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APPLIED SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK:  
MANPOWER AND THEORETICAL ISSUES\*

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ABSTRACT

Applied sociology and social work are compared and contrasted historically. Significant literature is reviewed that illustrates chronologically past cooperative efforts. Academic and practice integration of the two disciplines are identified in their modern context as well as trends are identified. Manpower issues that parallel and separate the two disciplines are explored. It is argued that current changes in funding of educational programs could have much impact on both disciplines and determine future differentiation.

Introduction

Sociologists have been making renewed efforts to relate their theoretical and research knowledge to practical usage while social workers have developed anew the need to underpin their rich practice knowledge with theory and research. Although there is a natural parallel between the two disciplines, both currently function independently and mainly in ignorance of each other (Munson, 1978:91). This has not always been the case. Historically, the two disciplines have made attempts to interrelate their knowledge, purpose, and functions. This paper documents the historical connections between sociology and social work, and this historical material is used to explore trends in both disciplines. The focus of the analysis relates the connection between applied sociology and micro-social work practice. These specific areas were selected because they have been the least explored historically, but seem to hold the most potential for the future if the two disciplines are to work together at all.

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### Historical Connections

During the era from 1860 to 1909 when the American Social Science Association (ASSA) was a viable organization, there was little distinction between sociology and social work. There was a combination of the scientific and the practical in solving social problems (Broadhurst, 1978: 39-41). With the demise of the ASSA in 1909, sociology was focusing on the scientific approach, and social work had embarked on the practical approach. Modern efforts to reunite sociology and social work have much in common with what existed between the two disciplines over 100 years ago.

According to Steiner (1925) the split between the two disciplines was in part recognized, and bridging efforts existed between the scientific methods of sociology and the "techniques" of social work. At this time Burgess (1927) pointed out that sociology and social work were separate and distinct but much could be achieved through cooperative experimentation. A flurry of cooperation, or at least academic exchange, took place during the mid 1920s. This exchange was reported by Karpf (1928, 1929) through summarizing debates at the American Sociological Society meetings at the section on Sociology and Social Work. This debate focused on the use of "case work" records to be used by sociologists for social research. This protracted debate epitomizes the scientific and practice dichotomy between the two disciplines that has not been resolved to this day. The issue revolved on how much case recording should be done in a manner to accommodate sociological research. Social workers argued that recording was necessary only to aid them in their work while others argued that as long as records could only be used by caseworkers, they would serve only to disguise ineffective practice (Karpf, 1929:70).

In two articles by Burgess (1927) and Vaile (1933) sociological concepts were applied to "family social work," and both have good information to assist social workers today. There is substantial material in the articles by Burgess, Karpf, and Vaile that leads one to believe that if their ideas had been pursued, integrated, and applied in depth, family therapy would have been developed by social workers and sociologists much sooner than it was in the 1950s through insights provided predominately by psychiatrists.

Wirth (1931) during this early era wrote an excellent article on "clinical sociology" in which sociologists and social workers were compared and contrasted in relation to functioning in child-guidance clinics. It was his view that each discipline had knowledge and skill to contribute to clinical work. Wirth's article remains the best

description of cooperative efforts in the clinical setting and has much practical relevance today even though it was written almost 50 years ago. Wirth accurately predicted his proposal would not emerge primarily because sociologists would shy away from what was considered the unscientific methods of social work. Besides, he pointed out, there were political reasons for psychiatrists, who established such clinics, to involve social workers instead of sociologists since the clinics relied on social agencies for referrals.

