



Edited by Geoff Payne and Malcolm Cross

Sociology  
in Action

Applications and  
Opportunities  
for the 1990s

Explorations in Sociology 33  
British Sociological Association

## EXPLORATIONS IN SOCIOLOGY

### *British Sociological Association conference volume series*

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# **Sociology in Action**

**Applications and Opportunities  
for the 1990s**

Edited by

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and

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1993

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First published 1993 by  
THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD  
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS  
and London  
Companies and representatives  
throughout the world

ISBN 978-1-349-12110-6      ISBN 978-1-349-12108-3 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-12108-3

A catalogue record for this book is available  
from the British Library.

Typeset by EXPO Holdings, Malaysia

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# 1 An Active Sociology?

Geoff Payne and Malcolm Cross

Academic disciplines are contained within three distinct frameworks: those of ideas, of institutions, and of the wider society. The first framework consists of the ideas and knowledge which a subject continuously inherits from its own past. At any one moment, we build upon the work that we, and other colleagues, have already done. Although we are free to select any part of that pre-existing repertoire to develop, we do not start with a blank sheet. Although we constitute the living components of our discipline, and our energies are its dynamic, we operate within a subject culture that can partially, but only partially, be reconstructed at will by the individual.

The second framework is made up of the specialist institutional structures which sustain all science; the colleges, schools and research centres which employ the professionals practising their disciplines, and which are organised around the roles and needs of teaching and research. These structures are by no means fixed, as changes to the secondary and higher education systems in the 1980s demonstrated all too clearly. Nor are they universally, automatically, or even-handedly supportive of every discipline. However, without organisations and functionaries, buildings and budgets, and committees and 'corporate identities' we have no home for our work. We are a small part of this intricate organisational framework, but we experience it as an external force.

Surrounding these two is a third framework, a wider society whose members sustain us by using the results of our research or seeking the education our disciplines have to offer. At a minimum, society must tolerate our eccentricities as harmless. In a capitalist society no subject can flourish if other people do not value it. Marginal survival may be possible in the face of public indifference, but a healthy discipline, let alone a healthy future, depends on achieving a measure of public support. No discipline has a God-given right to continue in existence.

It follows that, while as professional academics we are most intimately involved with the first of these three frameworks, we

cannot afford to neglect the other two. No discipline can risk being too exclusively introspective, or passive towards its external frameworks. However exciting or compelling its own internal logic, a subject must also attend to its own survival. A balance of academic efforts has to be achieved, so that institutional security and public acceptance are also maintained. In our own self-interest as sociologists, we require an applied sociology because it will be an active, participative sociology which engages with society that is most likely to sustain us as a discipline. Equally important, a 'sociology in action' has the potential to benefit other members of the wider society. Not least it offers the particular discipline strengths of systematic description, analysis, demystification, critique and re-conceptualisation, a set of resources that are needed beyond the narrow confines of the discipline itself.

The first framework of inherited paradigms is neither unitary nor immutable. Sociologists can and do control much of what they teach, research and write. Our roles are not simply determined in an absolute sense, despite the constraints of intellectual legacies and institutional arrangements. We can choose what kind of sociology we want, and within a liberal, pluralist society, there is ample room for variety. We can choose to foster a sociology which is abstract or introspective, critical or radical, historical or literary or contemplative. If we choose any of these styles in too narrow a way, sociology will still continue to exist – in the short term. In the longer term, however, even British society's supposed tolerance, indifference or lack of awareness of our existence is likely to become replaced by a more active dismissal.

Equally, engaging with society is no guarantee of survival: the messages we discover and relate will not be universally popular with governments, employers or current beneficiaries of the contemporary social order. However, sociology is not dependent on a single source of support for its survival, drawing rather on a range of differing audiences. There is already a real, as well as a potential, demand for our discipline, with more people each year wanting to study sociology, and a growing market for the results of (particularly, applied) sociological research. Our task is to maintain these healthy trends.

It is to this task that the present collection is addressed. The contributors, whose chapters are based on papers given at an earlier Annual Conference of the British Sociological Association



in Plymouth, argue from a variety of perspectives for an 'applied' sociology. Looking both backwards at past experiences and forward on the basis of current developments, their views are largely optimistic. By the start of the 1990s, many sociologists had discovered a degree of self-confidence about the discipline's future, and an enthusiasm for trying new approaches that should stand sociology in good stead for the rest of the decade.

## MAKING THE CHANGE

When the British Sociological Association met for its Annual Conference in Plymouth, it broke with tradition in three ways. It was the first time that the conference had been held anywhere other than a university. It was the first time that the conference was not organised around a narrowly-focused theme. And it was the first time that sociology and its general relevance for society – 'applied sociology' – received a central place in what has become the key event of the year for British sociology, the BSA Annual Conference. Each of these 'firsts' is a significant marker of change, both in contemporary Britain, and within the discipline itself.

The choice of a polytechnic as venue reflected the growth of sociology teaching in that sector of higher education during the last two decades. Sociology can be studied as Single or Joint/Combined Honours in 25 former polytechnic (or now 'new university') departments, and also in another 10 smaller colleges (CNAAs, 1988; PCFC, 1990). While the exact scale of this provision is masked by a variety of course titles and organisational formats for courses and departments, figures produced by the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council for 1989/90 showed over 5500 undergraduates following courses in which sociology was their main discipline. A further 2400 were studying combinations of social sciences in which no single discipline was dominant. Many other students following courses in other disciplines were receiving some teaching in sociology: social work, health studies, personnel management, town planning, education and business studies all call to some extent for sociological inputs.

The relationship between sociology and social intervention has been one of the discipline's central concerns since the nineteenth

century, but it is a concern reinforced by the social and political changes of the last decade, and nowhere more so than in the public sector of higher education. While the sociology curriculum in the polytechnics has been largely indistinguishable from that of the universities, the institutional ethos of the polytechnics placed greater emphasis on the relevance of higher education for the wider society. 'Calls for "relevance", "vocational orientation" and "practical application" have promoted a more policy-oriented sociology' (Conference Programme Notes): such calls have been louder and more influential in the polytechnics than in most of the older universities. Given the conference location, a theme which would stress 'the intersection of sociology, social research and social policy' (Conference Programme Notes) seemed particularly appropriate.

Partly because of the broad scope of sociology in 'the public sector' of education, the sociologists at Plymouth who proposed the conference theme of 'Sociology in Action' felt that an opportunity could be created for a broadening of topic coverage, in contrast to the usual more focused conference themes such as 'the sociology of power' or 'sociology and history', to take two earlier examples. The BSA has over the years often debated whether a narrow theme for its annual conference is desirable, or whether any theme at all is necessary. It could be said that the Plymouth Conference was an unofficial experiment, in which we reached a halfway house: there was a co-ordinating theme, but it was deliberately a broad one. The result was a balance of diversity and coherence, and may offer a model for future deliberations about conference topics.

The conference was organised around nine 'streams', covering the criminal justice system, health, social work, education, youth, gender, media studies, inner cities, and employment. The diversity of streams is indicated by the fact that six separate volumes of conference papers could be published, each on separate specific topics. Despite the diversity of its streams, the event maintained an overall coherence, because each stream dealt with a field of applied sociology.

This collection of articles not only takes the title of the conference, but connects with the over-arching theme more directly than do the other, stream-specific 'conference volumes'. The core issue for this volume is 'applied sociology': what is it, what does it mean for sociologists, and how should our own

practice (including our teaching) change to accommodate it. It is hard to imagine such an issue being a central theme of British sociology ten years ago: twenty years back, it would have been an absolute impossibility. The other 'conference volumes' have dealt with health, crime, employment, women's roles and young people: an indication of the breadth and relevance of sociology's contribution to understanding modern society. Paradoxically, this final volume deals with sociology itself. It is a book about the practice of sociology itself and is addressed more to sociologists as co-practitioners than to a wider readership interested in one specific social issue, such as crime or health and illness. It is an exercise in introspection, which paradoxically aims to promote 'extra-spection': our purpose is to explore how sociology has within its resources the capacity to be relevant to wider society.

#### A SOCIOLOGY FOR THE 1990s

It may seem a little strange to have to argue for this perspective, but contemporary sociology is an extensive field with many different styles and practices. The discipline certainly contains many members who continue to feel uncomfortable with an emphasis on relevance and application. For a variety of reasons, these people feel more at ease with an emphasis on ideas and the development of the subject for itself, on its own terms. We can illustrate what we mean by drawing on a review of one of the earlier 'conference volumes': the reviewer took the view that if –

this volume should be assessed in terms of sociology's potential contribution to understanding contemporary issues, the authors might be congratulated. Several essays offer incisive analysis of social events or processes and then make sensible, essentially non-partisan, forecasts or recommendations for future policy. They chart current trends, correct common misapprehensions and identify who benefited from the industrial restructuring of the 1980s. The book's virtues are ones of careful empirical investigation, effective ideology critique and sound practical analysis.

However, while successful in its own terms, I find the volume sociologically uninspiring, a collection of the routine

products of thoroughly competent research. Although some unexpected effects are uncovered, most of the processes are already very well known to sociologists. These essays are solid but unexciting, testament of the extensive funded empirical research central to British economic sociology in the 1980s. They are largely bereft of theoretical implication. (Warde, 1991: 745)

While naturally, as the editors, we would be expected to welcome the first paragraph, and to dissent from the pessimism of the second, the more fundamental issue is the reviewer's tendency to dichotomise the goals of sociology. On the one hand, he posits the task of understanding contemporary society, of contributing directly to debate about that society, and ultimately of helping to change it. On the other hand, there is the task of generating new intellectual abstractions for discussion, critique and elaboration by other sociologists, so that the practitioners of the discipline have an enriched cultural capital at their disposal. We are unhappy with such a dichotomy, not least because we believe that the conceptual apparatus of the discipline only has ultimate validity when it satisfies both the demands of rigorous logic *and* those of application and social relevance. The often-repeated distinction between 'pure' and 'applied' is an arbitrary and largely unhelpful one, most commonly encountered in ideological application by the advocates of one small corner of the discipline against those in another small corner.

As will become apparent on reading this book (and its sister volumes) we certainly do espouse a style of sociology which tries to explore the social world in which we find ourselves, namely Britain in the last decade of the twentieth century. However, we would not wish to exclude all other kinds of sociological endeavours, nor do we regard intellectual rigour or sophisticated conceptualisation as being relevant only to the realms of sociological theory. To argue the merits of one perspective need not entail the denigration of other perspectives, or the reification of positive characteristics as if they were unique to one school when in fact they are usually shared by practitioners of many different persuasions.

Generals are often accused of re-fighting the battles of the last war. The battles between 'narrow empiricism', 'grand

abstraction' and 'marxist critique' were the battles of the 1960s and 1970s. Many sociologists in their forties and fifties continue to operate within mental sets that were shaped in that era. The echoes of the cannon-fire can still be heard, rumbling around the empty hills; the warriors still bear their scars with pride. Newer recruits have joined, to fight for fresh causes such as feminism or post-modernism, but a critical discipline cannot shake off its disputatious nature, and so the old battles cannot be forgotten. New recruits are socialised into regimental traditions; the old ghosts continue to haunt us, the old campaigns distract us from more modern challenges. Even so, the discipline moved on dramatically in the 1980s, and it is to these developments that the contributors to this volume address themselves.

There is, of course, no unanimity in the essays that follow but the questions raised coalesce around three themes. First there is the debate over objectivity and the status of sociological explanations. If 'objectivity' implies a return to the 'abstracted empiricism' to which C. Wright Mills directed his ire then neither we, nor our contributors, have any time for it. But by alternative routes, there is a convergence towards the view that sociological accounts have a claim to be heard which springs from a distinctive body of theories, metatheories, concepts and practices. The double hermeneutic need not be a double-bind, with the only avenues of escape marked 'macro-theorising' or 'micro-empiricism'. It is perfectly possible to construct a sociology which engenders a developing body of theory married to a strong body of data in ways which help answer questions that non-sociologists ask. Moreover, an active sociology does not prevent posing other questions; indeed, those of us fortunate enough to have carried out a body of applied sociological research are often struck by the enthusiasm with which new theories, new ideas and new questions are grasped by those who do not enjoy the flexibility of thought which, at its best, sociology can bring.

A second theme is the role of applied sociology itself. There is a reluctance to accept the distinction between 'pure' and 'applied' research and a strong preference for a continuum rather than a firm divide. As sociology in the UK becomes ever more research minded this may reflect the realities of funding. Looked at from the vantage point of a teaching post in a university, there

is a natural tendency to assume that sociological research is funded by the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council). Increasingly, however, researchers are not lecturers and their sources of funding are eclectic. Government departments, local authorities and foundations contribute three out of four pounds to social science research and they are all motivated by an interest in *applications*. That is not the same thing as saying that they are uninterested in theory and it is certainly not true that they will push in the direction of mindless empiricism, but it is the case that the problem will be formulated within a policy context. One of the great opportunities for creative sociology is to utilise the opportunities for funding, and often for access, to both fulfil contractual obligations *and* to pursue intellectual curiosity. There is no lack of potentially exciting insights to be generated by applying sociology to a wide range of problems, even if an initial report has to be constrained by limitations imposed by a funding body. The technology for developing and re-using data is literally at our finger tips and it is rare to find that constraints on publication will be rigorously applied even when an initial project is recast, rethought and reinterpreted as a contribution to a wider intellectual debate. Indeed, there is more than a hint in what follows that an active sociology is recursive in terms of the discipline itself. It is striking that the experience of conducting policy-oriented research has apparently led to a reconstruction in the minds of our contributors of what the sociological project is about. This explains the reflexive strands that occur in at least four of the chapters that follow.

Finally, there is a call for what could be termed a 'new professionalism'. Just as there is no support for a swing of the pendulum back to the sociology of the American sixties, there is no demand for an elitist, restrictive model of what constitutes 'professionalism'. What there is is pressure for greater balance within the discipline and for this to be reflected in the curriculum and in teaching practice. To be sure, sociology has been buffeted by the ill-winds of mindless prejudice, but it has also been depressingly permeable to those who confuse discipline with dogma and expertise with reaction. The new sociologist is a person with a range of skills at her or his disposal, with a knowledge of where and when to apply them and with a keen conceptual mind that is practised in linking theory with data in a multitude of different ways.

## ACTIVE SOCIOLOGIES

The first part of the book looks at alternative models of sociological practice, both abroad and within the British tradition and argues the case for a new rapprochement between the 'pure' and the 'applied'. The central section develops by the use of examples, showing a number of the successful applications of sociology in recent years. The third section offers two instances of 'reflexive sociology' as two very active sociologists evaluate the lessons of applying sociology for the discipline itself. The last set of chapters tackles issues of the curriculum, which is seen as central to maintaining and promoting a more active sociology.

While all of the contributors to this volume argue implicitly for an alternative vision of sociology, the most explicit and concrete alternative is presented by Martin Bulmer's comparison of the discipline in Britain and the United States. In this exercise, he recognises the constraints of the three frameworks discussed above. American sociology cannot be simply transplanted into this country. However by looking at cultural, social and historical differences in the two countries, by considering how our two sociologies are organised, and by contrasting the different levels of technical expertise in empirical sociology that we inherit, he provides an account of the subject's public reception and the possibility of changing it.

America's history, geography and demography have created a nation in which the very concept of 'American society' is problematic, so that the analysis of social issues has been well supported by media interest and foundation funding. In Britain, a more cohesive and hierarchical society has supported a culture resistant to sociological critique, not least because of its association with the political left and the Labour Party in particular. In this country, a demythologising discipline reliant for the most part on state funding was always less likely to obtain the public recognition achieved by its counterpart in the United States.

On the other hand, American sociology has developed in both a less exclusive and more self-confident fashion. It does not differentiate sharply between demography, history, psychology or statistics in its academic organisation as does British sociology, and crucially there was for many years no sub-division

into a 'pure' or general sociology and an applied, more policy-oriented social policy. Allied to this catholic self-perception and wider range of intellectual tools was a claim to expertise: it has become accepted in the United States that sociologists have something relevant and of distinctive technical credibility to say on the topics of the day.

Bulmer puts this question of technical expertise at the heart of his analysis. He sees many British sociologists uncomfortable about making strong claims for professional expertise, and while arguing against a narrow credentialist model of professionalism, he calls for a sociological professional who has 'the confidence and the credentials to claim that on the basis of research-based analytical knowledge, one has something of substance to contribute to current policy debates'. Persuasiveness means better and more quantitative methods and a willingness to apply one's skills to topics chosen not just for their sociological interest but because they are in the public domain. In support of Martin Bulmer is the experience of many of us that when wanting to employ trained social scientists to work on a problem formulated sociologically, the only appointable candidates were those from other disciplines.

One line of critique that has perhaps been more pervasive and influential in the UK than in the US is that which has undermined application by questioning not simply method but methodology. If *all* claims to sociological *expertise* are invalid because of the equivalent explanatory status of competing accounts then an *applied* sociology is a particular nonsense since it follows that the terrain of enquiry is already replete with 'expertise'. The argument often turns on claims to 'objectivity'. In attempting to show that 'fears about the word 'objectivity' are unfounded', Paul Edwards draws on realist writings to offer grounds for a belief in the superiority of sociological accounts over simple actor accounts. As he reminds us, Gouldner's original attack on the notion of sociology as an objective science was not so much a philosophical argument as a political critique of 'the consequences of an unthinking espousal of value-freedom'.

The superiority of 'scientific' knowledge does not come from a process of falsification, but rather from the elaboration of ideas over time. Here Edwards prefers Lakatos' position to that of Kuhn, finding the concept of the 'research programme' a



persuasive description of both social and natural sciences as changing systems of knowledge. The finding of new evidence and the refinement and elaboration of theories leads to 'progressive programmes' supplanting less convincing explanations. Initial statements tend to be simple, before subsequently softening and blurring to incorporate criticisms from other schools or later work. In this view, the conscious experiences of the physical world by the researcher are less significant than the recorded world of accumulated critical argumentation. This third world (to use Popper's phrase) is better than the ordinary actor's account because it is more evolved and more comprehensive. The truth content of sociology lies not in testing limited hypotheses but in the success of its progressive programmes, which extend beyond the individual researcher. Perhaps Edwards's own experience as a senior researcher in an ESRC Research Centre is relevant here. He has had to find a way round the central dilemma that has reduced some others to inaction. It is not so much that sociologists are creatures with fragile egos and minimal self-confidence. Rather, as Edwards argues, they have laboured under methodologies which undermine, rather than promote, the discipline. Many sociologists find difficulty in accepting the tenets of 'naive falsificationalism' while not knowing how to translate the double hermeneutic into research practice. He offers a way out of this conundrum.

It is a substantial step from accepting the special status of sociological expertise to arguing for a proportion of its practitioners to move beyond teaching and research into the domain of therapy. David Blane presents a case for 'clinical sociology'. The movement, well-established in the States and in France, promotes a role for sociologists as helpers and intermediaries for client groups who need assistance. Examples include pre-court mediation, sociologically-based group work with criminals, individual counselling for people with social behaviour problems (such as eating disorders), family therapy, and of course in medical settings from which the term 'clinical' is derived. The sociological inspiration for this lies in the work of Mead and Simmel, together with more recent interactionists such as Straus, Berger and Luckman, Lofland, Rubington and Weinberg and others. The particular strength of clinical sociology is its capacity to bring both macrosocial and microsocial factors and processes into play.

At this stage, clinical sociology is still in its infancy in Britain, largely confined to the health sphere. Indeed, Blane sees primary care as the most promising area for growth. Unlike America, where there is not only a sub-discipline but also a split within the 'profession' between free-market practitioners and academic theoreticians based in higher education, this country offers a less propitious social setting for development. However, clinical sociology's unique combination of perspectives could be grounded in a training which also included welfare rights, counselling and research methods. It would be the practical side of one of Britain's major subject strengths, the sociology of health and illness.

## SOCIOLOGIES IN ACTION

The next three chapters are central to one of the core arguments of this book. They each throw light on a topic of central concern to the evolution of British sociology but, by locating the problematic in an applied setting, they achieve two things. First, they show up the partisan character of earlier formulations and, second, they say something important about the effect that applied research can have on sociology itself. The sociology of class, and economic sociology in general, while ironically often guided by nineteenth-century formulations that were more similar to those presented here, have tended to eschew a sociology of industry and of labour markets. They have not addressed the fragmentation of classes and the study of social exclusion, nor the rise to prominence of other social divisions such as race and gender. It is striking that Peter Townsend, for example, who has engaged more with debates in social policy than in sociology, draws on Garry Runciman's powerful writings on general theorising to continue his pioneering work on a sociology of poverty, rather than being able to locate his work in a lively literature that has its own relevant theoretical debates. Indeed, many of the theoretical insights which link industrial restructuring with social inequality and complex social divisions have come from urban geography (cf. Cross, 1992; Cross and Keith, 1993).

Questions of operating outside of conventional professional boundaries are central to the first of these three chapters, in

which Ian Glover and Michael Kelly reflect on their involvement as sociologists with the Engineering Council, the Finnistone Committee, and the British engineering profession. They set this in the context of the low status of manufacturing (and its lack of success) in this country, which they relate to the training of engineers and their managerial role in manufacturing as compared with other societies. This analysis is based in the work of a small informal group centred on Michael Fores in the Department of Industry – ‘Mike Fores’ barber shop’ – which influenced the Finniston Report and a number of other national initiatives but which was ultimately unable to overturn the cultural values and institutional practices that discount manufacturing. Their account of the way the ‘barber shop’ operated illustrates how sociological analysis can be strengthened by cross-disciplinary work, and used to modify – albeit within limits – public policy.

From this base, the authors reflect on British sociology, seeing a similar general preference for the intellectual over the practical. In particular, in sociological writing on industry and economic life, they perceive not so much a bias against business (as alleged by Marsland) but rather an opposition to abuses of economic power and an indifference to wealth-creation, the latter being typical of British culture. Thus sociology has dealt with the idea of ‘industrial society’ at too general a level, lacking sufficient direct experience of industry, relatively ignorant of historical detail, and influenced by the nation’s anti-industrialism. (Here, the authors offer a further example of how basic paradigms can be progressively refined.) In this way, the failures to adapt engineering training and the limitations of British sociology’s work on economic life are both seen as symptoms of an underlying and self-defeating insularity. Ironically, for a profession that tends to pride itself on its anti-elitism, sociology has allied itself ‘with the patrician values of an old “liberal” academic guard’ (Glover and Kelly, Chapter 5) rather than actively embracing the new vocational higher education now emerging in Britain.

A similar combination of sociological analysis and commitment of position runs through the next two chapters, which deal with class and race. In the first of these, Peter Townsend tackles the two extremes of the class structure, the ‘underclass’ and the ‘super-rich’. At one level, his chapter is a straightforward piece

of sociological writing about social class in Britain. At another, his treatment of the subject provides a further clear illustration of what an applied sociology can look like. While on the one hand, he follows the conventional review, critique, and synthesis method to achieve a partial reconciliation between different theories of class, on the other hand his personal programme, briefly started at the start of the chapter is to engage with events in society. 'The social and political implications of the practice of sociology seem to me to be an inescapable feature of the subject' (Townsend, Chapter 6). In setting out to improve on previous theorisation and quantification of the effects of policy and policy institutions, he sees it as inevitable that the sociological analysis of development in social structure must encroach on political sensibilities. If that were not so, the subject would be a less worthy target for our energies.

The first section of Townsend's chapter looks at living standards, showing how the poor in Britain have fallen behind the rest, and in particular, the rich. He argues that our usual class classification schemes do not adequately handle these patterns. Although there are problems with the concept of 'underclass', it does serve the function of directing attention away from white employed males to other more disadvantaged groups in society. The second part of his chapter examines the rich and super-rich, using data from his London survey to show the cultural and political attitudes of the people who are the human elements of the 'City' system. He sees this latter question of collective or institutional 'motivation' not just as a problem of classic class analysis (i.e. in terms of class consciousness and action) but as central to an understanding of the policies which shape and change the class structure of British society.

Townsend's concern with the practice of class and how sociology can illuminate it is mirrored by the work of Terry Chivers and Jill Sharp on race. Their rejection of a value-free sociology (i.e. an introspective and academic sociology) flows from an explicit and passionate belief that racism must be actively engaged and defeated. Their analysis of anti-racist movements show how five approaches have evolved since World War II, from an academic, distanced, analysis through to confrontation, action and training in anti-racism practice. Each 'model' of opposition to racism entails its own tactics and rationale for change, its typical setting for operations, and its particular contribution.

