a concept into a reified personal characteristic. These are legitimate concerns but they can be met without stopping further scientific advance. No diagnostic system is definitive; they all are periodically revised. Brill says that typology building is important to a profession because:

It cannot usually progress further than the level of knowledge on which it is based, but by facilitating the examination of existing data and by creating the possibility of communication, it promotes the advance of human knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

The pragmatic utility of classification for "brevity in communication, research, data storage and retrieval" are so important that any profession that abandons the attempt to improve its typologies compromises its future development.<sup>11</sup>

Toch, who is cognizant of the dangers from misuse of typologies, says that, "Man is a stereotyping animal and needs to generalize in order to cope with reality." He offers two suggestions for overcoming ideological and ethical difficulties; one is that any classification system involve those who are being typed and the other is that classifiers have sufficient perspective so as to not become so attached to the labels they are creating that they can't change them as new information becomes available.<sup>12</sup>

Every theory in order to survive must eventually prove useful. This means that the theory must be extensively tested in real situations; that is what practice is all about. If sociologists refuse to practice and social workers will not develop the skill to validate practice with theory the damaging divisions between the two professions will continue. Perhaps it is time to experiment with the "clinical sociologist" that Wirth wanted or the "hybrid" that Greenwood asked for.<sup>13</sup>

As long as it is in the name of research sociology tends to accept practice by its members. Add to this its higher academic standards and one can conclude that sociology is in a better position than social work to make contributions to practice theory and technique. And to some extent this has been true. To cite but one example, in any textbook on juvenile delinquency the chapter on treatment will contain more references to treatment approaches developed by sociologists than to those by social workers. That is not academic snobbery, social work just hasn't produced. Greenwood put it this way:

Unless and until the social work profession develops typologies of its problems and procedures, its concepts will remain indefinite, its language loose, and its textbooks vague. It is worth pondering to what degree the well-known traumas of social work education are attributable to the psychiatric involvements that training entails and in what degree to the insecurities that unstructured subject matter and instruction must inevitably generate in social work students.<sup>14</sup>

Almost a generation has passed since that penetrating assertion. Little has changed. The Family Service Association of America said in a recent policy statement:

In adopting service goals and in measuring effectiveness, social work must focus on the point where problems of individuals and families intersect with social conditions that inhibit their resolution. This requires complementarity of social work efforts on both sides of the equation.

It is our observation that many students do not achieve in graduate schools of social work a fundamental grasp of these points. They do not develop a commitment to, nor even an awareness of the need for, working with an adequate theoretical base for practice in usable form. Faculty members often lack enough knowledge of and skill in current practice to teach casework practice effectively. Opportunities in field work for using knowledge and skill in practice situations are too limited for students to achieve the minimum level of competence. They discover that education has not prepared them for the positions they seek.<sup>15</sup>

A new type of scholar-practitioner is needed; one who can contribute to both sociology and social work. To this point sociology has had the advantage because it has more of the needed people than social work; it just won't let them out of the closet. Social work has always been better than its own self-image. Lack of scholarship has hindered organizing and presenting the hard won knowledge which the field has acquired. The way to bring this scattered information together is by developing typologies which are refined in practice and common to both fields. Only then will sociology have cumulative knowledge and social work effective practice techniques.

Footnotes:

1. Charles Horton Cooley, Social Organization (New York: Schocken Books, 1962), pp. 23-25. First published in 1909 by Charles Scribner's Sons.
2. See for example Martin A. Kozloff, Reaching the Autistic Child (Champaign, Illinois: Research Press, 1973).
3. Harris Chaiklin, "The House Staff as a Behavior System," Bulletin: University of Maryland School of Medicine, 57 (Winter, 1973), pp. 5-8.
4. Sue Titus Reid and Alan P. Bates, "Undergraduate Programs in Accredited Colleges and Universities," The American Sociologist, 6 (May, 1971), pp. 165-175; and Joseph Zelan, "Undergraduates in Sociology," The American Sociologist, 9 (February, 1974), pp. 9-17.
5. Bernard Berelson and Gary A. Steiner, Human Behavior (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1964) and Lee Freese, "Cumulative Sociological Knowledge," American Sociological Review, 37 (August, 1972), pp. 472-482.
6. Alfred Kadushin, "Two Problems of the Graduate Program: Level and Content," Journal of Education for Social Work, 1 (Spring, 1965), pp. 33-46 and Ronaele R. Whittington, "Response to Sensitivity Training: Relevance for Social Work Education," Journal of Education for Social Work, 8 (Fall, 1972), pp. 3-4.

7. Wilson Gee, Social Science Research Methods (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1950), pp. 222-223.
8. Leslie Wilkins, "Problems in Prediction Methods," in The Sociology of Crime and Delinquency, ed. by Marvin Wolfgang, Leonard Savitz and Norman Johnston (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1962), p. 100.
9. See for example, Charles M. Bonjean, Richard J. Hill and S. Dale Mclemore, Sociological Measurement (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1967); Delbert C. Miller, Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurement (2nd ed.; David McKay, Inc., 1970); and Murray A. Straus, Family Measurement Techniques (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969).
10. Henry Brill, "Psychiatric Diagnosis, Nomenclature, and Classification," in Handbook of Clinical Psychology, ed. by Benjamin B. Wolman (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1965), p. 639.
11. Merrill T. Eaton and Margaret H. Peterson, Psychiatry (2nd ed.; New York: Medical Examination Publishing Company, Inc., 1969), p. 69.
12. Hans Toch, "The Care and Feeding of Typologies and Labels," Federal Probation, 34 (September, 1970), pp. 15-19.
13. Louis Wirth, "Clinical Sociology," American Journal of Sociology, 37 (July, 1931), pp. 49-66; and Ernest Greenwood, "The Practice of Science and the Science of Practice," in The Planning of Change, ed. by Warren G. Bennis, Kenneth D. Benne, and Robert Chin (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 73-82.
14. Ernest Greenwood, "Social Science and Social Work: A theory of Their Relationship," Social Service Review, 39 (March, 1955), pp. 20-33.
15. Family Service Association of America, "Position Statement of Family Service Agencies Regarding Graduate Schools of Social Work," New York, 1972/4-270, p. 3.

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