After Wirth's article no writing appeared for a decade on the issue. The next article to appear was a brief account by Burgess (1941) in which the scientific method reemerged as the issue. Burgess described social work as being "in the process of becoming an applied social science." He saw social work as moving beyond its "pre-scientific stage," and his thrust was more to commend social workers for drawing upon the scientific and theoretical orientation of sociology than to develop a plan for cooperative efforts. By this time the separation was complete and no efforts at devising models of cooperation appeared in the literature except for Lee's (1955) very general attempt to establish "the clinical study of society." Lee, rather than advocating cooperation, illustrates how sociology could borrow clinical terms such as diagnosis, treatment, and therapy to draw sociology closer to the real world. Lee's article is significant because he was the first to recognize that sociology had come full circle and was severely isolated through its emphasis on theory and research. All of Lee's subsequent writings reflect this view, and he is a courageous professional who has faced much opposition, but his ideas are now being used by others to combat many of the issues facing sociology as a profession. Lee's mid 1950's article characterizes a trend to focus on defining applied sociology within the discipline rather than developing cooperative models. In the following section the various models of applied sociology that have been developed since sociology and social work have diverged theoretically and practice-wise are explored.

### Models of Applied Sociology

The first attempt to define applied sociology at a very practical level was attempted by Wirth (1931). He related clinical sociology to clinical procedures, cultural approaches, the scope of research, consultation and training and direct participation in diagnosis and treatment. Clinical sociologists were perceived as free of dogma, experimental in attitude, and aware of their limitations while at the same time avoiding "arm chair speculation" but not seeing themselves as social workers. It was Wirth's belief that for clinical sociologists

to be successful, they must have the same access to clients as other disciplines, but he predicted the development of "sociological clinics" would falter because sociologists would be timid about practical approaches to problems.

Gouldner (1965) has identified two broad models of applied sociology of *engineering* and *clinical* sociology. These models are conceptualized basically as macro-level applications, and they are distinguished on the basis that in the *engineering* model the consultant is an employee of a firm or institution in which the employing organization's formulation of the problem to be addressed is accepted as valid, while in the *clinical* model the applied sociologist functions independently in formulating the problem but is less likely to specify the solution to be implemented than in the case of the *engineering* model. In terms of values the engineer is less democratic than the clinician in the process of identifying and solving the problem. While the engineer shows little concern for client resistance to implementation of applied findings, the clinician anticipates and systematically prepares for such resistance. The engineer is more concerned with the validity of the research methodology used and the outcome desired by the contracting organization (client). The clinician is equally concerned with the client's and the subject's response and resistance to his more independently-derived findings. At the same time that these differences in the two models are identified by Gouldner, he emphasizes these differences are minor. Clearly, the *clinical* model is more suited to the values of the social work profession and more appropriate to applications in micro social work practice than the *engineering* model.

Gouldner uses the term *client* in a different context from social work. For Gouldner the client is the employing organization. Social work defines the client as recipient of the organization's services. What describes the *client* for the social worker is more familiar to the applied sociologist when described as the research subject or *interviewee*. Gouldner also points out that applied sociologists relating to traditional clinical disciplines must recognize these disciplines operate from a perspective of applied psychology. Applied sociologists must adhere only to those concepts and propositions from applied psychology that are appropriately applied to analysis of groups for the purpose of changing interaction (1965:18-21).

An excellent article on ethics and applied sociology by Angell (1967) uses a role perspective. He distinguishes the "sole professional" and the "organization man" in the distinct role of consultant, practitioner, or researcher. In articulating ethical requirements and issues, Angell touches upon the practical functions of the

applied sociologist. Sharp distinction is drawn between the three roles. From our perspective, the applied sociologist working in clinical settings does not function exclusively in one role, but instead there is a blending of the three roles to achieve maximum efficiency of service delivery. In discussing the role of the applied sociologist as practitioner, Angell makes no differentiation between such a practitioner and a social worker. There is mention of the applied sociologist working as a marriage counselor, juvenile worker, and community organizer, and identification of the traditional ethical issues of recognizing the limits of practice skill, professional values versus organizational demands, client right to privacy, and confidentiality in publishing research on practice results. There is a professional value difference respecting research on client groups that sociologists feel more intensely than social workers. Sociologists have a much stronger professional orientation to the importance of research and publishing in advancing their profession than social work. The social work code of ethics makes provision for the worker to contribute to the body of social work knowledge,<sup>1</sup> but few practitioners act on this principle. Applied sociologists and social workers functioning cooperatively could assist one another in meeting their ethical obligations in this area and overcome professional ethical conflicts.