Each also favours one or more research paradigm, and draws on different elements of sociology for its support.

Chivers and Sharp demonstrate how sociology – or rather its components – have come to be utilised by people engaged in anti-racism. Here we are not talking about the ideological position of the profession, or vague generalities about ‘sociological research for policy’, but rather about specific clusters of concepts, perspectives and knowledge which inform, and can be employed by, different players in the anti-racist field. This analysis offers a new meaning to the idea of ‘sociology in action’. The latter part of their chapter provides extensive illustration of the form and extent of the racism they set out to overcome with the aid of sociological expertise.

## A REFLEXIVE DISCIPLINE

Janet Finch argues that a radical reorientation within the discipline was already seen in the 1980s. The days of the pre-eminence of theoretical work are passing: more sociologists these days are actively engaged in applied work. While she welcomes this trend, Finch sees it as raising several problems for the profession. Not only have we ‘begun to re-engage with policy issues without creating much of a stock of intellectual capital upon which to draw’, but we still face some basic questions about the practice of applied sociology.

To explore these, Finch distinguishes between two models of the sociologist as researcher. In ‘Model I’ the sociologist supplies the ‘scientific facts’; the politician, the funding body, the policy-maker ‘uses’ the ‘facts’ to take action. The alternative model rejects the idea of objective factual knowledge, substituting the idea of the creation of knowledge as a social process. Thus a key role of the applied sociologist is to offer conceptual reorientation of the research problem as part of the total research act. The final outcome cannot be a simple straightforward product, and so the policy outcomes are more opaque. Sociologists need to recognise that their findings, however rational, may be rejected or neglected for other political reasons, and that direct connections between research and policy are much less likely than indirect diffusion of ideas, which is often invisible. Confronting the external frameworks leads to compromise.

Control over findings is one of the four possible areas of compromise that faces the sociologist who attempts to produce 'useful and usable knowledge' for people outside of the profession, by means of sociological perspectives and methods. The four compromises are intellectual (over the choice of which key questions to examine); methodological (over the choice of which methods to employ); ethical and political (over the control of findings) and practical (over the basic need to find employment and funds in order for sociology to survive). Finch shows how compromise is generally more likely to be at an unsatisfactory point in the Model I, 'sociologist as technician', approach to applied research. While the results of any specific compromising process cannot be predicted, she draws on a range of examples to demonstrate that an optimistic view of the outcomes is justified. The alternative to the implied crude scientism of Model I is Model II's more sophisticated and reflexive applied sociology in which notions of neutrality, objectivity (but ultimately of powerlessness) are replaced by carefully reasoned and technically sound grounding of one's work in a coherent value-position.

Margaret Stacey's account of her research on the General Medical Council provides good concrete examples of the issues Finch and Edwards raise about value freedom and about progressive programmes. Her chapter begins by placing her research in the general context of her own earlier career, and in the specific context of her service as a member of the General Medical Council (GMC) between 1976 and 1984. Readers familiar with her other work will correctly expect to find Stacey rejecting a value-free sociology, and setting out a position which is feminist and anti-elitist. As her chosen object of study is the GMC, this was a source both of interest and of pain. The GMC is not only a medical elite, but an arena in which the class structure, or at least the status system, and the white male dominated gender order are maintained. The pain arose in part from the realisation that 'I was helping to uphold a system which I could not accept'.

However, it does not follow from Stacey's value position that she advocates a total rejection of the GMC's role. As Edwards argues, 'it is a common mistake to equate criticism with down-right opposition' (p. 51). What Stacey is doing is to differentiate between defects and strengths, between individual actors and

the workings of the system, and between idealised outcomes and political realities. In other words, she is demonstrating 'the hidden nature of the system' (Edwards, Chapter 3), without adopting a narrow or polemical view of the kind which might be expected from actors outside a social scientific discourse. Her declarations of value position are part of that discourse, but the reader cannot extrapolate from them the conclusions which Stacey draws. This is in part because her anti-elitism with regard to the medical profession is balanced by other value commitments, to political democracy and de-centralised government, and to quality of medical practice within the NHS. Her 'confession' of values is not open to a simple interpretation by the reader.

This complexity of outcome is also reflected in Stacey's discussion of sociological analyses of the professions. The medical elite on the GMC can be regarded as being characterised by a professional commitment to service (following Durkheim and Carr-Saunders) or by narrow professional self-interest (following Freidson or Johnson). In the same way that Clegg found commonalities and correspondences in Marxist and pluralist approaches (Edwards's example), Stacey now finds neither view of the professions to be totally adequate. The complexity which comprises the total range of professional activities requires an elaboration of earlier views which were adequate for explaining a more restricted set of social facts. In this way, the sociology of the professions is a progressive programme and Stacey's concerned and careful analysis of how the GMC operates is a significant contribution to this process.

Stacey concludes with some general remarks about professions, some of which are pointed towards the British Sociological Association's status and policies. She rejects current notions of a profession as being relevant to a nineteenth-century evolution of highly technical occupations. Rather than importing the struggle for status and recognition along with the search for high standards of practice and training, Stacey affirms her belief that good sociological practice must be based (like good medical practice) on the assumption of equal worth of all human beings, regardless of whatever oppressions or privileges those people currently experience. Careful, detailed empirical study needs to go hand in hand with 'an uncomfortably high level of individual and collective self-awareness'.

**SOCIOLOGY TOMORROW**

To a large extent, sociology is what it teaches: most sociologists are employed in education, our most visible activity is producing graduates in sociology, the most used writings are those on undergraduate lists, and the currency of ideas is indexed by their content in syllabuses. What we teach is therefore one marker of what our discipline is about: if we wish to argue in favour of this or that role for sociology, the curriculum is one of the key territories that will be contested.

Jon Gubbay, who has been one of the main figures in recent debates on undergraduate teaching, presents his framework for analysing discipline curricula. Encouraged by earlier BSA executive committees, he has been seeking to establish what is taught and by what methods. It would have been relatively easy to amass an archive of documents, but it has proved far more fruitful to develop a structure in which the components of the curriculum can be identified and considered. Thus Gubbay starts from direct influences, such as interactions between departmental personnel, skills in teaching, intellectual commitments, and institutional arrangements (echoes of two of our initial three constraining frameworks) before building in indirect influences such as the graduate labour market, political climate, student responses and the professions' agendas.

Within these interacting elements a core set of characteristic orientations, or 'domains' can be identified. These are the preparation of students for socio-political roles; developing the personal capacities of individuals; training students for subsequent occupations; and the reproduction of the education system and knowledge. Each domain contains a number of 'ideological' positions, often inconsistently combined in practice. Gubbay suggests that the most common configurations of domains and ideologies are those of the 'liberal', the 'market oriented', the 'service', 'higher learning', and 'traditional leadership'.

Although not unexpected, it is noteworthy that his research in both its pilot and main phases found a lack of consensus about what the 'core' of sociology is, and encountered a wide range of reactions. Some sociologists felt deeply threatened by the exercise, while others have since responded enthusiastically to seminars on the teaching of several topics. Many sociologists



have commented on the novelty of the experience of discussing with colleagues what they teach!

Although Stina Lyon and Kate Murray did not write their chapter (Chapter 11) in response to Jon Gubbay's work, their contribution reads almost as if that were the case. They start with the concept of vocationalism (or as we have just expressed it above, 'training students for subsequent occupations') which has been central to government thinking about education during the 1980s. Using data from the HELM (Higher Education and the Labour Market) Study of graduate employment, they show how a simple manpower planning model of the higher education system is inadequate. On the one hand, experience *before* higher education influences what subjects and institutions are chosen by potential students. On the other hand, the segmentation of the labour market and situations of employment *after* higher education have an impact on earnings, job satisfaction, labour turnover, and career orientation.

Between the two, higher education is not just a neutral channel providing connecting routes. Subject of degree is shown to be related to earnings or job satisfaction, for example. Given the 'pre-segregation' process of subject selection, prior experience in school or in the home is therefore linked to later income or job turnover. In this particular sense, whether a specific curriculum is made 'more vocational' is largely irrelevant to employability or job performance, because of the institutional forces of schooling and labour market segmentation. Lyon and Murray's response to the questions raised by Gubbay is somewhat sceptical.

In contrast, Martin Albrow adopts a more up-beat approach. Having stimulated much of this debate about the undergraduate curriculum by his 1986 BSA presidential address, he offers here a development of his vision of a competencies-based education. In part his concern is with the job opportunities of our students, because as a profession we are ultimately dependent on wider society's demand for our services. At the least we need to respond to the enthusiasms and interests of our students.

Whether this is seen as adapting to employers' requirements or student choice, this does not necessarily have to mean either a loss of control over the discipline, or a heavier emphasis on research methods. In Chapter 12, Albrow argues that sociology

does not just consist of the capacity to do a survey, or to carry out participant observation: each 'empirical specialism' such as the sociology of the family, or the sociology of religion, which appears as a final year undergraduate option involves its own skills. For example, the sociology of the family 'lends itself to the exploration of gender stereotyping, identity formation, conflict resolution', issues directly related to counselling and learning in self-help groups. If the discipline is presented too narrowly as 'who said what in which publication' these capacities remain undeveloped.

In practice, too much of the sociology curriculum is still presented in precisely that traditional form. The three shibboleths of conventional examinations, an emphasis on formal scholarship, and a concern for dominant theory systems constrain our education. Albrow is sceptical about the actual contribution of sociological theory to the discipline, as compared with other more empirical branches. Tested either by key contribution to knowledge (one acceptable legitimation) or by delivery of enhanced capacity for the student (Albrow's second acceptable test of legitimation) sociological theory has not earned its present dominant place in the curriculum.

If we can escape from these traditional pedagogical approaches, the prospects for sociology are excellent. Albrow cites a variety of new occupations which require sociological capacities. Students continue to want to learn about themselves and their place in society. Whatever the conditions of cultural history that have shaped current practice, our duty as teachers (how many practising sociologists exist outside the Academy?) requires us to review what we teach. Reform in the curriculum is reform in the discipline. In the latter part of his chapter, Albrow provides one detailed example to show how a course (in 'Mass Media and Modern Society') can be constructed to maximise the development of capacities, to underpin the conception of sociology as an active discipline.

An active discipline, a discipline with high-level competencies of many kinds, a discipline of people concerned with the *fate* and not just the study of people outside the profession, is what we mean by 'sociology in action'. Through this collection, we have attempted in a variety of ways to make a case for this style of discipline (it is for others to promote their own alternative styles). We have brought together illustrations of alternative

forms of sociology from abroad, with the careful self-reflections and conclusions of senior practitioners in this country. Strongly-argued approaches to specific topics have been set alongside more philosophical analyses. Straightforward examples of good sociology as the product of a successful applied style have been offered together with discussions of the curriculum, the latter as the way to achieve more of the former, and as a key to promoting change in the discipline. Taken as separate pieces, each chapter is sociologically interesting in its own right. We hope that in combination they make a persuasive case for a sociology in action that will provide the foundation for the work of the profession in the 1990s. It is through such an applied sociology that we can trust in Britain having a strong sociology *still* in action when we enter the twenty-first century.

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## 2 Successful Applications of Sociology: can Britain learn from America?

Martin Bulmer

Sociology in action poses a challenge for Britain and a challenge for British sociologists. Sociology has a very considerable contribution to make to issues of the day, whether at the level of public policy formulation, professional practice or public discussion and media presentation. This and many of the following chapters reflect upon the contribution that sociology has made and is making, and how it could be made greater. Sociology in action, sociology in practice, sociology applied to real-world situations is their theme.

What British sociology needs, arguably, is a sense of a world in which things were arranged differently. A world in which sociology would have a secure and publicly recognised place in the school and college curriculum, would be recognised as having important contributions to make to issues of current public policy, would be available as a source to policy-makers when reaching decisions and have a ready audience through the mass media, is what I have in mind. To be sure, British sociology has some of these attributes to some limited extent. But it is more marginalised and publicly criticised than one would wish. Could it be otherwise? The aim of this chapter is to compare the situation in Britain today with that in other countries, and in particular in America to see if any light can be thrown on the problem of sociology's public face.

One can gain something from systematic comparison, and in the brief space available some comparisons will be attempted. But one initial point needs to be made rather forcefully. The times may be relatively bleak for sociology, but the state of sociology is not merely a reflection of external forces and constraints. The burdens under which sociology labours in Britain are not immutable and are capable of exaggeration. Some of those difficulties are self-imposed, as I shall suggest later. Sociology in this country is ultimately what sociologists make

it, and this collection is a demonstration that sociology can be useful, relevant and action-oriented. How, then, could we learn from abroad?

The comparison can be approached in five ways: (1) What is our conception of sociology when trying to make it useful? (2) What are sociologists trying to do when applying their knowledge? (3) What claims to expertise do they make and how are these related to the discipline's standing in the society? (4) How well founded and persuasive are its conclusions? (5) What is the audience which it is trying to reach?

## APPLIED SOCIOLOGY

What is our conception of sociology in use? Applied sociology – for that is what is being referred to – is not a term which is much used in this country. There are several reasons for this. Early applied sociologists such as Charles Booth and Seeborn Rowntree are treated as part of the history of social research and of social welfare, but are not seen as providing a model for contemporary sociological research and action. Indeed, a curious bifurcation has developed, which we would do well to ponder, between sociology and empirical social research (Bulmer, 1985a). Possibly a majority of people doing social research in Britain today are not sociologists, yet this is not something which receives particular comment. But it says something about our engagement with the society of which we are members.

A different reason for the non-development of applied sociology in Britain lies in the radical or critical strain within the discipline, which has represented a kind of application in a direct sense through extending the boundaries of social thought, without being conceptualised as application. Indeed, sharp criticism has conventionally been directed by such critical sociologists against their colleagues who moved too close to the powers that be. In fact, those who consider that sociology has a demystifying, radicalising, oppositional quality to its thought are just as much in the business of applying sociology as the sociologist who accepts a research contract from the Home Office. Indeed, in the field of deviance there has eventually been some exchange of views between mainstream criminology

and the radical critics who established the National Deviancy Symposium in the late 1960s (cf. Cohen 1974; Payne et al 1981: 104–15).

In the mainstream of the discipline, the split, which has widened since the early years of the British Sociological Association, between the more abstract and theoretical concerns of sociology and the more practical and policy-oriented interests of teachers of social policy and administration has held back the development of a sociology applied to issues of public policy. The suffusion of social administration with value concerns set in a broadly historical and evolutionary framework has hindered the emergence of an effective applied social science in which sociology would play a major part.

It will be objected, in response to this, that sociology is by no means purely abstract and theoretical. Indeed not, and many of its practitioners in fields like industrial relations, criminology or medical sociology have, like Molière's M. Jourdain, been speaking prose – doing applied sociology – without being explicit about it. Some of the most substantial bodies of cumulative research are to be found in applied areas like the sociology of medicine and criminology, embedded in theoretically-informed work. But this is lost sight of in the conventional three-way division between general (theoretical) sociology, social policy (which *is* concerned with applications) and special sociologies of medicine, industry, development, crime, etc, etc, into which sociology is increasingly decomposing. There is not much space for something calling itself applied sociology, and there are few general attempts to articulate what its concerns are in this country. The fact that applied and theoretical work are not incompatible is lost sight of in stereotypifications of the 'empiricism' which supposedly characterises more 'useful' research.

The situation is different elsewhere. Reading recently a history of sociology in the United States, by Howard Odum, published in 1951, I was surprised to come across a chapter headed 'Applied social science, interdisciplinary efforts, 'practical' sociology' (Odum 1951: 384–402), which described the variety of interdisciplinary social inquiry undertaken before 1950, and the contributions made to sociology from other social science disciplines. In Odum's view, sociology was challenged to accept a broader field of opportunity and move outside of the

academy in search of fruitful applications. He listed a number of authors who made major contributions to applied sociology, and what is interesting for our purposes today is that they included not only people like Jane Addams from the social administration and social work traditions, but also people from social survey research, labour economics, social planning, education, and political economy, as well as two journalists, a novelist (Upton Sinclair) and several foundation officials. One could imagine a similar list being produced in Britain around 1950 or a bit later, including names like Richard Titmuss, Mark Abrams, Hubert Llewellyn-Smith, Patrick Geddes, Michael Young, James Meade, Mark Benney, George Orwell, J.B. Priestley and John Boyd-Orr. But merely to enunciate those names is to stress how narrowly we draw the boundaries of sociology, for most if not all of those people, if indeed British sociologists know who some of them are, would be regarded as falling outside of sociology. There is no doubt that sociology in the United States has been a more inclusive discipline, and this has facilitated the development of a strong applied orientation.

If you want a reminder of how relatively narrow British sociology has become, consider a book published recently, edited by Heather Joshi, entitled *The Changing Population of Britain* (Joshi 1989). It is an excellent up-to-date survey of the state of knowledge on Britain's population, with a slant toward policy. It justifiably received some media coverage when published. Of the ten contributors, seven are demographers, one an economist, one a geographer and one a teacher of social policy. There is no sociologist, and more significantly none of the demographers have been associated with a sociology department, whereas they *have* been associated with departments of economics, social statistics or mathematics. In the United States, demographers are common in sociology departments, as are social psychologists, social statisticians, social historians, and scholars with interests in social policy. The discipline is differently constituted, and this has a bearing upon its potential for application.

## THE ORIENTATION OF SOCIOLOGY

How can one define applied sociology? One way to do so would be in terms of the available texts. Of these, the most interesting

are those edited by Paul Lazarsfeld, William Sewell and Harold Wilensky (1967), by Lazarsfeld and J.G. Reitz (1975), by M.E. Olsen and M. Micklin (1981), and by Howard Freeman, Russell Dynes, Peter Rossi and William Foote Whyte (1983). Yet none of them is satisfactory as an overview of the scope or key issues in applied sociology. The Freeman et al. collection is particularly deficient in this respect, ignoring the social context of sociology almost entirely (cf. Bulmer 1978, 1985b).

One way of approaching the subject is to ask: what are sociologists trying to do when applying their knowledge? All sociological knowledge is applied in the sense that there is an aspiration on the part of the author that the reader will change his or her view of the subject after reading what the sociologist has to say. This is true of more abstract as well as more specific types of sociological writing. In that sense, it is artificial to separate out applied sociology.

The connotations of 'application', however, usually refer to research conducted to illuminate public policy, to be useful to someone outside the academic milieu, to be capable of implementation in a practical setting. And here again, sociology in Britain has showed itself to be equivocal in its response to the demands of the wider society. A discipline which potentially has so much to offer has to an extent held back out of diffidence or fear of being tainted by such contact. A retreat into the comfortable certainties of internal disciplinary debate has often been preferable to engagement with practical policy issues which defy easy solution.

This distancing has been easier, given the bifurcation between sociology and social policy in this country, though in some fields, such as criminology and the study of ethnic relations, pure and applied work rub shoulders with each other. If applied work can be defined as the preserve of others, it is so much easier to pursue one's own narrow academic track untroubled by the intrusion of the outside world. Moreover, the concerns of social policy are fairly specific, whereas the interests of sociology are more general.

There is in the United States a much longer tradition of sociological research with an applied orientation, which is not just a matter of the longer history of the discipline there. In race relations, one can point to the early study by W.E.B. Du Bois on *The Philadelphia Negro*, the report of the Chicago Commission on



Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago*, and Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*, all produced at a period when sociology had little ostensible impact upon public policy on race matters. In criminology, one can point to the Chicago studies of deviant groups, the sociology of juvenile crime and the workings of the parole system, carried out by E.W. Burgess, Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay, John Landesco, Frederic Thrasher and others. Landesco's data-base on Chicago mobsters was so good that the local police came to consult it. The parole prediction work – studies of the probability of a particular offender re-offending based on social background data – was so influential that in the mid-1930s the state of Illinois created the posts of sociologist-actuary at its state prisons, in which sociologists were employed gathering data from inmates which were then used in parole decisions, while Landesco was appointed to the Parole Board. The United States Parole Board still uses parole prediction methods based on those first developed by Ernest Burgess in 1928 (Farrington and Tarling 1985: 9–11 et seq.).

American sociologists have not felt uncomfortable addressing major issues of public policy and analysing the issues in a dispassionate but relevant manner. That it has been less common in Britain may be due to various factors. Undoubtedly the legacy of pragmatism was a strong one in the United States, whereas the comparably influential doctrines in Britain, such as liberal political theory or Fabian socialism, pointed in a different direction. Government was less permeable (cf. Abrams 1968) – there were no figures in American social science comparable to the Webbs – but there was more scope, partly due to the support of philanthropic foundations, for applied work to develop and flourish. The absence of a separate field of social policy undoubtedly encouraged sociologists to work in applied areas. And greater receptivity to social science among policy-makers and other influential elites created a more benign climate within which the social sciences could develop. To change the situation in Britain calls for greater self-confidence on the part of sociologists, a stronger belief in their own professional expertise, and willingness to attack topical subjects with the tools of their trade.

Today, American sociology, to a much greater extent than its British counterpart, sees itself as a profession the members of which claim expertise in relation to certain knowledge about American society. Irving Horowitz once made a distinction

between sociologists who see their avocation as a profession, and those who see it as an occupation. British sociology is much closer to the latter view, American to the former, and it has consequences for the effectiveness with which sociology can present itself in the domain of public affairs. Take the issue of social polarisation, now a theme of major research interest in the United States. William J. Wilson, for example, is currently engaged on a multi-million dollar team study of this issue in Chicago, and the debate about the 'underclass' wages fiercely in the public media (Wilson 1987). Though there has been some research around these issues in Britain, and a television discussion between Sir Ralf Dahrendorf, Ray Pahl and Stuart Hall, it is surprising how little major research has been done on the subject, and it was left to the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on the Inner City (1985) and the Audit Commission (1987) to make the running in the absence of high-profile sociological research on the subject. Some would explain this in terms of lack of funding, but this is an excuse rather than a satisfactory explanation. There are other subjects on which British sociology has been curiously muted. Studies like Ronald Dore's setting the experience of British industry in an international frame (1973) have been unusual. Economic innovation and the city do not feature as major topics of sociological investigation. It would, however, be a mistake to think that it is simply a matter of the orientation that sociologists adopt; it is also a matter of the receptivity of the audience and the nature of the product offered. It is this which introduces my third and fourth questions.

## CLAIMS TO EXPERTISE

How well recognised are the claims to expertise which sociologists make? There would appear to be marked differences in the United States and Britain, epitomised in the comment of the British spouse of a leading American sociologist, herself a doctor, who reports that when she tells other people in this country whom she meets for the first time that her husband is a sociologist they express shock and disapproval, whereas in the United States the same information produces reactions indicating esteem and approbation (Sharpe 1978; Bulmer 1987). There

is no doubt that the public image of sociology in this country is not very favourable. The question is why.

It has less to do with the sixties student revolt and the oppositional stance which some detect in the subject, I would argue, than quite deep-seated cultural traits which bolster resistance to sociological insights and ways of thinking. Consider the British legal system. Not only is there resistance to research on the legal system, evidenced by cases like the controversy over the Birmingham research into plea bargaining, but the law in Britain is not receptive to sociological insights or evidence. Contrast the tradition of sociological jurisprudence in the United States, traceable back to Roscoe Pound, Louis Brandeis and Felix Frankfurter, and the use of sociological evidence directly in legal briefs and judgments at least as early as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954.

Another contrast is observable in terms of social heterogeneity. In the United States geographical and ethnic variability is so much a fact of life that it forms the basis of social studies taught in the later years of primary school. American school children who in Britain would be studying history and geography are taught a very simple kind of proto-social science. Some of this difference is due to the explicit role American schools played in instilling citizenship and assisting the absorption of European immigrants, which involved social scientists as early as the 1920s advising on school curricula.

In Britain, the presence of ethnic minorities on a large scale is more recent and the resultant diversity has been met with much more ambivalence in the core value system of the society. Sociology itself is also comparatively young (cf. Abrams et al. 1981). In British schools, social class differences are faced up to, if at all, only indirectly, and there is a good deal of explicit hostility to attempts to analyse social variability in terms of the stratification system. Some of the British discomfort with sociology stems from resistance to examining one's own society, perhaps because so much about what was historically such a hierarchically ordered society was traditionally taken for granted in certain strata of the society. British sociology's preoccupations with stratification research in some measure sought to restore this balance. In the last ten years, resistance to sociology for the under-16s has also been reinforced by the national curriculum. Nevertheless, the situation is changing.

Sociology remains an extremely popular A-level subject, and 'proto social science' is taught increasingly in subjects like geography to the post-16 age-group. At degree level sociology remains expansive, and is influential within new or expanding fields like social geography, cultural studies and women's studies. British ambivalence is gradually becoming eroded.

A third contrast lies in the interface between social science and public policy. In Britain that interface has been permeable, ever since the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science. The Webbs and Seebohm Rowntree combined social science with political involvements, and that remains a not uncommon pattern. Raymond Aron remarked in the 1950s that 'the trouble is that British sociology is essentially an attempt to make intellectual sense of the political problems of the Labour Party' (quoted in Halsey 1982: 151). Centralised British political life, focused on London, provides seductively attractive opportunities for involvement in policy through political and quasi-political activities (Donnison 1972). What Arthur Stinchcombe once called Marxified Fabianism is characteristic of one tradition within British sociology. It is a tradition of application, exemplified *par excellence* in Titmussian social administration, which can in some circumstances be influential (Banting 1979), but it is also limiting because it associates the social sciences so closely with particular political positions.

The truth seems to be that many British sociologists do not feel comfortable making strong claims to professional expertise. Yet such a position is a *sine qua non* for developing an effective applied sociology, if the American experience is anything to go by. This is less a matter, as some people seem to imagine, of following the psychologists into the mysteries of 'certification', though there is in the United States a peculiar animal called the 'clinical sociologist'. What it involves is having the confidence and the credentials to claim that on the basis of research-based analytical knowledge, one has something of substance to contribute to current policy debates. Whether it is William Wilson on the black underclass in the inner city, James Coleman on the standing of public and private schools, Rosabeth Moss Canter on women in large corporations or Robert Bellah on the American character, such major contributions are much more evident in the United States than they are in this country.

It is also evident if one compares sociology in Britain with certain European countries. For brevity a few remarks about the Netherlands will have to suffice. Dutch sociology contrasts with its British counterpart because a high proportion of its graduates traditionally go to work in applied settings, not just as social workers or administrators, but with titles designated with the title 'sociologist'. Thus in regional planning and the development of the Polders since World War II, sociologists have played a considerable role as partners in a major piece of social engineering. This has not been the case in Britain. Perhaps it is the curious legacy of Geddes and Branford, perhaps the relatively stronger influence of geography, but in Britain sociologists have not been employed as such in practical settings in planning to any significant extent.

Another fruitful field of application of sociology in the Netherlands is within industrial organisations, where sociologists are routinely employed. In Britain there have been only a few developments, such as the model of industrial research developed by the Tavistock Institute (Brown 1967), and such employment is still the exception rather than the rule. One of the most interesting accounts by an industrial sociologist writing about such an experience, Lisl Klein's account of her time at Esso (Klein 1976), shows how difficult it has been in this country to establish and legitimise such a role. It will be objected that such employment may make sociologists, in the words of an American monograph on industrial sociology, 'servants of power', but this is to prejudge the role that sociology can play in enlightenment both within and outside the core institutions of a society.

## SOCIOLOGY'S PERSUASIVENESS

The persuasiveness of sociology is in part the outcome of the product which it offers, as well as the receptivity of the society to what sociologists have to say. Applied sociology in the United States is more persuasive because its results are couched in a scientific frame with strong reliance on quantitative data. This is not a welcome message in British social science, but it has to be faced. British applied sociology needs beefing up in terms of

methodology, and the sooner this difficulty is addressed the better. If an education in sociology is not producing researchers competent to do the full range of applied research, then we are not likely to make the most effective contribution to application in the sphere of practice.

There is enough evidence to suggest that at the present time existing academic training does not equip sociology graduates to perform effectively in the labour market for applied research, and that they are required to learn many skills on the job rather than drawing on their prior academic training. The most recent evidence for the marked weakness in quantitative methods in British social science was contained in the ESRC report *Horizons and Opportunities in the Social Sciences*, published in the summer of 1987, a general examination of the international standing and future prospects for the social sciences in Britain. This reported that 'there is a real worry that in some subjects (sociology and political science for example) researchers are not as numerate as their colleagues overseas and the gap is widening... at worst some social scientists appear to show not only indifference but disdain for statistical training. It would be very dangerous for the future health of social science to allow this situation to continue' (ESRC 1987: 7).

This disdain is of long standing, marking out British sociology, for instance, from its American counterpart (cf. *Husbands* 1981). Lacunae in the training of social scientists at graduate level were identified in a review of graduate methodology teaching in sociology carried out a decade ago (Bulmer and Burgess 1981). Dr Ronald Clarke of the Home Office Research Unit pointed out the problems that were encountered in trying to introduce recent social science graduates to the realities of client-oriented research (Clarke 1981). At the undergraduate level, a similarly worrying picture in public sector institutions of higher education is presented in a recent report, which concludes that 'almost no degree offers advanced options in data handling and analysis, and the level to be achieved is relatively low... (T)here seemed little sign of increase in the time given to develop numeracy' (Payne, Lyon and Anderson, 1989: 266; see also Gubbay, Chapter 10 below).

Observations made more recently by the author when participating in recruitment interviews for OPCS social survey officers and for research officer posts in other government

departments suggest that a number of candidates are inadequately prepared for work with a major quantitative component. Further evidence for concern is contained in the important report by the Social Research Association (SRA) in 1985, *The State of Training for Social Research*, produced by a group chaired by Malcolm Cross. The SRA report concluded that it

is clear from the inquiries we carried out and from the views of academic commentators quoted elsewhere in this report that the training for social research provided by universities and polytechnics in this country has in general been inadequate in recent years. Although most concerned believe that learning on the job is an essential component of training, the failure of higher education to provide the foundations for later developments has had many unfortunate consequences. It reduces the employment and career prospects of those who aim to be social researchers... it places an undue burden on employers who may have to devote resources to teaching the fundamentals of social research to recruits from the social sciences; and – perhaps most important of all – it diminishes the capacity of the social research to solve the problems to which it is applied.

... [Indeed], some employers have become increasingly reluctant to recruit social scientists as social researchers, and are turning instead to mathematicians, statisticians and those “with a good general background”. In this country, one reason for this paradox has been that many engaged in social research, because of deficiencies in their training, have been ill-equipped to wield, or even to know of, the tools available for their task (Social Research Association 1985: 72, 80).

Such evidence is however largely impressionistic, and much more systematic inquiry is needed into the effectiveness of Masters courses and the PhD as a means of imparting quantitative competence to young British sociologists. There are a number of courses, particularly Masters courses in Social Research at Surrey, Cardiff, Manchester and elsewhere, of which these comments would not be true. But the overall picture is fairly bleak. These comments have not dwelt on the situation in other countries, but the contrast with the United States could hardly be stronger. There quantitative competence is a *sine qua non* of being trained as a graduate sociologist at a

leading department, whatever one's dissertation topic, and the necessary grounding is given which can then be used in applied research if that is where the new PhD ends up.

Another aspect of the applied research scene in the United States is the much greater variety of types of applied research in use, particularly in terms of evaluation and of quasi-experimental research designs. In that respect, American sociology is much more similar to British psychology than it is to British sociology. Some would be glad to avoid such identification, but before rushing to judgement, consider that the impact made by the 'left realist' criminologists at Middlesex Polytechnic conducting inner city crime surveys. Whatever the ironies of their late conversion to survey research, there can be no doubt that this particular applied sociology has made a large impact because it is conducted in a more rigorous form than much current sociological research, which a non-sociological audience can grasp and interpret.

The second point to be made on the methodological front is encapsulated in the phrase 'rush to judgement'. Too high a profile is given to doctrinal methodological positions in British sociology, to the detriment of applied research. The disinterest in, and disdain for, quantitative research is often based on *a priori* judgements which have no basis in research experience. Alternatively, they sometimes have more of the character of aesthetic judgements than reasoned statements of the most appropriate research strategy for tackling a particular problem. How rare it is that there is a sustained comparison, for instance, of the relationship between quantitative and qualitative methods. This is quite different from the typical pattern in the United States, where to be sure strong differences of methodological emphasis exist, but they are not so strongly entrenched in the training system that issues are closed when they should remain open. Additionally, it is my view that the standard of criticism of the quality of the work of others, as evidenced in the journal review process, for example, is considerably higher in the United States than it is in this country. One reason for this is much more thorough collegial criticism of the rigour and persuasiveness of the methods which are used to present evidence. All these comments relate to matters internal to the discipline, but they have a direct bearing on the effectiveness and persuasiveness of sociology in reaching an audience interested in applications of sociology.



## SOCIOLOGY'S AUDIENCE

For applied sociology to be effective, it must reach an audience outside of sociology. In the United States, sociologists are notably successful in doing this, not perhaps on the scale of economists, but to a far greater extent than in this country. In part this may be because Americans are more interested than British people in understanding their own society, and American sociologists may be more interested in providing answers to questions that are in the public mind than their British counterparts. In part, it reflects more effective coverage, particularly in the weekly and daily press. Not only are major monographs likely to be reviewed seriously, but sociologists are the subject of news stories in the likes of the *New York Times*, *Time*, and *Newsweek* in a way that does not happen in this country.

The generation of an audience for sociology outside the academy is not a simple matter, but again it must be observed how in Britain sociology has not gone out of its way to reach this audience. Some of the early quasi-sociologists mentioned above – Michael Young, Peter Willmott, Richard Hoggart, Ferdinand Zweig, for instance, and others – wrote well and reached that wider audience, but perhaps precisely for that reason tended to be criticised by academic sociologists. Sociology itself often seems to display a preference for arcane and impenetrable styles, epitomised in the *Evening Standard* cartoon showing two people being introduced at a party. 'This is Mr Edgeworth, a sociologist, and this is Mr Roberts, his interpreter'. We do not devote enough attention to style, and we do not devote enough attention to teaching our graduate students to communicate clearly and write well.

One reason for this lack of attention to the wider audience may be a product of the fragmentation of sociology into special sociologies which was alluded to at the beginning. It may be that within those special sociologies there is more communication with particular professional groups – for example, with medical staff and administrators in health studies – but I am slightly doubtful that this is the case. In addressing potential audiences, British sociology remains more turned in on itself than its North American counterpart, and its credibility as offering an analysis of the state of contemporary society suffers. There is, for example, no journal in this country comparable to *Society/Transaction* in the United States, which presents serious

but non-specialist sociological material to a wider audience. While *New Society* existed, there was one outlet which carried some sociological writing, some of it quite heavily edited, but *New Society* was much closer to a literary weekly in style and had become increasingly selective in the sociology that it carried. There is a gap existing for more serious attempts at what the French call '*haute vulgarisation*'.

## CONCLUSION

A chapter about applied sociology abroad which spends a good deal of time discussing the obstacles to applied sociology in Britain may seem slightly paradoxical, but I think that it makes sense. We can see ourselves more clearly by comparison with what goes on elsewhere, and part of that clarity of view derives from self-study. To be sure, also, there are a lot of issues not covered in this paper, for example the problem of values, of client-oriented research, of research funding, and so on. One has to be selective, and in some respects the contrasts in these areas are less great than in the areas I have looked at. But again, the 'rush to judgment' needs to be guarded against. For example, the paradox of the US Navy funding basic research in social psychology on quite a large scale is one which critics of reliance on governmental sources might like to ponder.

One should not take for granted that the case for applied sociology is self-evident. There are plenty of sceptics on both sides of the Atlantic, as various as Robert Scott and Arnold Shore (1979), Sam Sieber (1981) and Anthony Giddens (1987: 22ff), who cast doubt on the feasibility, value or intellectual excitement of applied work. I have not addressed those arguments either, but taken it that these critics have not had the last word. In the end, there is no very sharp line between basic and applied work, particularly if one adopts some variant of the view that the task of sociology is social enlightenment rather than social engineering. The proof of the value of applied sociology lies in the substantive applied sociological work which is done and published and some of which comes to scholarly and public notice.

The argument here is that this substantive work will be enhanced if opportunities to carry out applied work are actively sought, if sociologists are not embarrassed to think of them-

selves as professionals with professional standards, if they are not hesitant about claiming expertise and an element of the authority associated with it, if they increase the rigour with which their work is done, and if they are not reluctant about trying to reach a non-sociological audience. The present state of applied sociology in Britain is uneven. There is happily now more self-confidence and even a belief that sociology has succeeded (cf. Bryant and Becker 1990). Some work exemplifies some of the above desiderata for applied work more than others; some aims – such as reaching a wide audience – are achieved more than others; some aims may to a degree be incompatible; some aims are more easily achieved in certain combinations. The best work, in fields as various as development studies, medical sociology and industrial sociology, clearly does possess the requisite qualities, but there is still much that does not match up to the requirements in one way or another, and a minority of work which departs from them quite flagrantly.

Yet the most important step to be taken is simply that of seeing that more applied sociological research is done in Britain. This is the most effective remedy for the situation diagnosed in this chapter. The opportunities are much greater than is often supposed. The range of empirical social research now carried out by non-sociologists is evidence enough of that. The chapters which follow demonstrate the potential of applied sociology. As more applied sociology is done, this will mean some changes in undergraduate education and graduate training, in sociologists' conception of themselves as professionals, in how they engage with core institutions of society such as government, in the opportunities they seek and create to place their students in employment with a sociological component in applied settings, and in how they write and how they reach non-specialist audiences. Sociology cannot afford to become too turned-in upon itself. Ways are open to break out of sociology's self-enclosed isolation, and the opportunities for British sociologists are there to be taken.

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### 3 Objective Sociological Knowledge *or* The Return of the Minotaur\*

Paul Edwards

This chapter originated when accusations of left-wing bias in sociology were almost daily occurrences. As one of sociology's perennial tormentors, Digby Anderson (1983: 5) notes, such accusations are met with the claim that the accusation is polemical whereas sociology is scientific. But 'is it not curious,' he asks, 'how sociologists so opposed to scientism in their own methods should seek comfort in dualistic definitions which imply that logical, considered and scientific inquiry is exclusively textually distinct from polemic?' In considering my own experience of being accused of bias I tried to sketch an answer: there are good grounds for claiming that sociology is objective, even scientific, and saying so is ultimately the only way of dealing with these accusations, for otherwise there is no rational basis for a claim that one perspective is any better than another (Edwards, 1983). I do not want to consider further the specifics of charges of bias, but to develop the sketch of broader issues of objectivity. This helps in looking forward: if sociology is to be seen as 'in action' it needs the confidence to assert that it is objective and not just a jumble of competing and incommensurable perspectives.

To say that we are scientific can readily invoke an image of 'hard science' which formulates sharp hypotheses and then sets about testing them. Yet this is an inaccurate view of the natural sciences, and much of sociology's anti-scientism has therefore been misplaced. The 'adequacy of positivist analyses of scientific laws as statements of universal regularities' must be denied,

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\* Gibson Burrell and Anthony Ferner have provided valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper, though the customary disclaimers apply with particular force. The Industrial Relations Research Unit receives funds from the Economic and Social Research Council, whose support is gratefully acknowledged.

argue Keat and Urry (1982: 232). Instead, we must see theories as explaining 'observable phenomena by describing the mechanisms and structures through which various, often unobservable, entities possess the "power" to generate these occurrences'. This realist philosophy of science is now widely known (see, for example, Thomas 1979; Sayer 1984). Realists, however, differ in important ways, for example on whether social science should set out to be value-free or whether the aim is, as Sayer would have it, to be emancipatory. The following draws on one reading of realism to argue that sociology has been unduly embarrassed about asserting its objectivity. This reading asserts a basic unity of the sciences and argues that social science theories can be said to offer true and objective knowledge.

I need to sketch what I mean by this, but the particular position sketched is secondary. What is actually done in social research often displays the production of objective knowledge, but epistemological debate has sometimes obscured this. I begin with this debate and some common statements of anti-scientism before outlining a view of objective knowledge and using examples of empirical research to illustrate, albeit very briefly, its applicability.

## THE GOULDNERIAN LEGACY

The argument that sociology should not claim objectivity frequently draws on Gouldner's celebrated 'Anti-Minotaur' of 1962. The Minotaur was, of course, Max Weber, with his anguished defence of value-freedom. Gouldner is sometimes seen as having established the myth of a value-free sociology. Yet he imposed an important limitation on himself: 'I do not here wish to enter into an examination of the *logical* arguments involved' (p. 4 of 1973a version, emphasis in original). The most that he can claim to have done is to have exposed the consequences of an unthinking espousal of value-freedom. In the context of American sociology of the 1950s this was a major contribution, but Gouldner cannot be used to argue against the logical impossibility of objectivity. Lessnoff (1974: 131-65) for example has provided a systematic defence of value-freedom.

Nor did Gouldner indicate what should replace the 'myth' of value-freedom, though when he returned to the issue six years

later he feared that the 'once glib acceptance' of value-freedom might be replaced by a 'no less glib rejection of it' (1973b: 27). He went on to consider the common escape of claiming that it is sufficient for the writer to state his or her own biases so that the reader may take them into account. A 'bland confession, of partisanship merely betrays smugness and naiveté. It is smug because it assumes that the values that we have are good enough; it is naive because it assumes that we know the values we have' (1973b: 54). What can the reader do with a confession, and how is it to be discounted when assessing research material?

Gouldner went on to offer three conceptions of objectivity. The first is 'transpersonal replicability', meaning that two people using the same procedures should reach more or less the same conclusions. Second is personal authenticity: a willingness to respect information discrepant with one's own views and to strive for personal integrity in analysing data. Yet these merely set some minimal standards for the conduct of an inquiry. Gouldner (1973b: 57) calls his third conception 'normative objectification' which involves the sociologist making a judgement in 'conformity with some stated normative standard'. But this merely takes the problem one stage further back, to deciding what these standards should be. It does not, moreover, deal with a problem identified by Gouldner's target here, Becker: bias may be involved in the decision as to what to study in the first place. We may, for example, 'fail to investigate police corruption because we think it unlikely that it exists' (Becker 1973: 198-9).

The criteria of objectivity, such as not suppressing information, implied in Gouldner's first two categories will not be considered further. The issue of how a choice of topics is objective will be taken up below, after some wider arguments against objectivity have been considered.

## THE RETREAT FROM VALUE-FREEDOM

The need to be committed is widely proclaimed. Taylor et al. (1975: 44) 'argue for a criminology which is normatively committed to the abolition of wealth and power'. 'We have,' say the authors of a Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies book (1981: 13), 'consciously taken sides and have not held back



from arguing political preferences'. McCann (1988) has restated the call for a 'movement away from the repressive extremes of critical distance and dispassionateness'. Such a call is based on the view that it is impossible to adjudicate between competing theories. According to Marshall (1981: 39), 'sociological explanations of deviance are no more and no less "true" than those offered by the authorities or the defendant himself'. For Cain and Finch (1981: 106, 112) 'the scholar cannot deal in or produce certainties'. A criterion of truth should be replaced by one of correctness, which, 'unlike truth, is not absolute; on the contrary, correctness is always from a *standpoint*. Moreover, whereas truth implies the ultimate stillness of the absolute, we intend correctness to imply action'. Sociologists have not only denied that one can adjudicate between different epistemological positions, say two experienced observers, but have also been happy to 'shrug their shoulders as the ensuing impasse' (Bell and Newby 1977: 27).

Two leading texts develop this theme. Lee and Newby (1983: 18–19) reject the unity of method between the natural and the social sciences: the idea of a causal law is problematic in sociology because the subjects of 'laws' are actors with consciousness and free will, not inanimate objects; and evidence generally consists not of hard facts but of interpretations by participants. For Giddens (1976: 146), 'sociology, unlike natural science, stands in a subject–subject relation to its "field of study", not a subject–object relation; it deals with a pre-interpreted world, in which the meanings developed by active subjects actually enter into the actual constitution or production of that world; the construction of social theory thus involves a double hermeneutic'.

## FALSIFIABILITY AND RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

Giddens reaches this position by considering the well-known debate about the natural sciences between Kuhn and Popper. His argument about this debate does not in fact hold. A demonstration of this will show that the natural sciences are not tied to a rigid conception of causal laws and hence that some anti-scientist arguments in sociology fall. It is then possible to consider how an appropriate model of truth can be extended to social science.

Giddens makes three main points. First, Popper adopts falsifiability as the key means of demarcating science from non-science. Yet Kuhn has shown that scientists often ignore experimental results that are inconvenient and that 'normal science' works by the suspension of critical reason. This is a misunderstanding. As Lakatos (1970) shows, Kuhn addresses the psychology or sociology of science and not its logic: the practice of the individual scientist is not to be equated with the development of science as a whole, for science is above all a public activity in which one person subjects others' ideas to critical scrutiny.

Second, the attempts by Lakatos (1970) to extend falsificationism have a severe problem: he speaks of degenerative and progressive problem-shifts, but by what criteria, asks Giddens, are we to judge what is progressive? Lakatos has in fact offered a detailed answer, which can be taken either as an extension of Popper's view or (in so far as Lakatos's (1978: 159) plea to Popper for a 'whiff of inductivism' has been turned down) as a post-Popperian position. In particular, Lakatos rejects the very strict falsificationism for which Popper has attracted justified criticism (e.g. Sayer 1984: 205–10). For Popper, any conjecture which is not capable of being falsified is not part of science. And much of social science would not meet this test. If I want to argue that capitalism is exploitive, in what sense is this open to being falsified? Yet such an argument might well be claimed to generate insights which would otherwise be lacking. The notion of research programmes helps to consider how an 'insight', 'approach' or 'perspective' might be evaluated.

For Lakatos, deciding on the falsity of a programme depends not on one or two tests of hypotheses but on whether they are degenerating or progressive. In many ways, social scientists' views of the natural science seem to be those of the 'dogmatic falsificationists' for whom 'science grows by repeated overthrow of theories with the help of hard facts' (Lakatos 1970: 97): Newton's theories were unable to explain phenomena explicable by Einstein, for example. But throughout the eighteenth century numerous 'facts' apparently contradicted Newton, and a dogmatic falsificationist would have been forced to reject him. What in fact happened was that new auxiliary hypotheses were added to the core of Newtonian ideas, and the facts were further interrogated and found not to disconfirm them at all.

Lakatos (1979: 168–92) shows how progressive and degenerative programmes can be distinguished through an extended comparison of Copernican and Ptolemaic astronomy. ‘One research programme supersedes another if it has excess truth content over its rival, in the sense that it predicts progressively all that its rival truly predicts and some more besides’ (p. 179). But, he adds, prediction need not involve hitherto unknown facts. The perihelion of Mercury, for example, had long been known as a low-level fact but it was not until Einstein proposed his theories that its significance as a dramatic confirmation of them was realised. ‘Copernicus *explains* what for Ptolemy is a fortuitous result, in the same way that Einstein explains the equality of inertial and gravitational masses, which was an accident in Newtonian theory’ (ibid., p. 186). This is a realist analysis, for it stresses above all that good explanation turns on finding the mechanisms by which possible unobservable causes produce phenomena that we wish to comprehend.

Progressiveness here should not be equated with explaining more than a rival theory. It can also be considered in terms of how far a theory offers convincing explanations and how far a programme provides refined statements of its theoretical objects. In social science, Thomas (1979: 24–6) offers the example of Bowlby’s theory that maternal deprivation leads to adverse effects on children’s development. This has been made more precise as different types of deprivation and sorts of reaction have been identified and as connecting mechanisms have been analysed. Hammersley (1985) has used ethnographic studies of schools to argue that they contain a research programme with important theoretical content.

Another example might be the study of ‘output restriction’. As Lupton (1963) notes in his classic study, to use the common-sense concept of restriction is not analytically useful because it implies an objective standard of fair effort against which restriction can be measured and because it neglects the positive contribution to output that the workplace practices placed under the restrictive rubric in fact make. He found it more useful to use workers’ own term, the fiddle, to characterise ways in which workplace effort standards were negotiated. Thus he developed the definition of the phenomenon in progressive ways. Subsequent research has explored the different types of fiddle practised by different groups of worker, thereby refining

knowledge of the behaviour ((for summaries see Mars 1982; Edwards 1986).