Street and Weinstein (1975), drawing on the work of Janowitz (1970), have emphasized three models of applied sociology entitled *Social Engineering*, *Radical Sociology*, and *Enlightenment* to suggest methods for sociologists to minimize the conflict among individuals, groups, institutions, and mass culture. *Social Engineering* is the traditional model in which the client has a specific problem that the specialist is engaged, because he has the technical and conceptual skills to produce data to specify a solution. The *Radical Sociology* model emphasizes a conflict model of society that negates established institutions. This model is viewed as having limited utility in relation to sociological thought, scientific philosophy and political issues, and this seems to have been the outcome in the case of the application of this model with respect to the National Welfare Rights Movement (Piven and Cloward, 1971:345-346; Helfgot, 1974:490). In the *Enlightenment* model, the sociologist functions more in the role of consultant by providing knowledge and research to enlighten decision makers. The author views this model as the most appropriate model for applied sociology given current

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<sup>1</sup>The social work code of ethics established by the National Association of Social Workers states: "I recognize my professional responsibility to add my ideas and findings to the body of social work knowledge and practice."

institutional arrangements, and that there will always be some mixed application of the models. This model is well-suited to defining how applied sociologists and social workers can engage in team efforts to enhance individual and institutional functioning. Street and Weinstein hold this view, and argue "Such a function could be served at the grass roots level by a social work profession in partnership with both enlightenment and engineering-oriented applied sociology" (1975:70).

Lazarsfeld and Reitz (1975) have written the latest book on applied sociology. They begin with a general but good historical discussion of the field. Their approach to applied sociology is a process model at the macro level in which applied sociologists perform policy-oriented research studies for big business and big government. They explore the "terrain" upon which the applied sociologist operates and "map" a "cognitive process" of practical sociology that is divided into the stages of: (1) identifying the problem; (2) setting up staff; (3) translating a practical problem into research; (4) the gap between knowledge and recommendation; (5) implementation; and (6) assessment. The focus in this process is on *who* identifies problems, *who* conceives the research, and *who* formulates recommendations. The macro orientation of the authors is reflected in their discussion of problem formulation when they cite problems of television networks, the U.S. Space Administration, government agencies in establishing public policy, and the military. In identifying problems, the authors focus on organizations that suffer some disruption in what are considered normative operations. There is no recognition or mention of the applied sociologist working in settings where the everyday caseload involves individuals and groups that have encountered or endured a social problem that brings them in contact with the organization. In other words, there is no focus on problems that develop in agencies that deal with problems. This lack of focus is ironic when one surveys the theoretical and research issues that concern the broader field of sociology or what some would refer to as "pure sociologists."

#### Modern Quasi-Cooperative Efforts

Historically we have described how sociologists have attempted to articulate methods of integrating their knowledge with social work practice. Such efforts were not well-received by social workers, and it is understandable why applied sociology has evolved as an intradiscipline area and at the macro level. Recently social workers have made meager attempts to use sociological theory and concepts to organize practice approaches, but the emphasis has been more on working with sociological concepts than working with sociologists.

The only area where sociology and social work have integrated knowledge has been at the academic level, and social work has been more open to such sharing than sociology. This is demonstrated by the fact that sociologists are part of graduate social work faculties while social workers are rarely employed by graduate sociology departments. At the undergraduate level, the opposite is true with many social work educators teaching sociology courses while few sociologists teach social work courses. There is more crossing of disciplinary lines at the undergraduate level than at the graduate level, but this seems to be more a function of teaching load and funding intricacies related to federal formula grants to support undergraduate social work programs than it is a genuine interdisciplinary integration. Although undergraduate accreditation standards for social work programs call for liberal arts and interdisciplinary education and integration of various content areas, sociologists are rarely, if ever, included on accreditation teams. Some intermingling of the two disciplines is occurring through social work educators with MSW degrees pursuing doctoral degrees in sociology. This trend seems to have the effect of merely moving educators with such education away from a social work orientation and toward a pure sociological perspective that social work students find difficult to relate to. Instead of integrating knowledge and practice, such educators simply seem to move farther away from social work and more toward sociology.