Lupton also offered some apparently testable propositions to explain why 'fiddles' were present in one of the factories which he studied but not the other. For example the firm in the first case was in an oligopolistic market and could afford to tolerate fiddles. But this is not a universal rule or law. Grainger (1988) has shown that in one firm where product market conditions, and indeed other factors, were conducive to fiddles they did not in fact emerge. This does not falsify some law but points to the need to identify the relevant causal mechanisms. In Grainger's case a combination of managerial policy and the pattern of workers' shopfloor organisation prevented effort bargaining from emerging. On the basis of a series of ethnographic studies, we thus have a better theoretical understanding of what 'restriction' is, how it operates, and the conditions promoting it. Whether this example would qualify as a research programme is open to question, but it can be seen as a progressive development.

But is there any evidence that users of one approach are open to 'progressive problem shifts', or do writers who might be opposed to the whole idea of studying something like fiddles remain locked in their own 'paradigms'? Industrial relations offers one clear example of progression. In writing the preface to *The System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain*, Flanders and Clegg (1954: v) doubted the relevance of anthropological studies of the work group: human relations in industry and industrial relations appeared to be separate 'paradigms'. Yet when Clegg (1970) produce a new edition the work group appeared prominently in the first chapter. And seven years later, responding to growing Marxist criticisms of his pluralist perspective, Clegg (1979) suggested that in many ways Marxism and pluralism were indistinguishable. The claim itself is not satisfactory, but it reflects the ability of a leading pluralist to see the relevance of issues highlighted by other perspectives; pluralism has embraced a wider picture of the nature of the employment relationship than that with which it started.

What constitutes an adequate explanation will plainly be the subject of intense debate. Yet, as the above examples illustrate, much of what social scientists actually do suggests that the truth content of their work increases: we know more about 'output restriction' than we did when Lupton published his study.

## TRUTH AND OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE

Is this true knowledge? Here we return to Giddens's third point about natural science. Popper and Lakatos adhere to a correspondence theory of truth, which is based on having a metalanguage in which it is possible to say "S" is true if and only if *s*', where S is a statement in a theoretical language and *s* is a fact about the world. The difficulty is that the metalanguage must be assumed to be a neutral observation language whereas Popper has always stressed that we know facts only through theories: how then can we ever have a neutral language? Popper himself (1972: 314–18) offers no direct answer to this question. But it is arguably academic in the worst sense. The point of a correspondence theory is to find a way of assessing the truth of a statement, that is by correspondence with a fact. Popper denies that facts exist outside theories: we know something as a fact because of an observation which is theory-impregnated. But facts are crucial as tests of theories. It is of course open to Giddens to argue that, since any fact used to test a theory rests on some other theory, we can never be confident about the decisiveness of a fact. But this is merely a form of relativism: we can never know anything about the world because we depend on our senses to know it. This may or may not be a logically defensible position. Natural science may depend ultimately on an assumption that we can know the world, but its achievements suggest that this is a very robust assumption.

A truth criterion does not, moreover, suffer from the problems which Cain and Finch attribute to it, namely an assumption of absoluteness and stillness. Popper has always stressed that our knowledge can never be absolute: we know the world only through our imperfect theories, and as better theories replace worse ones so we can approach the truth without ever possessing it. As for stillness, if the facts are not static then explanations will need to take account of this. For example mass unemployment in Britain during the 1980s raised new issues about the impact of novel circumstances on such things as the radicalism of the working class. Several studies (Westergaard et al. 1988; Marshall et al. 1988a; Gallie 1988) have argued that unemployment did not lead to radicalisation. This is not to imply an unchanging view of the connections between unemployment and

political attitudes but to explain how, in the specific circumstances in question, radicalism was rendered unlikely.

But can a truth criterion deal with the social world, to which the sociologist supposedly stands in a subject–subject relation? Here we need to introduce Popper's epistemology of the 'three worlds', from which the truth criterion is inseparable. With the exception of Williams's (1975) unconvincing critique, this epistemology has received very little attention among sociologists: Giddens does not mention it, and the leading 'realist' texts neglect it even though it represents an important extension of their arguments. World 1 is the physical world; World 2 is that of conscious experience, which may loosely be termed subjective knowledge, though Popper (1972: 73) argues that there is strictly speaking no such thing; and World 3 consists of the logical content of books, libraries and so forth, and most importantly of critical arguments. This is an 'epistemology without a knowing subject': knowledge in the sense of problems, theories and arguments exists independently of people's beliefs and dispositions.

The social scientist is not bound directly in a subject–subject relation with the social world because World 3 knowledge mediates this relation. We know in a World 3 sense that the social world is pre-interpreted, and we can use this knowledge to assess World 2 and to accumulate more accurate World 3 knowledge of the operation of social processes. Sociological explanations are World 3 phenomena because they are public and exist independently of the World 2 subjectivity of the individual sociologist.

We can thus dispose of arguments like Marshall's, that our accounts of deviance are no more true than those of the deviants themselves. Consider the archetypal 'deviant', the football hooligan. Alleged hooligans may well offer coherent accounts of their motives, and such accounts are plainly crucial to any sociological analysis. But such analysis can also offer theories of deviance amplification to suggest how hooliganism becomes identified, how 'the hooligan' grows into a stereotype and how moral panics develop. The Leicester studies (Dunning et al. 1986) show that hooliganism is not a modern problem and that its roots can be found in the ghettoisation of working-class communities which was a by-product of post-war urban restructuring. Even the most thoughtful participant will find it

difficult to place his or her own behaviour in historical and structural context. Sociological analysis stands outside a particular case to portray its characteristics and to relate these to structural conditions. Such World 3 analysis is of a different order from, and it has a greater truth content than, everyday explanations.

## CHOICE OF RESEARCH TOPICS

But, as Becker argued, could we still not be biased in our choice of topics to study? Philosophies of science do not help us very much here. Popper makes his celebrated distinction between the bucket theory of mind and the searchlight theory; the bucket theory holds that facts simply accumulate while the searchlight theory stresses that facts depend on the illumination of a theory. But whose hand is on the searchlight? The finder of bias may accept that research has been conducted according to proper standards but still argue that the choice of topics is biased, for example a preference for unionised establishments where conflict can be studied over the harmony of the small non-union enterprise.

Here the argument turns from epistemology to the practical world in which social research operates. To suggest that research agendas are set by sociologists alone is, however, inaccurate. A great deal of research in industrial relations, for example, has been shaped by the concerns of government and management. Some of this was direct, as in the investigations associated with the Commission on Industrial Relations of the early 1970s (see for example Purcell, 1981). A good deal more was indirect, as the 'problems' of strikes, restrictive practices, and shop steward power shaped the research agenda. Such influence has a long history: Baritz (1960) has charted the ways in which, over much of the twentieth century, industrial psychology has been turned to problems as defined by management.

As priorities among the politically powerful change, so do research agendas. In the 1980s there was interest in the potentials of small firms, in 'human resource management', and in privatisation. Research has duly followed some of these interests. This is not to suggest that there has been a simple following of explicit or implicit instructions from the powers that be.

Academic concerns have continued to play a role. For example, throughout the 1970s a succession of writers argued that the role of management should be given more attention, reflecting among other things the impact of Braverman on debates about managerial strategies of labour control and a desire to move away from simple typologies towards more nuanced and historically grounded analyses.

The nature of the academic inquiry, moreover, did not always meet with official approval. There are cases where research findings have been suppressed, for example in studies of the closed shop. In others, research was commissioned with the aim of proving a point, only for the evidence to point in a different direction, the clearest example being employment protection legislation, where governments have believed that this has deleterious effects on small firms, only for a succession of commissioned studies to suggest that the effect was slight (Clifton and Tatton-Brown 1979; Evans et al. 1985). That the research agenda was shaped at least as much by public policy concerns as by academic preference is, though, hardly in doubt.

It could still be argued that certain topics have been avoided because our assumptions close our eyes to their significance. An example might be rigged elections in trade unions or compulsory membership of a closed shop. But such an argument would be naive. As it happens, the impact of the closed shop has in fact been discussed carefully (Dunn and Gennard 1984: ch. 7). Other, equally sensational, employer practices may also be 'neglected' for sound reasons: they are not central to major lines of development, they are rather rare, and, very importantly, to dig into them might endanger research access. Moreover, when research is seen as a programme it is apparent that it has to pursue certain lines of inquiry if it is to be progressive. There may be good scientific reasons for ignoring a whole range of phenomena. It is also worth noting that a good deal of what passes for research in the fields of management and business studies is often highly prescriptive in tone (Sisson 1989). Anyone diagnosing bias in an area such as industrial relations would need to be aware of the vast amount of material covering such key matters as discipline, recruitment, and the operation of pay systems which are directly pro-management, to such an extent that the distinction between research and consultancy is sometimes perceived only dimly. The 'bias' of one discipline may be no more than the correction of 'biases' in other areas.



The key point, however, is that objectivity is not secured by balancing out different biases. If it were, we would have to admit every possible approach to a subject. In fact, the research which has been done on, say, shop stewards has provided objective knowledge which is not dependent on a particular perspective. Objective research is, in contrast to managerialist study, critical, not in the sense of opposing an institution such as the capitalist firm but of asking awkward questions, not being limited by the demands of its sponsors, and digging beneath the surface. Grunberg (1986) for example has shown how growing work-intensity in a British car plant was associated with a rise in the accident rate. In doing so, he is not adopting an 'anti-management' stance but is merely drawing attention to matters which managers may wish to keep hidden and is demonstrating that claims for vastly improved productivity require close critical scrutiny so that the costs as well as the benefits can be assessed. It is a common mistake for finders of bias to equate criticism with downright opposition. But those who argue that conflict is inevitable within capitalist work organisations do not thereby imply that capitalism is a Bad Thing. They are simply exploring the hidden nature of the system and holding up taken-for-granted assumptions to critical scrutiny. Their findings can be used in pro- as well as anti-capitalist directions. The thinking manager, for example, may find it more in her or his interests to be told that conflict is inevitable and that achieving workers' compliance is a task which can never be perfectly attained than to be fed rhetoric about the community of interest between workers and their employers. To say that conflict is inevitable is not to say that it is desirable or that one party to the conflict is always right. It is to identify the mechanisms governing empirical facts.

My main concern has been the implications of these points not for seekers after bias but for mainstream analysis. The way to respond to issues of bias is not to repeat worn arguments about differing perspectives. Three points have been sketched. Starting at the simplest level just addressed, the choice of topic stems not from sociologists' own preferences but from a wide array of influences including public debates, the difference between the sensational and the fundamental, and the difficult realities of actually doing research; and to be critical of something is not to be totally opposed to it. Second, we need to be willing to assert that research is disinterested, and that social

science knowledge is objective in the twin senses of existing outside the subjective interpretations of the sociologist and of having truth content. Third, truth content must be evaluated in terms of research programmes and not reduced to narrow hypotheses or interpreted as being specific to a closed paradigm. 'Differences in meaning need not render inter-theory or inter-paradigm communication and criticism impossible' (Sayer 1984: 78).

## VALUE-FREEDOM AND COMMITMENT

Where I differ from Sayer (1984: 43) is his view that social science 'should develop a critical self-awareness in people as subjects and indeed assist in their emancipation'. Research which is 'committed' can certainly produce valid work. Sayer mentions workers' inquiries into the car industry, and there are many well-known instances such as research for the Lucas Plan (Wainwright and Elliott 1982). For that matter, managerialist prescriptive accounts often contain valuable information. I have also argued that disinterested research has to have a critical edge. But to equate this with emancipation takes us back to Gouldner (whom Sayer does not discuss). How do we know what is emancipatory, and are there not massive and familiar problems with claiming that we are emancipating other people, for how do we know that they agree with what we define to be emancipatory?

Much depends on how the term emancipation is used. Even Popper would presumably claim to be emancipatory in so far as he believes that knowledge is cumulative and that better knowledge assists in better ways of dealing with the world. This is consistent with a traditional Weberian position, with the qualification that the claim for objectivity and value-freedom is made for the discipline as a whole: World 3 sociological knowledge is not committed to any particular programme of emancipation but exists in its own right and can be used in various ways. Seeing the matter in this way resolves some of the standard problems about value-freedom. The individual researcher can adopt a committed position. As long as this does not lead to the suppression of results which conflict with that position, this creates no difficulty. To say that social science

must present itself as being objective is not to impose a requirement that every individual social scientist must be disinterested. It is to suggest that the contribution to knowledge of committed research can be distinguished from the reasons motivating the research in the first place.

This does not make science morally superior to other forms of discourse. As Sayer (1984: 17–20) says, it is wrong to see science as the highest form of knowledge, for it rests on principles of an ethical nature, for example that data should not be suppressed, which scientism tends to deny. Scientific knowledge can be put to many uses. But it is not for the scientist to decide what is an emancipatory use and what is not. To argue otherwise is, ironically, to smuggle in assumptions that Sayer would presumably find uncongenial: to claim that we can emancipate people through science is to imply that the scientist as expert knows best, thereby implying a technocratic vision (as well as making some impossibly large claims for ourselves). Alternatively, emancipation can be taken to mean merely that knowledge is better than ignorance, which is hardly controversial. The role of social research as science is illumination, not emancipation.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have tried to show that many fears about the word ‘objectivity’ are unfounded, that proclaiming the unity of science does not entail a naive falsificationalism, and that social scientific knowledge is not trapped in a double hermeneutic, for it can exist in the World 3 of objective knowledge. I have also considered the less remarked issue of the choice of research topics, suggesting through the example of industrial relations that objectivity can be defended, particularly when a line of research is seen as a Lakatosian research programme.

Many of these arguments should be seen not as a call to sociology to alter its practice but as underpinning what is already being done. Social research has produced in the last few years a good deal of objective knowledge in the traditional Weberian sense of being value-relevant without being value-dependent. Well-known examples come from the study of class and social mobility. One of the most striking of Golthorpe’s (1987: 327) conclusions from his study of mobility is that the

pattern of fluidity in post-war Britain – characterised as it has been by structural mobility arising from changes in the growth of jobs near the top of the occupational hierarchy but by unchanging relative mobility chances – has not revealed the success of liberal reform but has, rather, concealed its failure. Exactly what the solution might be, Goldthorpe is careful not to say, for that is a political question on which the sociologist-as-expert has no more right to pronounce than anyone else. Or consider Marshall and colleagues' (1988b) careful demonstration that, a decade of free-market ideology notwithstanding, people still have a powerful belief in equality and that, despite individualism, class remains a basic source of social identity.

These examples could readily be multiplied. In the field of industrial relations there has been intense debate about the effects of Thatcherism on trade unions and shopfloor relations. In its early days the debate turned on whether unions were being totally destroyed, but discussion has now moved on to take account of the fact that the institutions of industrial relations have remained remarkably unchanged even though the power relations that they mediate may have shifted (Terry 1989). This has been related to considerations of whether British managements have the capacity or the will to construct an entirely new shopfloor order (Marginson et al. 1988). The debate has been scientifically progressive. Social research is active in the sense of providing critical analysis which engages with key issues in society and which provides means of illuminating these issues. How this illumination is used is a political matter.

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# 4 Clinical Sociology: What It Might Be

David Blane

UK sociologists are often surprised to discover that clinical sociology is already practised in France and the United States. Although it differs somewhat in those two countries, a common core is discernable which involves applying sociological theory to the practical problems that individuals or groups bring to it. If a clinical sociology were to develop in the UK, it would not necessarily follow either of the existing models, but any consideration of such a discipline needs to start from this experience. The first part of the chapter, therefore, deals with clinical sociology as it is practised and organised in the USA and, much more briefly, in France and the French-speaking parts of Belgium and Canada. The section which describes the practice of clinical sociology is particularly concerned with its institutional setting, for example whether or not this is primarily medical, the nature of the relationship between clinical sociologist and client, and whether or not the client is an individual or a group. The second section, which deals with how clinical sociologists are organising themselves, is primarily focused on the process of professionalisation which has started in the United States.

The second part of the chapter uses this experience to speculate about where clinical sociology might emerge in the UK. Although the American moves towards professionalisation are judged to be considerably premature, the chapter is cautiously optimistic about the possibilities. The key to such a development is seen as involving interaction between academic sociologists and pioneers who are interested in exploring the ways in which sociological insights and expertise could be applied to practical treatment situations. In other words clinical sociology might emerge from a constructive dialogue between theory and research on the one hand, and ethical, disciplined involvement in the problems of those who need help, on the other. This second part of the chapter is strongly influenced by the author's background in medical sociology and general medical practice,

and some might feel that the results are too narrowly focused. This setting, however, did provide the motive for writing the paper by offering frequent contact with clinical psychologists whose example suggests that other social scientists might also have much to offer in this sphere. Obviously clinical sociology would have a long way to go before it could develop a range of diagnostic measures and specific therapies comparable to those used by our psychologist colleagues, but I suggest some of the preconditions for such innovation are already in place.

## CLINICAL SOCIOLOGY IN THE UNITED STATES AND FRANCE

What do clinical sociologists *do*? The American literature describes a wide range of work and the first point to grasp is that clinical sociology in the US is not confined to medical settings. Although many clinical sociologists offer appropriate therapies to individual clients (of which more later), others see clinical sociology as 'helping groups in their time of trouble' (Gouldner 1965) and do not want 'to see the field become narrowly identified with health care' (Glass and Fritz 1982). Miller, for example, sees sociology as emphasising:

the clinical skills of communication, research, administration/application and classification. Specifically, sociologists are trained to pay attention to the impact of ethnic, sex role, age and family differences. Our methods emphasise seeing, questioning, reporting and listening. Our practice includes empathy, interpersonal communication, interpretation and involvement (1985: 159).

For Miller there is no reason why these skills should be confined to a medical setting, and his paper describes sociologists acting as mediators who are increasingly popular in the United States as an alternative to civil law suits for resolving disputes. Mediation is an informal first step in civil law proceedings and, increasingly, in some types of criminal proceedings which has the advantages of no court costs, fewer rules and compromise as a possible solution. The sociological basis of such work as mediation is seen as our understanding of small group dynamics, especially as embodied in Simmel's works on the 'triad'



(1955), symbolic interactionism (Rubington and Weinberg 1978) and Mead's work on 'taking the role of the other' (1962). The mediator encourages both plaintiff and defendant to state their points of view and to suggest solutions. Successful mediation occurs when both parties agree to a solution, in which case it becomes the judgment of the court in small claims or a recommendation to the judge in juvenile and criminal courts. In the programme reported by Miller the success rate was 77 per cent.

The employment of sociologists as court mediators is an example of clinical sociology in a non-medical setting. During the 1970s this seems to have been the dominant model, with clinical sociologists administering to the 'health' of groups in the same way that medical clinicians minister to the health of individuals. The use of 'clinical' in this sense follows Gouldner's (1965) distinction between sociologists as 'engineers' and sociologists as 'clinicians'. Although the clients of both types of applied sociologists are social groups rather than individuals, 'engineers' study what they are told to study by their employer and rely on the hierarchy of which the employer is a part to implement their recommendations, while 'clinicians', in contrast, form an independent judgment about which of the group's problems are most pressing and rely on the group's active participation to implement their recommendations. More recently however, for reasons which are not entirely clear, the emphasis on the sociologist as clinician to groups has relatively declined compared with the growth of clinical sociology as a speciality dealing with the problems of individual clients, usually in a medical setting and context.

One example of this newer development is described in Ben Yehuda's (1984) paper on sociologically-informed group therapy for drug addicts. This practice is based on the sociology of deviance and symbolic interactionism, and as well as helping drug addicts it sees this background as relevant to 'homosexuality, prostitution, mental illness, juvenile delinquency and the like'. Unlike psychiatric and psychologically oriented group therapy which tend to concentrate on intra-psychic processes, the sociological type is primarily concerned with social position and deviant identity. It therefore accepts that the deviant behaviour may be both appropriate and functional in the deviant's normal social context; accepts as rational the deviant's 'paranoia' about agents of social control; and understands the effects

on self-identity of 'degradation ceremonies'. Its concern with social position leads it to encourage deviants to explore and develop their other roles (as worker, family member, neighbour, etc.) apart from their 'master status' of drug addict or whatever. The concern with deviant identity means that the therapy group becomes important as a locus of destigmatisation, as well as being a place for the re-acquisition of normal social skills and the development of an orientation towards the future. Rather than seeking to change the personality of the deviant, then, sociologically-informed group therapy attempts to help ease the deviant's passage from the deviant subculture back into fuller participation in straight society. A perhaps premature attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of this form of therapy showed that its results were no better than, but certainly not worse than, those of groups with a psychiatric or psychological orientation.

As well as helping to solve problems in a non-medical setting and offering quasi-treatment programmes at the group level, clinical sociology in the USA also includes individual level counselling. Straus (1982) uses the example of overeating leading to obesity, but sees the social behavioural approach to individual counselling as also being relevant to 'problems of conduct, substances abuse, sexuality, interpersonal relationships, job and life stress, and the enhancement of personal performance generally'. Straus based his approach on an eclectic mixture of Mead and symbolic interactionism, Berger and Luckmann's (1967) 'social construction of reality', Lofland's (1976) 'activism' and Thomas's (1931) 'definition of the situation'. This approach, therefore, emphasises the contextual nature of behaviour, the ways in which individuals interpret this context, and their potential to solve their problems through creative, self-reflexive and relatively autonomous behaviour. The counselling process involves an assessment phase, which ends when an explanatory model of 'the problem' has been agreed with the client, followed by an implementation phase during which the client increasingly takes control of their 'problem behaviour'. Using the example of overeating, Straus illustrates the assessment phase as involving a consideration of macrosocial factors (e.g. high value-added food industry), situational factors (e.g. eating to manage stress), lifestyle (e.g. eating rituals), socialisation (e.g. food as a 'treat' for being a 'good child') and beliefs about moral worth ('I lack willpower')

sanity ('I must be crazy to keep eating') and fate ('It's my glands'). Straus argues that the precise techniques which are used during the subsequent implementation phase are of less importance than the underlying dynamic of the process in which first the clinical sociologist explores the alternative definitions of the situation (e.g. food is not a temptation; it's simply there, like a bus ticket or a tree'), then teaches the client how to 'do something about the problem' (e.g. behavioural tactics for managing food intake, coping with stress without eating) and finally turning over control to the client, often after briefing the client's 'significant others' on their new self-definition and the changed practices which need to become routines. Although Straus is rather dismissive about the techniques which can be used during the implementation phase, he reports that a considerable variety are used by the clinical sociologists, either drawn from other practices or developed by themselves. 'These include subject-centred hypotherapy, interactionist family therapy, guided conversation, sociodrama and simulations, psychomotor therapy etc'.

The above brief description of American clinical sociology, as revealed by its literature, shows a wide variety of techniques, sociologists-client relationships, practice settings and client problems. Two common themes, however, seem to be identifiable. The first is a theoretical grounding in microsociology, particularly that of Mead, and a symbolic interactionism. The second is an aversion to seeing the client as a passive object of treatment, and an emphasis on clients' capacity to solve their own problems with the appropriate help. Despite these common themes, there is considerable disagreement about the direction in which clinical sociology should develop, and this debate will be examined next.

## PROFESSIONALISATION

Clinical sociology in the USA has already acquired many of the characteristics of a proto-profession. Firstly, it has researched its own history and identified its intellectual founders of whom Wirth and Taft are most frequently mentioned. Wirth (1931) argued for a practical sociology which would use its theoretical insights to help solve individual problems, and he sketched out

how the clinical sociologist's role would differ from those of the social worker and the psychiatrist. Starting during World War I, Taft (Deegan 1986) integrated the symbolic interactionism of Mead with the psychoanalytic theory of Rank and she used the resulting insights to help individuals in trouble. Secondly, clinical sociologists have started to identify what is distinctive about their work, and to lay public claim to it. The clearest statement of this is Glassner and Freedman's textbook 'Clinical Sociology' (1979). Finally, clinical sociologists have organised themselves as a 'learned society'; they have formed an association, the Clinical Sociology Association; they hold annual conferences; and they publish a journal, the *Clinical Sociology Review*.

These developments, however, leave clinical sociology far short of the 'classic' profession. For Freedman (1982) the main shortcoming is that 'anyone in the country can claim to be a clinical sociologist without any challenge to that designation', while Glassner (1981) argues that the standardisation of practice and the establishment of training centres are necessary preconditions to the system of accreditation and licensing desired by Freedman. It is at this point that the debate about the future development of clinical sociology becomes relevant. Many members of the Clinical Sociology Association wish to see themselves rapidly established as an independent group of clinicians called 'clinical sociologists' with the appropriate accompanying structure of specialist training, licensing and adequate fees. Other members, however, are opposed to this line of development and see clinical sociology as involving the incorporation of sociological theory, research, diagnosis and therapy within existing clinical disciplines such as psychiatry, social work, community services and psychiatric nursing. The former group tend to be post-doctoral sociologists who have been unable to obtain academic posts, who are hence working in the free market as consultants offering whichever of their skills is in demand, and who see the professionalisation of a clinical sociology as enhancing their market position. The latter group tend to hold academic positions, are looking for new and interesting areas of development for their discipline and see clinical sociology remaining in the medium term as an advisory discipline working within the existing clinical framework. Glassner, who co-authored the textbook *Clinical Sociology*,

belongs to the latter group. He asserts, 'at present clinical sociology is only a promise', and argues that the legitimate transition from expert adviser of other professions to therapist of clients would require 'scientific adequacy in development of specifically sociological diagnostic and therapeutic tools, rigorous theoretical and clinical training and certification and prospective ethical discussions'.

There is thus a split within American clinical sociology between free-market practitioners on the one hand and academic theoreticians on the other. The future development of the discipline will in large part depend upon whether this split is closed or widened. Only if the former happens will it be possible for the discipline to set its own research agenda and thus meet some of the shortcomings which Glassner correctly identifies. Developing the discipline's own concepts of health, diagnostic instruments and therapeutic techniques, for example, will require the active co-operation of practitioners and theorists. If the split widens, however, then the discipline is likely to disappear down the resulting chasm.

The only other countries apart from the United States which appear in the literature as possessing a clinical sociology are France and the French-speaking areas of Belgium and Canada, where the terms 'clinical sociology', 'socioanalysis' and 'applied psychiatric sociology' are used interchangeably (Gurdin 1986). Although their theoretical framework differs from that used by their US colleagues, they attract the same wide range of clients (individuals, groups and institutions) and practise the same wide range of therapies (socio-drama and role playing, group therapy, programmes of social hygiene). Clinical sociologists in the French-speaking countries are mostly state employees, either in research units or academic departments and perhaps as a consequence there are no attempts to organise the practitioners of clinical sociology into a profession.

## POSSIBILITIES FOR CLINICAL SOCIOLOGY IN BRITAIN

Although clinical sociology in the American and French sense does not exist in Britain, sociologists here have long been involved in medical work in a role similar to that advocated by Glassner in the US, that is, as expert advisers. One clear

example of this is the cumulative impact of the work of the Institute for Social Studies in Medical Care on the practice of clinical medicine, particularly at the level of primary care, where one could argue that what has been called 'the new general practice' has been importantly shaped by this sociological input. There are many other examples, and listing them would merely be an exercise in naming eminent British medical sociologists. The examples, however, do raise the question, which is ignored by the US literature, of what is the difference between clinical sociology and medical sociology. I would suggest that whereas medical sociology is primarily based in academic departments and research units, and uses traditional sociological techniques such as surveys and in-depth interviewing to examine particular issues, clinical sociology would be primarily based in clinical centres, and would be forced to develop new techniques to alleviate the apparently individual problems which are brought for help. Obviously, this latter project would be a long-term affair, and would only flourish in a suitable environment. Interestingly, though, some of the pieces of such a suitable environment are now in place.

Firstly, as the American experience shows, sociology is rich in theoretical insights which are relevant to individual and small group treatment situations. The field of microsociology in general, and particularly deviance theory and symbolic interactionism, contain ideas which are potentially useful as a guide to intervention in the lives of those who seek help. In addition, sociology, because of its concern with social structure, draws attention to aspects of life such as occupation which are relatively ignored by existing treatment professions, and through concepts such as social class stresses the interconnection between advantage and disadvantage in the various spheres of life. In other words, the theoretical development of a clinical sociology would have a wide range of ideas on which to draw, and the necessary development work would primarily consist of identifying which of these ideas are of greatest use in what types of situation and for what types of problem.

Of equal importance to the existence of potentially useful theory are the signs that appropriate employment opportunities are beginning to emerge, from which a clinical sociology might be developed. What is sometimes called 'the new general practice' involves a body of innovative clinicians who are prepared to

consider new ways of helping their patients. The Sheffield Occupational Health Project is an example of such an initiative which is now spreading to other areas of the country. The Project employs occupational health workers who interview patients while they wait for consultations with their general practitioners and record the occupational hazards to which they have been exposed during their working lives. There is thus scope for experimenting with the ways in which sociologists could usefully contribute to primary care. As employment in this setting would depend upon the general medical practitioners, it is helpful to identify some of the areas where they would initially recognise their patients' needs are not being met. One of these is the area of welfare rights, particularly in relation to patients who have disabilities. Many sociological researchers already consider it good practice to inform research subjects about the benefits to which they are entitled, but for which they have not applied, and so this function would simply be an extension of normal 'good practice'. A second function might involve counselling. It has often been observed that patients bring to their doctor problems for which doctors are not trained, and which they regard as 'problems with living'. Those medical practices which have employed counsellors find that their skills are often more appropriate to these patients' problems and that, if anything, there is a danger of GPs overloading the counsellor by referring too many patients to them. A final possible component would involve research. Most practices now have an age-sex register of their patients which is used mainly to audit the effectiveness of screening programmes and the like, but which is also a potentially powerful research tool for investigating the causes of disease through case-control studies. At present age-sex registers are little used for this latter purpose, which is particularly wasteful because GPs' longitudinal involvement with their patients' diseases will frequently generate hypotheses about their causation. The 'new general practice', then, is likely to recognise an unmet need for research as well as for counselling and welfare rights advice.

A third factor exists, in addition to a rich theoretical heritage and innovative employment possibilities, which would also be important to the development of a clinical sociology. The experience of pioneer social scientists working in primary care suggests that it is easy to become intellectually confused by the

clash between a social science framework and the medical approach which is inevitably dominant in the day-to-day work situation, and that this confusion can quickly lead to demoralisation in the absence of regular contact with sociological colleagues. It is therefore important that a national network of sociology departments and medical sociology units has long been established as part of the higher education system. Such institutions would be able to offer informal support and perhaps honorary affiliation to the isolated social scientist working in primary care. More importantly, it would be out of the contact between these theoretical and applied sides of the discipline that a clinical sociology might develop. The previous section which suggested tasks within general practice that a sociologist might appropriately undertake, was essentially a 'foot in the door' exercise. Practical experience would undoubtedly modify and refine these tasks, as well as adding new ones. However, a consideration of the training which would be relevant to such work indicates that what has been discussed so far would not constitute a sub-speciality along the lines of clinical psychology.

The training which would be relevant to the tasks so far discussed would include welfare rights, counselling and research methods. To the extent that there would be sufficient materials for a course in clinical sociology itself, however, its content would be dominated by the somewhat different US and French experience, and work relevant to the situation in this country would be decidedly thin on the ground. In other words, clinical sociology at present has very little knowledge which is distinctive and not 'lifted' from some other group.

The production of appropriate specialist knowledge would therefore be part of the development of clinical sociology. In part this work would involve generalising from the experience of individual practitioners, in an attempt to understand patients' problems and identify the most effective ways of dealing with them. Of equal importance, however, would be the attempt to use sociology's ideas about health, illness and disability to generate new ways of seeing these problems and to suggest new ways of dealing with them. The appropriate specialist knowledge, therefore, is most likely to emerge from a dialogue between practice and theory, which in institutional terms would mean the collaboration of social scientists in primary care and medical sociologists in higher education.



## CONCLUSION

To talk of clinical sociology as a profession, as some of its practitioners in the USA are doing, is premature. Judged against the basic professional characteristic of a 'monopoly of its field of work', it has neither a monopoly nor a clearly defined field of work. It has yet to develop specific therapies for specific problems, having for example nothing comparable with the clinical psychologist's deconditioning for phobias or relaxation for panic attacks. Similarly it has no diagnostic techniques on a par with the clinical psychologist's personality or memory tests (although the Nottingham Health Profile might be the prototype of one such test, in this case measuring general health). What does exist in Britain, however, is the opportunity for sociologists to become innovatively involved in primary care while retaining institutional links with their parent discipline, and it is suggested that a clinical sociology could emerge from this context through a process of setting its own research agenda, developing its own health concepts, and constructing and evaluating its own diagnostic and therapeutic techniques.

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# 5 Engineering Better Management

Ian Glover and Michael Kelly

This chapter describes a set of mainly sociological ideas and arguments which have been associated with a loose grouping of academics and writers working at the margins of British academic sociology in the 1970s and 1980s. It also explores the way in which this set of ideas was influential in the Department of Industry for a time, especially in the period leading up to the establishment of the Finnieston Committee of Inquiry into the Engineering Profession. The central plank in the argument was that British culture consistently undervalues the practical business of making things. This is particularly marked in the disdain that the British show for manufacturing industry. This anti-manufacturing ethos pervaded Government thinking, and is equally to be found in much of British social science.

The first part of the chapter deals with engineering and the training of engineers as a case study of how sociological research can influence public and educational policy formation. On the one hand this demonstrates that sociology *did* influence wider thinking (albeit sometimes less visibly than sociologists might like). It also illustrates how that influence was achieved, and its limitations. This experience serves as a springboard for the authors' critique of several aspects of British sociology, which comprises the second part of the chapter. We would also suggest that the discussion of engineering is intrinsically interesting for anyone concerned with the sociology of industrial societies: for reasons which we develop below, any reluctance on the part of the reader to take an interest in the subject of engineering is evidence in support of the chapter's basic argument.

## MIKE FORES' 'BARBER SHOP'

Around 1975, a small number of like-minded academics connected with Michael Fores, then a Senior Economic Adviser for

the Department of Industry, began to develop a consciousness of themselves as a group. They shared an interest in several inter-related topics: the nature and origins of the differential comparative status of engineers in various European societies; the backgrounds and careers of British and western European managers; the nature of management-level tasks and related aspects of work organisation; historical, political and cultural influences on the quality of British management; the education–work interface in Britain and western Europe, and later the USA; the role of professionalism and managerialism in British society; and the nature of knowledge use in management-level work, especially in technical change.

In addition to Fores, the informal group – which came to call itself ‘Mike Fores’ barber shop’ – included Peter Lawrence, Arndt Sorge, and Ian Glover. Although each had varying degrees of sociological expertise, these were combined with other backgrounds: engineering, economics, history and management, acquired not only in conventional educational settings but also in part in governmental employment. Through regular seminars and conferences in the mid-1970s, links were established with other academics, such as John Child, Liam Hudson, Alistair Merit, Corelli Barnett, Alec Chisolm, Peter Herriot and David Granick among others. This network included psychologists, economists, historians, engineers and management experts: it was international in composition and it embraced a number of senior civil servants, industrialists, journalists and even politicians.

## THE CORE ARGUMENTS

Bearing in mind that the retrospective sociology of knowledge involves selectivity and reconstruction, we suggest that the core arguments to emerge from the ‘barber shop’ were as follows. First, there was an underlying argument that British economic difficulties could only be understood fully by exploring the generally lower status, levels of reward and opportunity associated with engineers and engineering in Britain compared with their counterparts elsewhere. The group began to make the argument that western European engineering education was generally superior to its British equivalent, by virtue of its

ability to attract more able and confident school-leavers as well as its greater breadth and practicality. The latter, it was felt, had not been achieved, at the expense of the only consistent strength of British engineering degrees at that time, namely theoretical-scientific sophistication. The message which emanated from all of the effort put into gathering material on western European and British engineers was that the latter were less likely to have attended elite educational institutions, and that they were more narrowly and less relevantly educated, less highly paid relative to members of other managerial-level occupations, much less likely to occupy senior posts in industry and elsewhere, and generally less highly regarded.

The central messages of the Anglo-Continental comparisons of the backgrounds and careers of managers were that Britain appeared to have a 'non-system' of matching higher education and work, with manufacturing and/or engineering attracting a much smaller proportion of the abler members of each generation than in Europe, and that its managerial stratum was less often highly educated and especially, much less relevantly and broadly educated. Other closely associated points were links between industry and higher education were much closer in western Europe; the continental notion of *Technik*, that of engineering and other useful arts of manufacture, was conspicuously absent in Britain, where engineering was misdepicted and marginalised as 'applied science'; and there were in effect no professions in Europe where the state rather than largely independent occupational groupings had long organised most higher vocational education and training. Organisational hierarchies in industry tended to be leaner and fitter in western Europe with line activities like production taking precedence over staff ones like finance and personnel, in contrast to much British experience. Continentals were often very suspicious of American and other Anglo-Saxon habits of thinking of 'management' as a set of 'superior' and desirable tasks and roles, and of generalist American-style management education.

This part of the work of the group was arguably the most central and influential. Subsequent research showed that unlike the British, continental Europeans did not expect scientific genius and/or miracles to solve difficult technical problems in manufacturing, and nor did they expect a grounding in scientific principles to constitute, or substitute for, the full process of

an engineer's 'formation' (Finniston 1980). Similarly, they did not entertain even the faintest of Anglo-Saxon-style hopes that the management of manufacturing and commercial activities could be turned into a 'science' through reliance on hard, documented information and rational decision-making (Fores and Glover 1976). Instead, they believed that the notion of 'managerial work' was something of a contradiction in terms (Glover 1979; Fores 1985; Glover and Martin 1986). For West Germans and other western Europeans, it was foolish and indeed impossible to try to separate the planning and execution or the management and the performance of tasks. Their 'managers' were *both* broadly educated *and* specialists. Their sense of identity lay in their engineering or commercial specialisms and it was in these that their careers developed. They showed relatively little interest in management status *per se*, or in management science (Sorge, 1978). This difference was underpinned by their education, which was more often sector-specific than its British equivalent. Because of its breadth they were usually more capable of mobility across functions within their organisations, but because of its sector-specificity they were much less likely to be or to want to be mobile across sectors (cf. Fores and Glover 1976, 1978; Hutton and Lawrence 1979, 1981; Lawrence and Hutton 1982).

## DEVELOPING THE ARGUMENTS

At various times members of the 'barber shop' have offered explanations or part-explanations of relative British decline. For example Sorge (1979), Glover (1980) and Sorge and Warner (1986) show how differences in political history shape education and training systems, economic priorities, and divisions of labour around and within manufacturing sectors and units. They also discuss the nature and long-term effects of Britain's mid-Victorian compromise between the landed interest and the rising urban middle-class manufacturing, commercial and professional groups which forestalled a bourgeois revolution of the kind which took place in several of Britain's competitor countries. However the 'barber shop's' members have generally been more interested in the working out of decline than in its origins. Thus their writings have often been directed an 'unholy trinity' of professionalism, managerialism and scientism which

they regard as being central to the process of working out of British decline or failure.

By professionalism, they mean the complex of institutions, values and habits associated with the growth, largely in Britain and other English-speaking countries, of professionally-organised occupations, which in Britain at least can be attributed to relative governmental and educational neglect of higher vocational education and training for management-level tasks in manufacturing, commercial and cognate activities. The relevant arguments have focused on the practice of allowing professional groups to proliferate at will, and in so doing to determine their own education, training and roles, and the related tendency to over-value advisory 'staff' and functional specialisms compared with normally more productive 'line' ones. The notion of managerialism has largely been explained above; by elevating some, mainly planning, roles above other, mainly execution ones, it fits in with and reinforces already extant tendencies to adopt an arms<sup>2</sup>-length stance towards the details of tasks (cf. Glover and Martin 1986).

Both professionalism and managerialism can be, and have been, depicted as products of a situation in which higher education has – at least until recently – almost overwhelmingly prioritised the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake over the production of people with technical and commercial skill and knowledge. A closely related feature of the existence of professions and of managerialist attitudes, which has also interested members of the 'barber shop', has been the growth in recent decades and the social attractiveness of post-experience management education, as exemplified in the DMS, and especially the MBA and the chartered manager movement (see Armstrong 1989, for some important details including an account of the 'barber shop's' stance). The social attractiveness of managerialism and management education to relatively narrowly educated and trained professionals has been attributed in part to their promise of 'added breadth', as for example when an accountant learns about marketing; their appeal to 'generalist' liberal arts and science graduates has been attributed in part to their promise of practicality, as for example when a history graduate learns about finance (cf. Glover 1979; Fores and Sorge 1981; Glover and Martin 1986).

The notion of scientism has also been referred to or explained, in part, above in references to British tendencies to over-value

the role of scientific, compared with technical, knowledge in engineering, and a 'scientific' approach to management-level work in general. The most direct criticisms of it by 'barber shop' members have been centred on thinking about technical change. Most of the work on technical change has been produced since 1978, but its course was implicit in ideas which had been developing from the early 1970s. The central theme in this work on technical change revolves around a comparison of two major, general, models of technical change, namely the *Technik* one and the Science leads to Technology leads to Hardware (STH) one (Sorge and Hartmann 1980). An Anglo-Continental contrast is, of course, depicted in them. The *Technik* model regards technical change primarily as a continuous phenomenon, as a product of developing human skills and technical knowledge, with science often a necessary input but never a sufficient guide to design. The STH model emphasises, on the other hand, discontinuity and the primacy of scientific knowledge in general and of scientific discoveries in particular. The 'barber shop' has argued that the first model is by far the more realistic. They have noted how in the countries with which it is associated, i.e. those of western Europe apart from the British Isles, engineering/*Technik* enjoys significantly more prestige and resources than in the latter countries or in most other English-speaking industrial ones, and how related differences operate with regard to natural science (cf. Lawrence 1980; Fores 1985; Glover 1987; Fores 1988).

It was not the simple logical or analytical strength of these arguments that carried weight, but rather the way in which they were developed. Articles were prepared for *The Guardian*, including contributions from the Secretary of State for Industry, the Duke of Edinburgh and prominent industrialists such as Arnold Weinstock. Extensive literature reviews on British, French, West German and Swedish managers were produced by Glover, Marceau, May and Erland respectively (see Glover 1978), background sources which were later used by senior DoI and DES officials. Fores played a key role as initiator and 'connector' for this work.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the timing for these developments was fortunate. Until the 'oil shock' of 1973 heralded the economic stress of the next decade and a half, concern about the quality of British management had been largely restricted to relatively small numbers of individuals who were informed about the strength of the foreign



opposition and who were dotted about education, government, the media, industry, commerce and the professions. For example the average British citizen's very often justifiable worries about the competence and outlook of their betters in general and about the management of manufacturing in particular were not usually based on awareness of such facts as the worry that the French and Swedish equivalents of Oxford and Cambridge universities, in terms of social attractiveness, mainly produced high-powered engineers. Similarly, there had been little if anything in the way of widespread awareness of the general differences between British and foreign educational institutions and priorities.

More directly, the work on managers, associated in the public mind with that on engineers, appears to have influenced the 1976 Ruskin College 'great (education) debate' speech by James Callaghan and to have helped researchers at the National Institute for Social and Economic Research to justify a considerable amount of subsequent influential research into the provision and nature of education and training in Britain and on the Continent, especially West Germany (cf. Prais 1981). It also strongly influenced the establishment of the Royal Society of Arts' Education for Capability movement, whose original manifesto was largely drafted by Fores, which has enjoyed widespread support from the great and the good, and which organised Industry Year 1986 and numerous smaller-scale events designed to change attitudes and behaviour in education and elsewhere (cf. Burgess 1986). But before that, the Labour government had set up the Finniston Committee of Inquiry into the Engineering Profession in July 1977. Although only one source of advice, the group's work was one of the few submissions explicitly acknowledged in the Commission's Report (Finniston 1980), and the Finniston Committee's permanent secretariat showed a strong direct interest in their ideas. Most of the arguments described above appear to have influenced the final form of the Finniston Report.

#### **FINNISTON AND POLICY: A GLIMPSE DOWN THE CORRIDORS OF POWER**

The recommendations of the Report were grouped under ten headings, concerning the economic role of engineering, the

supply of engineers, their employment, changes desired in schools, initial education and training, continuous education and training, the registration and licensing of engineers, the role of engineers' professional associations, engineers and trades unions, and the establishment of a statutory 'Engineering Authority' to 'promote and strengthen the engineering dimension within the British economy' (Finniston 1980, pp. 161–72).

Many of the recommendations consisted of exhortation about the attitudes and habits of people in government, companies, education and professional associations. Many of the others concerned relevant forms of information and advice. There was not so much in the body of the Report or in the recommendations in the way of criticism of the secondary schools' habits of encouraging other school students who are studying science subjects to opt for science in preference to engineering degree courses (cf. McCormick 1988).

There were numerous recommendations for the education, training and registration of engineers, and limited recommendations for their licensing 'in areas of activity where public health and safety considerations arise'. The Engineering Authority would effectively, it was implied, take over part of the qualifying function of chartered/registered engineers and technicians from the engineering professional associations (or 'institutions' as most of them are called).

Most of the recommendations have been acted upon, although and as might be expected, not always entirely as originally requested. Relevant government departments, many major and other employers, relevant professional and other public organisations concerned with engineers, and many people in and associated with engineering education, have been engaged in publicising and promoting engineering. Most importantly, the Engineering Council was established in 1982 to codify and raise standards of engineering education and training (or 'formation') and to tackle wider issues such as engineers' assumed lack of power and status in management and elsewhere. The Engineering Council was however established as a chartered body rather than as the statutory one that the Finniston Committee had wanted its 'Engineering Authority' to be. Thus it is a body with state-delegated powers and state support, rather than a creature of the state as such, so that engineering cannot be said to have been brought by government fully into the centre of

things (Glover and Kelly 1987, chapter 6). Further, engineering is still defined by the state (and many others) as a profession, whereas probably about a half of those graduate and equivalent engineers eligible to join the professional engineering associations have not bothered to do so, and in face of the fact that the vast majority of engineers, unlike most of their counterparts in law, medicine and much of the accountancy profession, do not provide services to individual clients, but are engaged in the straightforwardly commercial activity of making goods for sale in the world's markets (Fores and Glover 1978; Glover and Kelly 1987, chapter 10).

The Engineering Council, following earlier developments dating mainly from the late 1970s, has caused engineering degree and other courses to become longer, broader and more practical in their technical and scientific content, and broader too, by the addition of components covering the commercial, financial and human aspects of engineering management. In doing so it has both raised standards of formation, including ones concerning training, and made the process clearer and more uniform across specialisms and between the three levels of chartered and incorporated engineer and engineering technician. According to Keenan and Lawrence (1986) the new 'enhanced degree' courses are felt by those undergoing or who have undergone them, and by employers, to be superior to the ones which existed previously, and which were widely criticised for being narrow and over-theoretical. The Engineering Council has also secured government funding to expand higher engineering education, and although the amounts of money involved and the scale of the changes are not very great, to be favoured in such a way by a fairly cost-conscious government is at least a minor achievement (Filer 1989). It has also continued to stimulate developments in education and training (including continuing education), and to try – without a great deal of success to date – to rationalise the roles of the traditionally rather chaotic relationships between its professional association members. Further, McCormick (1988) suggested that the gap between the A-level scores of entrants to natural science and engineering degree courses is no longer as wide and as unfavourable to engineering as it was in the 1970s, although how far this is due to the Engineering Council's work and how far to other factors cannot be known.

## **The Limits of Change**

All of the above changes are worthy and useful, and it is at least possible that the most able engineering graduates currently being produced in Britain will be comparable in quality with some of the best in the world. Nevertheless, so many problems remain that it is still possible to argue that little in the way of fundamental change has resulted from the Finniston Report. This is mainly because the main changes are not a great deal more than 'tinkering with a system of qualifications, a long-overdue, sensible and necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for improvement' (Glover and Kelly 1987: 109). They are certainly not the kinds of change that would have been precipitated by a 'severe upset in the material base of a nation' (Sorge 1979) and master-minded by a government facing a major national crisis. Rather they are the kinds of bureaucratic tidying-up exercise which professors and civil servants like.