At the same time this quasi-integration is taking place, sociology educators have developed more interest in applied sociology as job opportunities for graduates of traditional sociology programs have diminished. In many cases, this has placed sociology and social work graduates in competition for the same jobs. This has produced more blurring of the differences in and confusion about the two disciplines. The outcome of this competition is unclear. In some states, there has been declassification of traditional social work positions by public agencies<sup>2</sup> allowing sociologists to freely compete for these positions while at the same time, the National Association of Social Workers has launched a national effort to achieve state licensure of social workers at multiple levels of practice. Currently twenty states<sup>3</sup> have some form of licensure, and twenty-nine other states<sup>4</sup> have bills in the legislative process. This has resulted in a reversal of the earlier

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<sup>2</sup>See *NASW News*, November 1976, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>See *NASW News*, September 1976, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup>See *NASW News*, April 1977, p. 9.



trend in declassification, and public agency administrators are now requiring certain positions be occupied by licensed social workers.<sup>5</sup> While licensing laws will aid social workers in overcoming much of the professional self-flagellation of the past, many social workers and sociologists at the lower levels of education and practice will continue to compete for positions in a shrinking job market. The blurring lines of distinction between and increased confusion about the two disciplines are problematic and should be of concern to both sociologists and social workers. Lee (1976) has addressed this issue in a general manner through arguing that "humanist" sociology holds the most promise for social workers.

### Trends

The early movement of sociology into the university in quest of scientific recognition could have impact on the future of both disciplines. Social work has never achieved the status or recognition in the university that sociology has. Schools of social work have maintained themselves in universities only through substantial federal grant financing. It is not unusual for the major portion of social work schools' budgets to be soft money. In the last several years there has been a gradual decrease in such funding especially in graduate schools. If substantial funding cuts continue, coupled with faculty loss of decision-making power (Kemerer, 1978:233-236), it remains to be determined how universities and college administrations will respond. They have been reluctant to absorb the type faculty and staff that have been hired with grant funds. Such faculty generally are connected with field instruction and usually do not possess a doctorate, lack a research orientation, have meager theoretical underpinning to use in identifying their orientation, do not comprehend functioning of academic settings, and do not hold or qualify for tenure track positions. If grant funding were to diminish, universities and colleges would be "between a rock and a hard place" with respect to absorbing these faculty. At the same time these faculty members could contribute much to articulating a working relationship between sociology and social work since they are closely connected with practice. As the external resources of schools of social work are depleted and autonomy is diminished, it is possible that many of these programs will be subsumed under sociology departments which are usually totally hard money supported. Graduate schools

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<sup>5</sup>For example, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Division of Licensing and Certification in December 1976, directed that all social service designees working in nursing homes must be licensed social workers.

of social work are generally more heavily grant supported than undergraduate social work programs. Currently, undergraduate programs are more likely to survive grant funding cuts than graduate programs. At the same time there is less basis for distinguishing the difference between social work and sociology students at the undergraduate level than is the case at the graduate level. At the undergraduate level many social work programs already are combined with sociology, and at the graduate level, there is a trend of offering joint sociology and social work programs. Sociologists are placing more emphasis on defining and implementing applied sociology programs that do not substantially differ from social work programs, and this is being done with little or no input from social workers.<sup>6</sup> If such programming becomes wide-spread, we will witness a return to the type of education that existed at the turn of the century that was described earlier in this paper.

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<sup>6</sup>For a specific example of such a program proposal in England, see Program Proposal, M.Sc. in Advanced Social Work (Mental Health), Department of Sociology, University of Surrey, Guilford, Surrey, England.

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