Thus what Finniston could not do was impose major changes in social attitudes, in national educational practices (or even priorities), or even in the promotion prospects of engineers. We know of little evidence to suggest that British engineers have stopped being 'on tap but not on top' in employment and we know of some mainly anecdotal material which suggests that cost-conscious employers are keeping them more firmly in their (purely technical) place than ever. Privatisation of hitherto engineer-dominated public sector utilities is likely to produce managerial prioritising of commercial, as opposed to technical, disciplines (Armstrong 1987a). The expansion of business and management education which has been gathering momentum over the last twenty years – and certainly doing so faster than engineering education – has hardly taken manufacturing as its model for the future, either. Although the rapid expansion of the former kind of education has been the norm in recent decades in most of the industrial countries, partly because large-scale technical education is generally older-established, the inclusion of commercial and financial and other 'management' subjects in British engineering degree courses does often take the form of 'tacking-on' rather than integration, so that engineering and management continue to be thought of and treated as separate activities (Armstrong 1987b).

The Finniston Report may, however, be seen in (say) the year 2030, fifty years after its publication, as a harbinger of real and beneficial change. Most of the graduates currently in senior posts in British organisations are products of the sort of elite undergraduate education which was expanded following the Robbins Report of 1963 and which is too rarefied and inadequately vocational for the kind of mass system which is currently evolving (Singer 1988). There is undoubtedly a great deal of counterproductive tension, wasteful competition and deprivation in Britain's education system (Hunt 1987; see also Hough 1987). The kinds of problem surrounding and following upon Finniston's proposals, discussed in an article about them by Fores and Pratt (1980), concerning arm's-length and rationalistic managerialism, the continuing strength of the beliefs that 'useful' and 'broad' education are sometimes incompatible and that the nineteenth century 'professional model' of vocational education and training is the most appropriate one for engineering and management, are as real more than a decade later as when Fores and Pratt were writing. Discussions of the future of management education including the confused debates surrounding the somewhat retrograde notion of the chartered manager exemplify all these tensions and problems (see for example, *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 10 March 1989). Similarly international comparisons of managers' qualifications and skills and of the place of engineers in management, have continued, through to the 1990s, to show Britain in a poor light (cf. Handy et al. 1988).

Nevertheless, there has been and there is a great deal of increasingly well-informed debate about higher vocational education and its national and international context in Britain in the 1980s and early 1990s. The standard of this debate has often been high and its orientations humane (cf. Burgess 1986). It has been self-critical, creative in its thinking about future context, and practical about pedagogy (cf. the papers by Nuttgens, Handy, Burgess, Adams, Raven, Pratt and Gorb in the collection edited by Burgess). It has influenced other opinion-formers and those who make and implement policies in government and education and its kind of thinking is apparent in for example some of the more enlightened and positive efforts of the Council for National Academic Awards. On the other hand, having experienced, at the sharp end, the

hostility of some engineering educators and students to social science – even the practical, pro-engineering kind which we have developed – as well as the general sense of exhaustion, heat and conflict engendered by rapid and not always productive change in the polytechnic sector, we are fully aware of the strength of the inertia and opposition facing attempts to be positively creative in education. We are also aware of the nature of developments in British management, which in becoming leaner, more pro-active, entrepreneurial, dynamic and so on, has improved its performance while (in effect) walking in many respects away from the sort of well-organised and thought-out workaday and heavyweight *Technik*-inspired philosophy which Fores' 'barber shop' advocated.

### **Technik, Training, and Technology**

It is worth briefly considering some of the reasons why the Finniston-*Technik*-barber shop philosophy did not have as much impact as it might. First, there has been the growth of business and management education noted at several points above. Although this is a far from unhealthy development in itself, the contexts of British arm's-length managerialist tendencies and of a traditional preference in many quarters for parasitical 'business' over productive 'industry' (cf. Veblen 1921), have often meant that it is perceived as an alternative rather than as a supplement to whatever is *Technik*-like in higher vocational education and training.

There was also the distraction (in effect) of late 1970s and early-mid 1980s' concern with the 'impact' of new technology. Important as microelectronic technology clearly is, concern with its role in a time of rapidly growing unemployment was only rarely articulated against a wider background of what was at best ambivalence towards and lack of competence in using all forms of technology, old, contemporary or new. Similar remarks could also be directed at the urgency of early-mid 1980s' interest in youth unemployment and youth training, as well as the habit of that period of blaming British difficulties on 'the world economy', whereby commentators defined themselves and their society as economic victims rather than actors.

Finally there was the burgeoning interest of the last decade and a half in Japanese management, and the issue of the extent

to which Japanese economic strengths are culture-specific, which tended to divert attention from some fairly obvious, powerful and accessible western European lessons. The interest in Japanese management followed the earlier tendency to look to the USA for answers to economic difficulties, and indeed Japan has often been viewed from Britain through American eyes, as can be seen in the case of the psychologically rather interesting literature on managerial 'excellence' of the 1980s (see, for example, Peters and Waterman 1982). A problem with the kind of thinking encouraged by popular writings on management which use Japan as an example is that they tend to propose short-termist organisational-level solutions to problems which are societal ones, and to trivialise understanding of cross-cultural differences in the process (Glover 1989). Also the western European, notably the West German, exemplar arguably offers lessons which are at least equally valid and clearer and easier for Britons to understand (cf. Glover 1985; Child et al. 1986). At least some resistance to the idea of learning from West Germany has probably been due to the longer and much older history of Anglo-German compared with Anglo-Japanese conflict. The very popular British television series *Dr Who*, in which lazy English aristocratic scientific genius habitually, at one minute to midnight, saves Creation from the remorseless inhuman/soulless/mechanical deprivations of such culturally stereotypical creatures as the Daleks (German engineers?), is surely one example of British anti-German prejudice, which even in the 1990s is by no means entirely residual.

Coming closer to the present, ever-widening appreciation of the ongoing internationalisation and globalisation of economic life and of management can make – in our opinion very mistakenly – the 'homeliness' (but hardly the world-openness) of *Technik* seem dated or irrelevant. Yet manufacturing and engineering are *increasingly* the activities upon which the maintenance and improvement of living standards depend (cf. Gershuny and Miles 1983; Cohen and Zysman 1987; Glover 1989), and if Britons can learn and accept in the 1970s and 1980s that their education and training system and their managers are inferior to foreign ones, they may be able to learn that too in the 1990s.

Arguably then, the work of the group was influential in the way in which the Finniston Report was shaped, but the ways in

which the Finniston recommendations have been interpreted and implemented have not always followed the prescriptions implied by the research base of the group's work. Even so, Michael Fores and his collaborators might justifiably claim to have had an impact on policy, in a way few other British sociologists and other social scientists have done.

Ignoring any immodesty in such claims, why has mainstream British sociology not had more impact? Why should a group of relatively obscure and practical researchers (obscure in mainstream academic terms, anyway) have been so influential, when the heavyweights of mainstream sociology are so conspicuous by their absence from the policy-making process? The answer may partly lie in the question itself and it may be purely a matter of politics. In the first case the 1980s was the decade of Thatcherism, and it may simply be that the ideological predilections of the government – which at least in hindsight were highly predictable from some of the historical analysis associated with the 'barber shop' – and British sociology were too far apart for any meeting of minds. In the second, simply by being relatively obscure, practical in orientation, and in the right place at the right time, Fores and his friends may have been more likely to have gained a sympathetic hearing than if they had been well-known university professors. While undoubtedly these points must constitute a good part of the explanation, we suggest that the above ideas about the work of the group and its impact have something to offer anyone who is interested in the contemporary role of British sociology.

## SOCIOLOGY, POLICY AND PRAXIS

The origins of sociology lie in three different strands of thought, of which only one was predominantly theoretical. They were (1) eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European social theory (which was mainly theoretical although it had many empirical underpinnings, and of course Marxism had an overtly pragmatic orientation); (2) British empiricism (Rowntree, Fabianism, the early editions of *The Sociological Review*, and so on); and (3) American pragmatism including the Chicago School. In Britain in the 1980s, much university sociology appears to have embraced some of the least pragmatic elements of English aca-



democratic culture, following a 1960s jump into theoretical work by Marxists and others who sometimes appeared to have lost interest in *praxis*. This led to the production of a considerable amount of very erudite and high-level sociological theorising, but in some circles, data and empirical virtually became dirty words. In writing this we are not denying the importance of theory and we are certainly not ignoring the growing production in the universities and elsewhere of much excellent empirical work, and not by any means only at such places as the Industrial Relations Research Unit or the Medical Research Council's Medical Sociology Unit.

What we are aware of, however, is that in countries like the United States, in which the balance of sociology's outputs is less theory-centred than in Britain (or perhaps England), the subject seems to have much more *gravitas* and status. We are suggesting that lay perceptions of the gentlemanly academic 'Englishness' of much British sociology is a handicap when it seeks public approval and support. This may be because a sociology which sometimes parades concern for 'the people' and which in doing so is seen to take itself very seriously indeed, is naturally rejected by 'the people' as well as by the elite: the parading of humane concern can look suspiciously like an occupational strategy or a form of conspicuous consumption. Indeed the fact that sociology is more obviously professionalised and pragmatic and less 'gentlemanly-amateur' in the US (and West Germany), yet does not seem to take itself so seriously as is still sometimes the case in Britain, is probably both to its credit and its advantage there.

The idea of irony is significant for our argument in several detailed ways. For example, it would seem that 'broad left' sociology has failed the broad left. Sophisticated critiques of such practices as racism and sexism, however worthwhile in themselves, which were developed from the late 1960s onwards, arguably foreshadowed, were part of, and reflected, the marginalisation of sociology which has taken place in the 1970s and 1980s. This would seem to be because they have diverted sociological energy from the production of *effective* and major critiques of phenomena of power and class. To make such critiques effective, sociologists would have had not only to describe and explain the injustices attributable to the unequal distribution of wealth and power, but also to persuade enough influential lay people that the relevant inequalities meant

inefficiency and that to reduce the inequality might benefit the majority, including, presumably, the influential people.

Perhaps when sociology is taken seriously in Britain it is under a different label, and sometimes covertly, such as in some engineering courses or at the Department of Applied Economics at Cambridge; in medical schools, in industrial relations and personnel management and in organisational behaviour and management courses; in media studies; in marketing research, which is a mixture of practical economics, sociology and psychology underpinned by statistics: and so on. It is used, mainly covertly too, in political and political-economic and other public discussion and debate. A very fundamental kind of irony in Britain, with its traditionally pragmatic, even anti-philosophical culture, is that 'practical men' deride sociology, but use it, principally because it is impossible to think or to live without doing so. Sociology may lack *gravitas* and status in Britain precisely, and perhaps ironically, because so much establishment university sociology is, rightly or wrongly, widely perceived as having prioritised theory.

A further irony is that many of the 1960s critiques made by sociologists of the monopolistic medical and legal professions, of academic bias in the education system in general and in higher education in particular, of the venality of some industrial relations practice, and the rigidities of other institutions and processes, produced originally in the name of the left, have been taken over by the right (e.g. by the Adam Smith Institute and the Institute of Economic Affairs) and adopted as their own. Was this because their subject became grandiose and arcane following its expansion, or because events moved too quickly for sociological research and debate?

### **The Sociology of Economic Life**

These observations about sociology as a discipline can be elaborated briefly by reference to a small number of other related issues, both general and specific. One very general point concerns the tendency of sociologists and engineers (and other makers and doers) to be wary of each other in the late twentieth century. It might be thought that there was a natural affinity between them given the atmosphere of mutual sympathy between early sociology and industrialisation (and

engineers) as well as the importance of engineering in social and economic development. Reasons for the coolness of twentieth-century sociology towards engineering include sociology's growing fragmentation and intellectualisation, with the latter meaning that sociologists have increasingly identified themselves with other intellectuals like themselves as opposed to makers and doers, a trend reinforced by anti-industrial attitudes fostered by the very affluence which (paradoxically) engineering creates (cf. Bell 1978).

In a more specific vein, Marsland (1988) has attacked British sociology for manifesting British anti-industrialism and/or anti-business attitudes to a particularly marked degree. Marsland's arguments are praised by Anderson (1988) in *The Director*, who in passing mentions the contribution apparently made to Japan's economic success by that country's education system. Yet although it is true that the proportion of engineering graduates per capita produced each year in Japan is notably higher in Japan than the British population, at least some of Japan's economic success might also be attributed to the even greater Anglo-Japanese difference between the proportions of graduates in administrative, business and social scientific subjects produced in the two countries, and even perhaps to Japan's decision, some years ago, to expand sociology courses while redefining the subject as a mainly vocational one whose expansion was to constitute an important part of ongoing societal development (Atarashi 1986).

More pertinent, regarding Marsland's criticisms, is the extent to which sociology is attacked by him for being opposed to parasitical business/markets/profit/competition/enterprise, rather than for being against (productive?) industry (cf. Veblen 1921). This is a legitimate criticism in so far as its balance is probably quite accurate. Thus critical sociological accounts of economic activities do tend to oppose abuses of economic power, rather than wealth-creation as such. Such accounts tend to neglect to emphasise the positive features of, rather than to oppose openly, 'genuinely' productive economic activity. However Marsland's arguments do, on the surface at least (although he has eschewed the relevant standpoint in correspondence with us) exemplify a crucial part of the problem which he ostensibly addresses. Thus while we would clearly go part of the way with him about sociological negativism towards the co-

operative and fruitful elements of economic life, and also attribute some of it to British anti-industrialism, we would also argue that a completely uncritical sociological enterprise would be largely pointless, and that a good deal of sociological research and criticism is in fact well informed by an appreciation of the difference between the parasitical and the productive.

A much more valid general set of criticisms of sociological accounts of economic life concerns a habit of over-generalisation in discussions of the character of industrial societies, past, present and future. The school history textbook notion of a rather dramatic and traumatic British industrial revolution has been given far too much credence, too readily by many sociologists (cf. Macfarlane 1978; Fores 1981). In the present, or recent past, sociologists have been unduly influenced by notions of convergence between the economic, social and political arrangements of the industrial societies (Kumar 1978). The implicitly rather anti-industrial and in most respects highly dubious notion of post-industrial society has become respectable in some sociological quarters and influential amongst many journalists, politicians and other social commentators (Kumar 1978; Gershuny 1978; Gershuny and Miles 1983; Glover 1989). Some sociologists are naively influenced in other ways by the assumptions, institutions and values of the societies in which they have grown up. The tendency of English-speaking ones to reify the very different activities of the engineer and the scientist into the meta-construct of 'science and technology' is a major example, and very relevant here, as we have already implied.

Yet all these over-generalising tendencies seem to be products of a hardly unreasonable desire to isolate master trends or to develop major categories. In accepting the old (and Whiggish) historians' thesis of a dramatic, traumatic industrial revolution, sociologists have probably been more naive than anti-industrial. The convergence thesis, more of a product of economics, economic history and political science than sociology, but quite widely espoused and used by the latter, was fundamentally pro-industrial (Kerr et al. 1960). The notion of post-industrial society is implicitly, if not entirely, anti-industrial and originally a mainly sociological one, but it is hardly antipathetic in every respect to cooperative economic activity, to industrial wealth-creation, to the engineer or to capitalism. Acceptance of the 'science and technology' construct

also appears to be a product of naivety, of taking the claims of professors of natural science to be useful at their face value, rather than of any conscious desire to obfuscate. Nevertheless sociology clearly has had, and still has, problems in coming to grips with all relevant details of economic and social life.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have described how sociologically-informed research has influenced lay perceptions of British management and engineering in the 1970s and major changes in British higher technical education in the 1980s, and how the relevant work fed into further research into British and comparative management, and into some sociology and management teaching. In doing so we hope that we have shown that sociology can and does influence public policies, including ones concerned with national elite formation, even if not – at least in the short term – very powerfully.

We have also noted how sociology, while also often influential in the education and work of management-level people like doctors and marketing researchers, is only very rarely felt to be ‘useful’ by non-sociologists in Britain. We have already argued that this would seem to be partly due to a tendency in the part of the subject’s top brass to valorise patrician and often backward-looking *in-vacuo* theorising at the expense of the prestige of theoretically and otherwise relevant empirical work, and to tend to study other sociology, rather than society. In making this point we noted how the tendency we described flew in the face of European faith in *praxis* and of past British and past and contemporary American and other foreign sociologists’ faith in empiricism and/or pragmatism. In the course of making several points about the elevation of theory above practice in education, including higher technical education, we were both implicitly and explicitly critical of all those who habitually counterpose the liberal and the vocational, and the theoretical and the practical. This leads us to the last two points which we wish to make.

First, much criticism of sociology has come from ‘traditional’ graduates in the humanities and natural sciences, and much of this criticism has been very poorly informed indeed. We would suggest that such people have made their criticisms partly

because they are products of types of education which are understood, and increasingly widely so, as narrow and limiting (cf. Wilkinson 1964; Barnett 1972, chapter 2). This is not to deny that the breadth of an education in sociology is often much more apparent than real to some of those who receive it. However, humanities and natural science graduates may with at least some justification be regarded as members of a traditional elite on the defensive in a context in which the prestige and support given to vocational forms of higher education is increasing, in some cases at their direct expense. Second, we feel that the rise of vocational higher education in Britain is an inevitable part of a national catching-up exercise, and that the most sensible and positive stance for sociologists in such a context is not to ally themselves with the patrician values of an old 'liberal' academic guard, but to become part of and/or to help liberalise and perhaps liberate a new one, and to do so openly and fearlessly. To do this, if indeed they wish to, they will need to be sociological about themselves by dispassionately examining the relevance of their own values, experience and skills, as well as by systematically comparing the role and standing of their subject in Britain with its role and standing elsewhere.

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## 6 Underclass and Overclass: The Widening Gulf Between Social Classes in Britain in the 1980s\*

Peter Townsend

Conceptions of class, changes in class structure and changes in rates of social mobility were all central themes of sociological work in the 1980s. But despite this, the measurement of trends in the number of identifiable classes, the distance between them in power, their command over resources or whatever, and the numbers of men, women and children allocated to those classes and moving between them, cannot be said to have been such a prominent focus of attention. Similarly the role of policy and policy institutions in motivating current and potential trends have been infrequently theorised and certainly not quantified.

The theme of this chapter, social polarisation in the 1980s, is controversial, although it has the advantage of encouraging some reconciliation of the different priorities held by sociologists, as well as testing out the relevance of alternative sociological theories of class. The Government has indicated its sensitivity to the subject on a number of occasions – for example, on the cumulative social effects of budgetary measures, and on the percentage of the population with low incomes. But such matters must be central to sociological analysis of developments in social structure – even if such analysis encroaches on political sensibilities. The social and political implications of the practice of sociology seem to me to be an inescapable feature of the subject: there is in fact no question of a sociology of social polarization which is not ‘sociology in action’.

Plainly the theme of social polarisation is central to current as well as traditional preoccupations in sociology. What are the trends in social inequality? It cannot seriously be argued that

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\* I am grateful to Garry Runciman for his penetrating and helpful comments on a first draft.

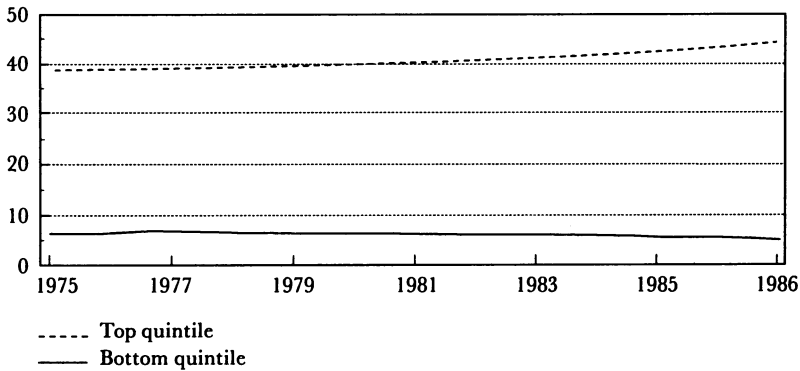
living standards in Britain have not diverged in the last 20 and particularly in the last ten years. With variations for particular years the trends, on statistical data from government sources as well as from independent sources, are firmly established (for example, Walker and Walker 1987; Townsend, Corrigan and Kowarzik 1987). They are quite clearly attributable to a mixture of government policies, multinational developments in production, trade and finance, and demographic and cultural factors. The question is not *whether* divergence has taken place, but *how serious it is*, how it can be fully explained and what should be done about it – on strategic as well as moral grounds. Social layers in Britain have been partly reconstituted, more deeply etched and more widely spaced.

This summary deserves to be set out at greater length. I will start with an illustration of the evidence about disposable incomes and then relate this evidence to a number of themes taken up in sociological discussion. The first is the conceptualisation of classes and the meaning of ‘polarisation’ and ‘compression’ of those classes through time. The second is whether or not an ‘underclass’ can be said to have emerged in British society in recent decades. The third is whether dependent minorities now constitute a distinctive feature of British society which modifies, and complicates, class relations. And the fourth is the means of differentiating structurally among the rich and prosperous in terms of position and attitude.

## RECENT TRENDS IN INCOME

What is the scale of current shifts in living standards? The accompanying graph and the figures (Figure 6.1 and Table 6.1) represent the heart of the evidence of polarisation in the last ten years. The source is an annual survey managed by Government, which is certainly the most reliable source of information at present about trends in living standards. It is the Family Expenditure Survey (FES), whose methodology has been developed year by year since 1957 and is aimed to cover about 11 000 addresses in each year. Detailed information is collected about both income and expenditure. The measured annual reviews by the Central Statistical Office give emphatic testimony

Percentage distribution



*Figure 6.1* Percentage distribution of income after cash benefits and all taxes, by quintile groups

of income polarisation between 1975 and 1985, particularly between 1979 and 1985.

The graph shows the shift in disposable incomes, that is, income after tax and paying national insurance contributions, at different points in the spread of incomes from high to low. Supplementary evidence could be quoted from Income Data Services Ltd, Hay ML Management Consultants and other sources to suggest that, if anything, the graph underestimates the current divergence in the living standards of different

*Table 6.1*

Percentage distribution of income after cash benefits and all taxes, by quintile groups

	1975	1977	1979	1981	1983	1985	1986
Bottom quintile	6	5	6	6	6	6	5
Second	12	12	11	11	11	11	10
Third	18	18	18	17	17	17	16
Fourth	24	24	25	24	24	24	24
Top quintile group	39	39	40	41	42	43	45
All households	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

SOURCE: Central Statistical Office, *Economic Trends*.  
(Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding)

sections of rich and poor. There are two main reasons. First, the value of employer welfare or 'fringe' benefits for higher paid employees has been rising disproportionately to cash income, and this is not fully measured in the FES. Second, the higher paid have also benefited disproportionately from the development of share bonus schemes and rises in property values. Again this annual 'wealth' is not related to the measure of disposable incomes. Some sociologists have argued over many years that conventional measures of cash incomes are becoming more and more misleading of the real distribution of living standards, because employer indirect welfare, or 'fringe' benefits, and the acquisition of substantial forms of wealth (and new forms of wealth) by a rising percentage of the population, contribute powerfully but also unequally to the true picture of the distribution of living standards (Titmuss 1963; Westergaard and Resler 1975; Townsend 1979, especially chapters 5, 9 and 10; Halsey 1986).

Not only has the gap between poor and rich widened. The real incomes of many groups of the poor have actually fallen, or remained about the same, since 1979. Between 1979 and 1985 there was a marginal loss in purchasing power at the lowest quartile of 6p per week and at the median of £1.34 – balanced by gains at the upper decile of £11.61 and at the highest decile of £24.20 (estimates based on annual reports of the FES, 1980–6, calculated in Townsend, Corrigan and Kowarzik 1987). For the whole period 1979–89 it has been estimated that while the modal gain for households was between 1 per cent and 5 per cent of net income, 3 per cent of households lost more than 10 per cent of net income, and at the other extreme 2 per cent of households gained more than 25 per cent in their total net income (Johnson and Stark, 1989a and b, especially p. 3).

The proportion of the population with incomes below, at, or only marginally above the Government's own standard of low income in that year increased by nearly four millions to 15.4 millions, or 29 per cent of the population (Oppenheim 1988; Social Services Committee 1988; and see also *Economic Trends*, CSO, 1987). A table for 1972–85, produced by the House of Commons Social Services Committee on the basis of DHSS statistics, is reproduced in Table 6.2. With some fluctuations the growth in the population with low income is unmistakable.

*Table 6.2*  
Persons living in families with net incomes low relative to  
supplementary benefit scale rates: Great Britain

	(1) <i>Below SB</i>	(2) <i>On SB</i>	(3) <i>(1)+(2)</i>	(4) <i>Proportion of families with children (per cent)</i>
	<i>(000s)</i>	<i>(000s)</i>	<i>(000s)</i>	
<i>End-year estimates</i>				
1972 (a)	1780	4140	5920	12
1973 (a)	1600	3780	5380	12
1974 (a)	1410	3730	5140	13
1975 (a)	1840	3710	5550	16
1976 (a)	2280	4090	6370	17
1977	2020	4160	6180	17
<i>Annual averages</i>				
1977	1900	4120	6020	16
1979	2090	3980	6070	15
1981 (b)	2610	4840	7450	19
1983 (b)	2780	6130	8910	19
1985 (b)	2420	6960	9380	20

*Notes*

- (a) The treatment of self-employed income varied during this period.  
 (b) Age-related heating additions are excluded from the SB scale rates.

SOURCE: Social Services Committee (1988), *Families on Low Income Statistics, Fourth Report*, House of Commons paper 565, London, HMSO.

Government statistics have now been recast in household rather than tax-benefit or income units, using a spurious equivalence scale. One statistical study has shown that by changing the basis of the calculations (primarily by switching from tax-benefit units to households, but also by selecting one particular equivalence scale) the number of people estimated to fall below a low threshold of income was reduced. The methodology would not attract international support. Indeed, the ten nation Luxembourg Income Survey shows there are at least three alternative approaches to the problem of weighting the incomes

of different types of households to arrive at 'equivalent' income, producing diverse results (Rainwater 1988). This produced a more favourable result for the Government than would have been produced on the statistical assumptions made formerly.

Even so, the methodology which was so convenient to Government interests secured the result that at the first, second, third, fourth and fifth deciles disposable income had increased by from only 4–6 per cent over a period of six years. Sections of the population with below-average incomes had gained rather less than those with above average incomes. The average was estimated at 9 per cent, and the top 10 per cent were found to

*Table 6.3*  
Changes in real average incomes of individuals analysed by decile group 1979–85 (Britain)

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Per cent increase</i>
Top 10 per cent	18
80–90 per cent	10
70–80	9
60–70	6
50–60	6
40–50	4
30–40	4
20–30	4
10–20	5
Bottom 10 per cent	6
All income levels	9

*Note:* The estimates are based on data from the *Family Expenditure Survey*, an annual national survey of incomes and expenditure. They are adjusted for family size and composition, on an equivalence scale approved by the Department of Social Security. Income is measured before deduction of housing costs. There have been considerable delays in the publication of survey data on low income and the Government Statistical Service report does not specify results for 10 per cent groups above average income.

SOURCE: *Hansard*, 17 March 1989 and 23 March 1989, and Government Statistical Service (1988) *Households Below Average Income*, London, May.

have gained 18 per cent, as Table 6.3 shows. Pensioners were among those estimated to have gained by more than average, but those classified as unemployed were found to have lost real income by 2 per cent on average during this period.

This result was not published prominently by the Government. Its statistical service had published a set of estimates on the new basis only for 1981–5 and the estimates made no reference to groups with above-average income (Government Statistical Service 1988). The data taking the analysis back to 1979 were published, or more correctly, placed in the House of Commons Library only after parliamentary questions had been asked by Nigel Griffiths MP (see *Hansard*, 17 March 1989, Col. 390 and 23 March 1989, Col. 792–3).

This summary of recent trends in living standards must not be regarded as something new. Perhaps the most intriguing data for the sociologist concerned with tracing developments in class are those showing trends in equalities of health. There have been a stream of research studies confirming the wide structural inequality in health which exists between prosperous and poor groups and indeed suggesting that when the ambiguities and errors in measurement are removed that the inequality is wider than at first sight it seems (see for example, Marmot et al. 1987; but also Lynch and Oelman 1986; Wilkinson 1989; and Fox 1989). In an important new analysis Wilkinson argues that changes in class structure or at least in income status and position must be invoked to explain the divergence of mortality rates of the different social classes since the 1950s (Wilkinson 1989). He has demonstrated a powerful correlation between income and health in different papers in recent years, for example between movements in average earnings and trends in mortality rates, for 22 occupations in the period 1951–71 (Wilkinson 1986, chapter 6) and for 64 occupations in the period 1971–81 (Wilkinson 1990). In particular he found that health was highly sensitive to changes in income at the lower end of the distribution of income.

## THE RANGE OF VERTICAL INEQUALITY

The history of sociology is predominantly a history of the analysis of class struggle and reconstitution. Marx set the pace and

has dominated the scene with his emphasis on oppositional politics – freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, bourgeoisie and proletariat. None of us can ignore the power of that simple social division. Marx recognised subdivisions within the main strata but gave them less weight than sociologists have subsequently felt obliged to do. Following Weber, occupational class analysis in this century has tended to identify five, six, seven or eight strata (Glass 1954; Townsend 1979; Reid 1981; Goldthorpe 1987; Marshall et al. 1988; Runciman 1990), implying a more graduated structure, though often acknowledging a major division between non-manual and manual. Allocation to class by occupation, however, has been more a matter of convenience than of principle. Occupation happens to have been a reasonably reliable indicator of class position, though the increasing absorption of women into the labour market, together with the development of retirement and long-term unemployment, combine to make that indicator less dependable, and pose serious questions about the basis of stratification (see, for example, the discussion in the introduction to the Black Report, 1980).

Runciman is one of the few sociologists to have examined the criteria used to arrive at a defensible view about the number of social classes. His approach not only modernises but attempts to reconcile Marx and Weber. He gives greatest weight to the ideas of ‘economic power’ and ‘role’. Thus classes are ‘sets of roles whose common location in social space is a function of the nature and degree of economic power (or lack of it) attaching to them through their relation to the institutional processes of production, distribution and exchange’ (Runciman 1990: 1). Economic power derives in large measure, but by no means entirely, from occupational roles, and income and wealth are not necessarily coincident with such power. After critically discussing different typologies of class he identifies seven classes: an upper class, three middle classes (upper, middle and lower), two working classes (skilled and unskilled) and an underclass.

Evidence about the distribution of disposable income shows that vertical inequality is much less in some societies than in others at roughly similar levels of national wealth. Examples are Britain compared with Sweden, and Kerala compared with most other Indian states. Thus, the ratio of disposable income



earnings between the tenth and first income deciles in Sweden is approximately 4:1 (Vogel et al. 1988: 14), compared with between 6:1 and 10:1, depending on operational definition of disposable income in Britain.

The criteria of stratum membership, but also distance between strata, therefore deserve close attention. Access to the roles associated with each stratum, but also to the resources associated with, and the degree of power wielded in, the performance of the roles needs to be observed and measured. In his impressive book published in 1989, Garry Runciman has gone far to set out one possible framework of analysis. While he conforms with post-war practice in devoting most space in his discussion of social hierarchies to social mobility and rates of upward and downward mobility he does not neglect the need to distinguish the number of, and distance between, strata, and the function of institutions like education in influencing mobility rates and hence outcomes for the shape and levels of the hierarchy. I only wish he had given more emphasis to the disentanglement of distance between strata and the short-term and long-term effect of policies as well as demography on class structure. He has the courage to examine polarisation and compression of the social hierarchy in a variety of countries – in early modern Russia, and he compares eleventh-century England with twentieth-century Sweden.

The comparative perspective is instructive and carries an intellectual momentum of its own. Runciman points out that social mobility even of a collective kind 'may leave the social distance between the two the same as it was before their locations were reversed' (Runciman 1989: 140). Mobility may also 'polarize the society in one area of social space while simultaneously compressing it in another' (ibid: 141). Such reminders certainly pose a challenge to analysts of class trends under Mrs Thatcher's Government.

## THE UNDERCLASS

Polarisation of course implies much more than wider inequality of living standards or power. It implies restructuring as well as different patterns of consciousness at top and bottom of the social scale. Most attention has been concentrated on changes

at the foot of the hierarchy. The emergence of an underclass has been proclaimed by a large number of sociologists, first in the United States and now in Britain (e.g. Auletta 1983; Cook and Curtin 1987; Dahrendorf 1987; Gephart and Pearson 1988). On the face of it this seems to be related to observed polarisation taking place in some affluent societies but that does not always seem to be what is being claimed. Thus, Runciman has invented the term 'systact' to cover strata, classes, cohorts, castes, estates, orders, interest-groups and ranks in which a group or category of persons have roles by which they have a 'distinguishable and more than transiently similar location and, on that account, a common interest' (Runciman 1989: 20). He proposes to start from a hypothetical fourfold division – a dominant elite; a subordinate group playing the auxiliary roles necessary for the exercise of that domination; a major stratum of persons occupying the roles which guarantee the basic productive functions which keep the society in being; and an 'underclass' of 'outlaws, mendicants, vagabonds, captives, drop-outs, criminals and so forth whose roles are stigmatised by the ideology of those located above them' (ibid: 27).

This approach to the categorisation of the poorest class begs a lot of questions. It has a long history. Marx had a highly developed sense of the division between what has been called in British empirical studies the 'respectables' and the 'roughs' (Stacey 1960) and believed the latter could threaten the revolutionary success of the proletariat. He wrote of the lumpenproletariat as the 'dangerous class, the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lower layers of society' which could be bribed and recruited to anti-revolutionary activities through reactionary intrigue (Marx 1935, originally 1852: 44). From early days the poorest class or classes in society have been the objects of professional contempt and yet have not attracted very close examination by sociologists of class. There seems to be a disposition to bundle together all those groups which do not lend themselves to clear social categorisation, irrespective of their differences.

There are similar problems about latter-day categorisations of the urban 'underclass', especially in the United States, where the Social Science Research Council is establishing a major programme of research. This programme owes its origins to anxiety about the persistence of poverty and seems to be guided

by precepts and malignant sub-cultures. This is evident in the attempt to define the phenomenon. Thus,

discussion of the urban underclass both in the media and among scholars typically include (often only implicitly) one or more of six characteristics. These include: (1) persistence and/or intergenerational transmission of poverty; (2) geographic concentration; (3) social isolation from mainstream society which may manifest itself in participation in the unreported economy, welfare dependency, teen pregnancy, drug abuse or crime; (4) underemployment and unemployment; (5) low skills and education; and (6) membership in a minority group. (SSRC 1988: 6-7)

The problem with such research programmes is that all too frequently they lack intellectual coherence and theoretical direction. There is more than a suggestion of blaming individuals and sub-cultures for the poverty and lack of opportunities that they experience, independent of any provision for the examination of economic and social institutions and the collection of evidence.

An alternative approach to the definition of an underclass has been provided by Giddens, who places emphasis on discrimination and unemployment as instruments of social differentiation. Giddens argues, 'Where ethnic differences serve as a "disqualifying" market capacity, such that those in the category in question are heavily concentrated among the lowest-paid occupations, or are chronically unemployed or semi-employed, we may speak of the existence of an underclass' (Giddens 1973: 112). While he accepts the predominance of an urban underclass in the United States he points out that the phenomenon can also be found in other industrial societies like Britain, and may be causally dependent upon the development of a dual labour market (Giddens: 219). 'It is evident that there is a basic division of interest, which in all probability will become more and more pronounced in the future, between those in the new 'reserve army' of capitalism, in insecure occupations yielding only a low rate of economic return, and those in the more stable, high-yielding manual occupations' (Giddens: 289).

Some sociologists find this unpersuasive. Duncan Gallie, for example, does not believe a case is made out for the development of a new radical underclass, which is supposed to be

provoking the growth of aggressive conservative attitudes in the employed manual working class. The predictions, he believed,

were based upon unsound assumptions about the way in which labour markets were developing, they greatly over-estimated the homogeneity of the categories that lay at the centre of the analysis and they took little account of the capacity of existing institutions to adapt to and channel new sources of tension. (Gallie 1988: 488)

The long-term unemployed came closest to fulfilling the prescriptions of an underclass, but that was all. The contours of social stratification in Britain were 'not altered in any fundamental way' (ibid: 488).

This seems to me to underestimate the case. Giddens's argument was first published in 1973, and though some changes were introduced into a second edition of his book in 1981, that argument would necessarily have to be brought up to date. Unemployment grew quickly in the late 1970s, and not only in the aftermath of the 1979 election. It was accompanied, and in part, provoked, by a wider industrial and economic policy designed to restructure class in Britain. Laws were passed to restrict industrial action that could be taken by unions, cancel employment rights and strengthen the powers of employers. Wage-earners' rights of access to rented public housing were severely reduced. The skilled manual class was greatly weakened. At the same time the labour market was casualised.

There are more insecure self-employed, more part-time workers, more wage-earners with wages below the so-called Council of Europe 'decency' threshold, and reported instances of the re-introduction of child labour and the substantial exploitation of home-workers. If the wider issues of fiscal policy, cuts in public expenditure and state coercion (Hillyard and Percy-Smith 1988) are carefully constructed as the appropriate context then we must bear witness to the simultaneous depreciation of the so-called traditional working class and the rapid establishment of a dependent and in part compliant underclass. Some unions are waking up to the potential recruitment of part-time female employees but most unions make few attempts to maintain links with members who have become unemployed and retired. An increasing percentage of the population, when confronted with the question of identifying

themselves with one of a list of classes choose the epithet 'poor' rather than 'working' class.

The argument also needs to be freed from the preoccupation with the white, male, economically active population. John Goldthorpe's elaborate analysis of social mobility represented 28 per cent of the population (Goldthorpe 1987). Retirement does not feature in the index to the compendious publication of *Employment in Britain*, edited by Duncan Gallie (1988). The participation rates of men and women in their late fifties and early sixties have been falling fast. For many of the people experiencing the phenomenon, 'retirement' conceals lifelong, and not just long-term, unemployment.

In the London survey in 1985-6 (see Appendix) we tried to make estimates of the real unemployed, taking account of people's wishes as well as their availability and level of commitment. In the survey we found a huge reservoir of untapped productive capacity among prematurely retired men and women, and also among younger women, who want to combine part-time employment with the care of children, and/or older people or people with disabilities. Another tranche of human waste is to be found among that group of, mainly middle-aged, women who no longer have dependent children or disabled relatives to care for and yet accept meagre roles as housewives which involve them in very few hours of activity each week. Many, certainly not all, comply with rather than are fulfilled by a situation which amounts to social subordination.

Retirement pensioners are doubly dependent. Retirement is an economic and social invention of twentieth-century society which most people have no option but to accept at an arbitrary age. With the institutionalisation of minimal pensions the status of retirement represents a structured dependency (Townsend, in Phillipson and Walker 1986). The social associations of retirement are not those of employment, nor are they so frequently connected with political institutions and activities. While it would be wrong to claim that retirement pensioners and the long-term unemployed comprise a single stratum or class in every respect there is little doubt that they are largely divorced from working-class organisation, status and influence; and they share social security status and minimal living standards. With dependents in the household they comprise a quarter of the population.

Two sets of evidence bear in particular upon the contention of class motivation to minimise redistribution through taxation, and to institutionalise, and therefore both legalise and legitimate dependency. One is the extrapolation of the effects of Government measures in 1979 to change the annual readjustment of state pensions from an earnings to a price basis and in 1985–6 to restrict the benefits of the State Earnings Related Pensions Scheme (SERPS). Even on modest assumptions about economic growth the 1985 green paper showed that the value of state pensions relative to earnings would be more than halved by the year 2033 (DHSS 1985, vol. 3, p. 36). The second set of evidence involves more than 30 measures taken since 1979 with the overall effect of reducing the social security budget, and the level of unemployment benefit in particular. After a review of benefits for unemployed people, Atkinson and Micklewright concluded:

Since 1979 ... there has been a major shift away from insurance benefit towards reliance on income-tested assistance for the unemployed. Without public debate, there has been a shift in principle underlying income support for the unemployed. The role of insurance benefits has been eroded by the tightening of the contribution conditions, the extension of the disqualification period, the restriction of benefits to students, the abolition of the lower rate benefits, and the abatement for occupational pensioners; their value has been reduced by the taxation of benefits; and the abandonment of statutory indexation has made the position of recipients insecure.... These measures add up to a substantial reduction in the amount of National Insurance benefit paid to the unemployed ... [and] the covert abandonment of the insurance principle. (Atkinson and Micklewright 1988: 31–2)

This amounts to much more than the eternal, if statistically variable, stigmatisation referred to by Runciman or the self-selecting life-style strategies adopted by individuals and sub-cultural minorities implied in much of the American literature on the underclass. It is a twentieth-century phenomenon of class reconstruction and the institutionalisation of a new stratum. It involves state control of livelihood and the social status of 'claimant' or 'pensioner', and not only 'worker' or 'wage-earner'. Women and blacks suffer disproportionately in this process and

descriptive accounts of their experiences too often implicitly blame them for it.

## DEPENDENT MINORITIES

The analysis of underclass formation invites closer examination of some of the more distinctive social minorities. I have argued already that people with longer-term social security status, especially retirement pensioners and people with disabilities, and long-term claimants of means tested benefits, like some unemployed people and one-parent families, are not only divorced from most wage-earners by virtue of economic status and income, but by social status and associations as well. The concept 'minority' has to be reconsidered and applied to categories of people who are economically dependent, vulnerable, deprived and isolated in a number of observable and measurable respects. This treatment of the term follows a usage specifically adopted in an earlier work (Townsend 1979: especially 566–8). Social management can mean that numbers as well as severity of conditions tend to be played down, and the fragmentation of different categories maintained.

When, as in the United States and in part in Britain, evidence about an underclass is supposed to implicate primarily the black minority, the heterogeneity of that black minority is sometimes invoked to disavow the possible development of an underclass. Thus, the homogeneity required to produce a distinctive set of attitudes to society as well as the stability of composition over time to create a new stratum has been questioned by some sociologists. 'Ethnic minorities are dispersed across the occupational structure and there are very substantial variations between different ethnic groups'. (Gallie 1988: 468). But again, not only are the very large sections of elderly, disabled and unemployed persons who might also be considered for membership of this stratum set aside, but the heterogeneity of the black minority is not sufficiently related to its developing economic and social context. Changes between first-generation immigrants and black British have to be traced; and poorly organised inner-city policies, as well as restrictive local authority housing and regional investment policies of the central government evaluated. The dynamics of implicit policies of

racial discrimination, as practised in particular by the Home Office and the Department of the Environment, and the feeble support for the work of the Commission for Racial Equality by the central Government and in the administration of the law, make likely the ascription of underclass status to a very high, and increasing, proportion of the black population.

## THE RICH AND THE SUPER RICH

The restructuring of class must not be assumed to apply only to the lower strata. That would be an absurd theoretical proposition, but it is one which seems to be implied in some of the literature. If an underclass is being established on a substantial scale it is as a result of the exercise of new forms of power on behalf of vested interests. I believe we have to examine the functions and effects of the growth of corporations and especially of multinational corporations, and the corresponding elongation of the wage hierarchy. We must also examine those financial centres and institutions and international agencies which have facilitated this critical change.

The restructuring of finance capital and the international role of the City (Murray 1985) are the *dramatis personae* in explaining changes in class structure at the top. As a number of analysts have argued, financial and commercial interests are not coincident with national industrial interests and, generally speaking, the British Government has maintained a closer rapport, through the Treasury and the Bank of England, with the City than with the representatives of industry. The international role of the City has always gained precedence in policy over the long-term development of British industry (see, for example, the discussion of the dynamics of class in Stanworth 1984 and Scott 1982). The re-emphasis by Government on the market, the free flow of capital, and the withdrawal from state intervention, regulation and public spending, has enhanced the power of those connected with the City to gain from developments in the international market, even at the expense of the national interest – as measured by current and prospective employment and rates of economic growth.

The City has a stake in having access to the world economy and the maintenance of an over-valued sterling and the free



flow of capital, commodities and commercial services. Decisions that have long-term implications for British industry are taken on the basis of short-term financial considerations adopted in the City (Minns 1982). The City is of course the most important centre of wealth creation for the rich in Britain, and is the main institutional location for the servicing of their wealth (Stanworth 1984; Lisle Williams 1981).

The rapid internationalisation of the economy is necessarily having its effects on the varying ranges of structural inequality within nation-states. For example, the social distance between owners or management and workforce is liable to be greater when corporations have multiple subsidiaries and multiple workforces in different countries. Certainly the difference in wage between the highest and lowest points in the hierarchy is much greater. State regulation is likely to become less effective in moderating low wages and poor working conditions, because national laws and governments, as agents of control over market operations, can more easily be ignored or side-tracked.

Multinational companies – Nissan is the most recent example – play off one EEC country and region against others, with respect to grants, tax concessions, cheap finance and so on. The result, in the UK as in Ireland, has been a major reduction in the net tax rates on multinational business (that is, tax net of grant and other subsidies). A study of 17 of the top 20 UK companies in 1982 showed that 14 of them paid no Corporation Tax at all, as the result of offsets, allowances and declared losses. (Murray 1985).

The 'internationalisation' of the economy is of course much more than the operation of similarly structured but larger companies in different countries. There has been a change in the rate of industrial accumulation: the decline in productivity growth and GDP growth in Europe and North America affects rich and poor economies alike and there is a trend away from the relative independence of operation of individual firms, plants and units towards a more integrated mode of operation. This is believed to be primarily social in character, which transforms the structure of the operation and style of management. Thus, some analysts argue that there is a transition from the 'machinofacture' towards 'systemofacture'. There is:

integration between units. This is reflected in automation technology itself (where computer integrated manufacturing integrates previously discrete subprocesses), in interfirm relations (where arms-length relationships are supplanted by close relationships and co-ordinated production and product development) and in the inter-relatedness of work practices and factory organisation (where managerial orientations move to what has come to be called 'total productivity control'). In each case, the transition to systemic links requires significant changes in organisation and attitude so that the primary area of policy attention is first on social relations, and only subsequently on the adoption of the new flexible automation technologies. (Kaplinksy 1989: 2; see Hoffman and Kaplinksy 1988)

The 'big bang' of 1986 was a state-enforced attempt to prevent London from playing a reduced share in the internationalisation of capital formation. Too many in the City 'remained comfortably cossetted by the large earnings that could be earned in the restricted, fixed commission domestic securities market, and did not venture too far into the more competitive international arena'. Given growing international competition, profit levels could only be maintained by participation in larger deals. Outside financial institutions were allowed in. Capital was more centralised; the balkanisation of the market began to break up. Increased participation of outside companies is now resulting in the weak falling by the wayside. 'The viability of the city as a financial centre has been considerably enhanced. However, it has been at the cost of diminished national involvement in domestic financial transactions' (Thrift et al. 1988: 24).

The London survey of 1985-6 produced evidence suggesting the emergence of 'pedestal' elites with immense power and wealth, having relatively little to do with working people in their native country, and sometimes taking contemptuous attitudes to large sections of the population, and especially the dependent underclass (Townsend with Corrigan and Kowarzik 1987: chapter 7). Long ago, Lundberg coined the name 'super-rich' for these individuals, but did not relate the phenomenon closely to the evolution of the international economy and did not ponder the changes in structure, social relations and classes

(Lundberg 1969). Some of these socially remote rich people spend a small proportion of each year in their London homes, because of their roving roles as multinational managers, highly paid servants of international agencies and professional emissaries. Others have businesses which have profited from the growth of financial institutions servicing the internationalisation of the economy from London. This new 'overclass' is a counterpart of an 'underclass', some of whose members are impoverished partly as a consequence of the relocation of industry overseas and the more fanatical pursuit of monetarist policies at home.

### THE ATTITUDES OF THE RICH

One man in his mid-thirties hoped that his six-figure income would grow rapidly, and admitted that his assets would be valued at nearly a million pounds. He held strong views about poverty. 'There is no poverty. Now you can get money from the state. People don't even have to go to work. You don't have to put up with working in an unrewarding situation'. He strongly disagreed with the propositions that the gap between rich and poor was too wide and that the rich should be more highly taxed. He strongly opposed the idea of putting controls on 'some people's expensive way of living' to reduce poverty and disagreed with the statement that a lot of people entitled to claim benefits do not claim them. Finally, he strongly agreed that cuts in public services like health and education could be made without increasing the number of people in poverty and that, if there was any poverty, it was more likely to be reduced by increasing Britain's wealth than by making incomes more equal.

By the criteria of economic power or control it is possible to differentiate between the small class of super-rich and the prosperous upper middle class, and yet to encounter similar attitudes within a work context often increasingly internationalised. A notable development in Britain's class structure in recent decades is the disproportionately large growth of a prosperous class helping the dominant class, in Runciman's expression, to 'exercise their domination' successfully. This class can be said to extend, below the top 1 or 2 per cent, to cover the

richest 30 per cent of the population. Their disposable incomes are three, four or more times larger than the minimum levels of social security benefit payable by the state to those unable to take paid employment. Their assets, including owner-occupied homes, are considerable. Many live in two-wage households without dependants. Most own a large array of consumer durables and can afford to pursue expensive leisure activities and holidays. They are managers of local branches of giant national services and financial institutions, or members of professions working for large public and private bureaucracies.

Of course, attitudes among them vary considerably, but some of them hold hard views of those in poverty. In the London survey, for example, a bank director in his forties said he had immediate control over six supervisory and 400 other staff. In 1986, he was earning £40 000 a year and had received, in addition, a bonus of £50 000 the previous year (now an annual event). He enjoys a substantial package of fringe benefits as well, including car, medical expenses, meals and pension. 'The changes in the market have increased work pressures, with more takeovers of companies and more international deals'. He was very conscious of the new international context within which the bank's activities were located. He believed that there were few poor people in Britain and that many who drew benefits were not entitled to them. He did not consider that the gap between rich and poor was too wide, or that the rich should be more highly taxed. He strongly disagreed with any suggestion of introducing more controls over wealth or the rich and believed that any residual poverty would be solved by economic growth rather by redistribution. Finally he believed that cuts in NHS spending could be made without increasing poverty. Others among the most prosperous were equally emphatic. Some were vehemently scornful about the work-shy attitudes among unemployed people, and wished, as it was expressed by one of those interviewed, 'to control the way the poor spend their money'. This ideology is not, of course, new. Around the turn of the last century enlightened liberals like Charles Booth and William Beveridge went into print about the possibility of setting up compulsory labour camps.

Among this group of highly prosperous people were some who had divided opinions. One the one hand they shared the restrictive views about state spending and the undesirability of

further taxation of the rich, but on the other took a much more sympathetic attitude to the difficulties of poor people. For example, the manager of a local branch of a national bank was interviewed. In 1986 he was earning about £20 000 but this figure was heavily subsidised because he had the advantage of a very low interest housing loan, car, pension, substantial monthly life assurance premiums and payment of a season ticket from the London suburbs. He said he was working long hours, having worked 44 in the previous week but specifying a further 22 hours in answer to a range of questions in working in the home, looking after children and working for a voluntary group. His wife did not have paid employment but herself worked long hours looking after children. Both of them reflected an educated understanding of poverty. Thus, when asked what he meant by the term he said, 'Not having an adequate diet. Not being able to pay for fuel of any kind to heat and cook. Not being able to afford adequate clothing and footwear. Not being able to keep up your health because of insufficient money. Not being able to afford some treat out of the basic routine every three months. People live in poverty if they cannot provide for their children, get together with their family and have a holiday'. He put the poverty line for his own family at £200 per week or approximately three times the Government's minimum standard. But while he recognised that poverty was extensive he did not consider that the gap between the rich and poor was too wide, or that the rich should be more heavily taxed, and believed that NHS spending could be cut without increasing poverty.

At the other extreme there were prosperous people who expressed very different attitudes from those expressed by each of these groups. Thus, a company director with high income and assets valued at nearly half a million pounds, whose wife also received a substantial income because she ran her own fashion business, took the view that the rich should be more highly taxed, that it was impossible to cut the public services without increasing poverty and that the gap between rich and poor was far too wide. However, he was not involved in social or political activities to change the status quo and appeared not to consider that he had the capacity to intervene effectively.

Some in this category perceive themselves as having personal good fortune in an unjust and unequal society, but they also

believe they have no possibility of bringing about any form of social justice for others. In interviews a number of them seemed to be shrugging their shoulders metaphorically about their own relative affluence in the midst of so much squalor and desperation. 'What can I do? I am just a small cog in a large machine. I just get on with my immediate professional, administrative or scientific expertise. And political activity really is beneath me and not just something which is not expected of me in my present job'. This attitude seemed to apply in particular to those working as administrators of professionals in the public services. Thus, a social security office manager in charge of 70 staff told us that he was 'working in a pressurised environment, dealing with people who are sometimes at the end of their tether, and you can only deal with the surface problem and there's so much else which is wrong. It upsets me a great deal. I can't switch off from it. I feel nothing is being done. We're very understaffed and I don't think the conditions [in which people are seen] are necessary'. But in a wide variety of other organisational and professional contexts we found people who did not feel comfortable with the roles expected of them or acted them out only because they felt they had little or no alternative. They appeared to have accepted that they acted only in conformity with what was expected of them and, in effect, felt absolved from a sense of personal responsibility for the consequences of what they did. The feeling of frustration seemed, on the evidence of the survey interviews, to be widespread. The definition and control of role within the workplace, and within society, will bear a lot more attention.

Diverse and often confused attitudes are struck by prosperous people. Many in the upper or prosperous middle classes have adopted a language of fatalism and not only of self-protection. Occasionally the language also conveys a contempt for self as well as acknowledgement of the serious deprivation of poor people. Ironically, their ambiguous stance needs to be compared with the high moral commitment, if censorious condescension, of their less numerous Victorian predecessors. Certainly they convey far less acknowledgement of social position and power. Perhaps bureaucratic organisation influences middle-class attitudes towards the end of the twentieth century as powerfully as did religious beliefs towards the end of the nineteenth.

## CONCLUSION

Sociological work on social class during the 1970s and 1980s has concentrated on social 'standing' and mobility, rather than the operational definition of number of, and distance between classes and the causal influence of Government policy on these structural factors. As a consequence that work has not seemed very relevant to either the description or the explanation of trends in inequality in Britain.

There are material conditions, as measured by income and wealth, but also by physical, environmental, working and social location, that help to construct class. The institutions which govern these conditions also sanction and determine the roles that people are allocated, and hence bequeath different degrees of 'positional control' over others. Through its policies the Government bolsters, adapts and creates these institutions. This process has to be understood if changing inequalities are to be accurately described and explained.

This is easy to recognise if we trace the widening gulf between rich and poor in recent decades, but particularly in the 1980s. Although the Government has been slow to publish the evidence, and has scarcely done so in a manner calculated to suggest that information is being maximised in the public interest, official statistics confirm that the range of disposable incomes, like the range of original earnings among both men and women, has widened markedly in the 1980s. This is the result of a combination in particular of tax, social security, employment and economic policies. But it may also be the result, as argued in this paper, of the rapid internationalisation of economic institutions.

Undoubtedly classes are being restructured. Identifying and measuring the material and institutional context that different strata of the population occupy becomes a matter of major importance. Similarly, the criteria by which the number of classes and the distance between them are decided have to be given a lot more attention. One question which has begun to attract considerable interest is the existence, size and membership of an 'underclass'. However, changes in other classes, and especially those consisting of the rich and powerful deserve as much recognition and attention. These are even embryonic signs of the emergence of a small international 'overclass'.

Class structure is primarily influenced by Government social and economic policies and by economic institutions. Both have been discussed briefly in this paper in relation to official statistics, but also to survey data. There are of course complementary themes, such as the influences upon trends in inequality of the initiatives taken by companies, voluntary organisations and families and the paradoxes of age, gender and race inequalities. Thus among the most interesting features of trends in inequality in Britain recently have been greater inequality in living standards between different phases of the life 'cycle'; dual career households, especially in middle life; and rapid augmentation of personal wealth, especially by means of the housing market, and especially therefore, in London and the South East.

There is therefore cause for a change in the sociology of class. First, better exposition and analysis of the structure and trends in the structure of class need to be developed. Second, the connections between both Government policies and evolving economic, especially international economic, institutions, and class inequality have to be brought out more clearly and more precisely. Third, collective or institutional 'motivation' must be a prime theme of analysis. For example, social and economic policies represent forms of collective discrimination favouring some groups or sections of society at the expense of others. And this can be properly recognised only if social minorities come to be identified in a broader sense than that commonly used. Governments can create minorities, by institutionalising forms of dependency, and not only act to ameliorate or exacerbate their conditions.

## **APPENDIX**

### **1985–86 Greater London Survey Methods**

The survey of 'Londoners' Living Standards' was conducted in some 1700 households across London, using stratified random sampling. First, 30 wards were selected at regular intervals from a total of 755 London wards, ranked by four indicators of material deprivation: percentage of economically active adults who were unemployed, percentage of households overcrowded, and percentage of households not owning a car and neither



owning nor buying their own home. The last two indicators are surrogates for income and wealth respectively. All four indicators were drawn from 1981 Census data. Unlike censuses in some other countries, data about income and wealth are not collected in the United Kingdom census. This procedure at the first stage was designed to ensure representation of prosperous and deprived populations in the city.

Second, within each of the 30 wards, approximately 120 addresses were selected at random from the Postcode Address File. This file has the advantage of being up to date but the disadvantage of including a high percentage of ineligible addresses – many being non-residential and others being buildings which are either vacant or even demolished. Interviews were completed with 56 per cent of households expected to be eligible for the survey. Within households, 73 per cent of the individual adults who were members of those households were interviewed. Exceptional efforts were made to secure a larger response, although it was known at the time that Government as well as independent survey organisations, including the OPCS, were concerned about the fall in response rates in the London region (often within the range 50–60 per cent) which tended to be lower than that in any other region. An unusually large number of recall visits were arranged by the body carrying out the interviews, the Research and Intelligence Unit's Survey Services Group of the Greater London Council, to try to find individuals at addresses where no contact had been established. After the Greater London Council was abolished in April 1986 the survey organisation MORI generously undertook a programme of recall visits and interviews. In the event, most of the interviews were carried out between September 1985 and May 1986 and the recall programme produced a further 200 interviews in the summer and early autumn of 1986.

The basis of the survey lay, first, in a household questionnaire covering housing, locational and household information and, second, an individual questionnaire. Each member of the household over 16 years of age was invited to answer questions about employment/unemployment, income and savings, unpaid work, health experience and attitudes towards deprivation.

The final response yielded data from 1716 households and 2703 individuals within those households. A detailed account of the fieldwork will be found in Owen, J. (1987), *Survey of Living*

*Standards in London: Fieldwork Report*, London Research Centre, London Residuary Body, Survey Services and Methodology Group.

By the normal criteria of representativeness which are applied to sample data we found that the 1985–6 survey conformed closely with Census information about the Greater London population, by age, sex, economic activity, occupational class and ethnic status. This is described in detail in the full report.

With the winding-up of the Greater London Council the Poverty Research (London) Trust (whose Trustees are Professors Adrian Sinfield, Hilary Rose and Alan Walker) took over the financial management of the survey. A follow-up survey which had all along been planned in the most and least prosperous boroughs of London (Bromley and Hackney) to unravel further aspects of the relationship between poverty and the labour market, was now undertaken by MORI. A representative sample survey in three of the wards in each of the boroughs was completed in 1987. Altogether, interviews were completed with 407 individuals in Bromley and 381 in Hackney.

The administration of the final stages of the research programme, and the development of computer disks and files, took place at the Polytechnic of North London during 1986–8. Access to the data is encouraged, at modest cost, and is available at the University of North London and the Department of Social Policy and Planning in the University of Bristol. A copy of the files has also been lodged at the Data Bank at the University of Essex.

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# 7 Finding Ways to Engage Racism

Terry Chivers and Jill Sharp

Since the post-war entry of black minorities to Britain, there have been major changes in the approaches adopted by people directly involved in race relations, and in the way sociology has been involved in these changes. The approach of those working in race relations has followed a tendency towards the engagement of racism at the level of social interaction. Because the level is social, people turned (knowingly or unknowingly) to sociology because it offered them the kind of analytic wherewithal that they needed to combat racism. Sociology has therefore been employed as useful knowledge much as Comte envisaged.

This increasingly applied use of sociology arises directly from a change in belief among anti-racists that racism needs to be actively engaged. Finding out about racism and publishing the findings is important, but does little to remove it. People concerned with opposing racism have sought ways of more direct struggle.

Yet why use sociology in this process? We believe that the answer lies in a range of factors: conceptualisation, perception of social processes and social facts. We shall also argue that sociology has a role to play in the mechanisms used to combat racism. Let us briefly illustrate each of these factors. The value of conceptualisation is that it supplies tools to think with. As we discuss below, each of the major approaches to racism draws on key concepts which are grounded in sociology. 'Multiculturalism' for example depends on a framework of analysis of curriculum and classroom settings drawn from the sociology of education.

The second factor, social processes, is used to describe the operations of workplaces (subsequently referred to as 'organisations'). Most workplaces are organised with different levels of responsibility, supervision, status, distinct tasks and so on. These concepts all relate in their different ways to power and

control. Thus even the actual task is only mine or yours because we have been assigned power in that respect. Power and control are crucial social processes which will crop up elsewhere in what we have to say.

The third factor was social facts. In a Durkheimian sense, this concept is partly concerned with the way in which our role behaviour is coerced by others. When we perceive the pattern of expectations that each role engenders, we achieve a limited potential freedom – the ability to redefine that role in ways which may push back the boundaries which others seek to place around us. This could be useful to persons seeking social change. Elsewhere in sociology, the term ‘social facts’ is used to indicate evidence – such as we might collect to demonstrate the presence of racism and establish the need for action. In the sense used here, social facts are a kind of intellectual ammunition. We further argue that sociology is useful as a mechanism of change. This is a reference to emerging experiential forms of activity associated with training, which so far belong principally to the American work against racism.

How far does this sociology take us? To answer, one needs to realise that action against racism can occur at several levels, each of which is relatively autonomous. The personal and the international levels are distinct. But one of the purposes of sociology is to make the links between levels. Thus personal racism within a group can have effects on an entire organisation, which in turn relates to some wider societal system, such as education, religion, business and so on. Equally, these societal systems are liable to be linked internationally. Even more important are the links which operate in the opposite direction, that is the international influences that affect societies, organisations, groups and individuals. Hence all attempts at social change are faced by massive forces. Planned changes are part of an entire influence system. But we see this as a case for promoting such changes, not for abandoning the effort.

## INTRODUCING THE MODELS

Much of our subsequent discussion will revolve around the ‘models’ in Figure 7.1. By the term ‘model’ we mean the set of

related ideas and practices which constitute a particular approach. Each model is given a title, which is a concept and which seeks to carry some explanation of the approach.

The first model we refer to as the 'academic'. It is concerned with the teaching of sociology at various levels of the education system. Some of this sociology teaching is concerned with race and racism and that is our focus. Model 2 is that of the race relations practitioners – a reference to the organised body of workers whose central task is to achieve reconciliation between ethnic groups in our society.

Model 3 has been termed 'multiculturalism' because this signposts an approach which seeks to foster integrative race relations by promoting diverse ethnicities in Britain. The view is that many cultures contribute to a rich and complex whole. It is a perspective seeking to foster good race relations. In a way, this stands in contrast to Model 4, 'anti-racism', where the objective is to oppose bad race relations. The aim of Model 4 is to locate racism and defeat it. The final model, 'training and development', relates to two forms of action, both of which have become growing matters of attention in our society, especially since World War II. For present purposes, training may be seen as the attempt to change people and organisations in respect of race relations. Development seeks to foster growth in people and organisations to the same end. These five models represent relatively distinct approaches in the struggle against racism. They seem to us to sum up the number to have emerged to date; others could come along at any time. Quite possibly consultancy could develop into a model in due course.

The models might be considered in terms of particular types of action or particular methods. Thus, as a type of action, the academic model is associated with teaching, the race relations practitioners' model with stopping bad race relations, and so on. In addition, the models may also be usefully seen as methods, that is particular procedures for achieving desired goals. As a method, the academic model aims to teach people about racism so that they avoid it. The training model as a method seeks to enable people to avoid racism and to prevent it where it exists. The value of thinking of the models as methods is that they no longer present themselves as discrete bodies of ideas with boundaries. As methods, the models can be seen as means which each of the other models can use. Thus as a

<i>The five models</i>	<i>1. Academic</i>	<i>2. Race relations practitioners</i>	<i>3. Multiculturalism</i>	<i>4. Anti-racism</i>	<i>5. Training and development</i>
<i>Issues</i>					
1. What model can offer against racism.	Knowledge.	Knowledge. Influence.	Curriculum diversification.	Cultural and structural change.	Organisational change.
2. Tactics.	Didactics.	Conciliation. The courts. Negotiation. Advice.	Integration.	Political education and action. Exposé.	Group work. Staff development. Organisational politicking.
3. Rationale for change.	Information is power.	Persuasion. Enforcement.	Tolerance.	Exposing racism. Sanctions. Changing structures.	Develop the change agent.
4. Setting of operation.	Classroom.	Community.	Classroom.	Anywhere in the social structure.	Classroom. Laboratory. In-plant.
5. Research form favoured.	Various.	Natural science.	Interpretivist. Natural science.	Interpretivist.	Various.

*Figure 7.1* Models of the uses of sociology in combating racism.



method, the academic model (Model 1) could be seen as a form of training (Model 5). An example would be a trainer delivering a lecture on the nature of racism. Similarly, the training method could be considered in relation to multiculturalism (Model 3). An example would be a teacher training programme in relation to multicultural education. As methods, therefore, the models take on a flexibility which will be useful for understanding the overlapping nature of their activities.

## DEVELOPING THE MODELS

The left-hand column of Figure 7.1 sets out five matters that we wish to examine. The first is what has the nature of the model to offer in the contest with racism? This suggests certain resources. For example, a crucial academic resource for Model 1 is knowledge. The second issue is labelled 'tactics'. This refers to the means used by the models to achieve success in their opposition to racism. Thus the academic model typically uses didactics, while the race-relations practitioners' model typically uses conciliation. The third issue, 'rationale for change' is concerned with how the models would rationalise or explain their perspective. Thus for the academic model it could be argued that its contribution of information arms its students with a power against racism. The fourth issue is the 'setting of operation'. For the academic model, the setting will typically be the classroom; as it will also often be for the training model. The last issue is about the form of research favoured by each model. The race relations practitioners' model tends to favour a natural science paradigm, whereas the anti-racist paradigm seems more often to prefer an interpretivist paradigm.

We can explore these five issues by discussing the chronology, nature and implied method of each of the models. The oldest is the academic model, which has a history dating back to the inception of sociology as a taught discipline in this country. Thus Ginsberg's *Sociology*, which first appeared in 1934, has a chapter entitled 'Race and Environment'. We can therefore say that the sociological consideration of race has occurred within higher education in Britain for over half a century. Today, race and ethnicity have a place in sociology courses up and down the country. A check of the current introductions to the discipline

(Worsley 1987, Bilton 1987, Abercrombie 1988) confirms this statement. Moreover, race and ethnic relations feature in the current research and publications of the academic model.

As a method, the academic model is widely adopted, being evident in all the other models. Thus race relations practitioners, teachers involved in multicultural and anti-racist education, and trainers, often give lectures, hold formal seminars and the like. The academic model is well established and that may be part of its attraction. Yet as a method for stimulating social change, the evidence suggests that we might do well to look elsewhere (Peppard 1980).

The academic model can be analysed straightforwardly enough. As a model, what it has to offer in the struggle against racism is knowledge. Facts can be assembled from a range of sources, for example Daniel 1968, Rose 1969, Smith 1977, or Brown 1984). New material is constantly appearing. For instance, the journal *New Community* devotes a regular amount of space to recent changes: in the law, the political situation, the educational position and so on. The strategy is didactic: teaching people to understand, and hence avoid racism. The rationale is that information is power, or at least one form of it, as Touraine (1971) has argued. The typical setting of the academic model is the classroom. The research paradigm may be natural science or interpretivist, and today there is a good range of methods and techniques.

The race relations practitioners' model is a reference to what is sometimes called the race relations industry. The model might be dated to the setting up of the Race Relations Board in 1965. The central organisation is today the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), while at the local level, there is a network of community relations councils (CRCs), subject to local control. There has been a range of interpretation of the CRCs' cautious style (see Sivanandan 1982; Banton 1985; Keel 1987). As a method, the model might be seen in its role of special expertise. Because of this, all the other models will quite frequently invite race relations officers into their settings to outline aspects of their work and offer special insights.

What the model brings to race relations is not only knowledge: it is also a particular capacity to influence situations. This influence derives from the legal position – the 1976 Race Relations Act being of particular note in this connection.

For example, this legislation defines direct and indirect discrimination. Because of this legal support, race relations practitioners will on occasion turn to the courts. However, the law is used more as a means for negotiation than for prosecution. Race relations work is principally concerned with conciliation. In addition, advice and instruction will be offered to members of the minorities experiencing discrimination. These then are the tactics of the model.

The rationale for the existence of such a model lies in its capacity to bring about change by persuasion and, in the last analysis, by enforcement. Critics of this model might favour an alternative rationale: the desire of government to remove itself from day-to-day involvement in an enormously contentious arena of conflict and pass it over instead to a quango. Such a move permits government to avoid direct responsibility for race issues, and is in line with those who argue that there has been a political marginalisation of race (Katznelson 1973, Ben-Tovim 1986). In fact, the two rationales do not conflict: the second could be interpreted as an extension of the first. The setting for the operation of the model is the community as a whole, since race relations practitioners are involved with a wide range of public and private organisations. The CRE has carried out and supported a variety of research, and a certain amount is also organised locally. There seems to be a preference for the natural science paradigm, though this is not an exclusive position.

Sociology is implicit in much of this race relations work. For instance, there is the task of debunking, which Berger (1963) cites as typical sociological behaviour. The practitioners will often find themselves dispelling illusions about race and biology, race and culture and so on. Moreover, the practitioners will often be dealing with racist activities and orientations. These generate social interactions in which roles, power and conflict (sociological concepts) will be matters of experience. To a point, then, race relations work is an application of sociology.

## OFFSPRING OF THE LIBERAL HOUR

The third model, multiculturalism, emerged in the 1960s. By this time, a phase of assimilationism was passing. It had simplistically assumed a progressive absorption of black people

into the dominant white culture. This phase was replaced by one of integrationism: a doctrine which sought to promote the existence of different cultures. It was a model of cultural diversity – an offspring of what has been termed ‘the liberal hour’ (Rose 1969). This might be dated from 1965, when Roy Jenkins was appointed to the Home Office, to 1968 when he left (Banton 1985).

Clearly the policy of promoting cultural diversity is wider than multicultural education. However, the latter, particularly in terms of its impact on schools, has been the principal example of a multicultural perspective. Today, multicultural education is associated with attempts to diversify the curriculum in schools to reflect more adequately the ethnic diversity of society. An important aspect of this activity has been the change in syllabus content across a number of subjects. The approach might be characterised as one which fosters an appreciation of the cultures of other peoples. Changes along these lines had been proceeding for perhaps two decades when the Swann Report (1985) was published. The Report attempted to promote multicultural education. It supported such trends as the teaching of English as a second language and policies of equal opportunities in schools, a concept now associated with gender, race and disability. The Report and the response to it have helped in the process of gaining acceptance for multicultural education. Yet its impact on the schools is decidedly patchy. The future is difficult to discern: not only are there always new initiatives in the offing but examination changes and involvement in national curriculum activity are enormously absorbing of teacher time.

As a method it would seem that multiculturalism must make some headway. All the models embrace it to a point. Thus colleges in both Further and Higher Education generally accept the need to cater for the minorities in student intakes. The race relations councils have sought a varied ethnic composition. Some versions of anti-racism have argued that anti-racist and multicultural education are essentially integrated (for example, Leicester 1986). Training and development seek to achieve black and white participants and facilitators in many courses. Multiculturalism might be characterised as a widely accepted method of approaching race relations.

These points in large measure cover what multiculturalism has to offer in opposition to racism. The ideal is many cultures living together, side by side, in mutual respect, i.e. the anti-thesis of racism. The tactic is integration. For example, one can show how different cultures pursue leisure; one can compare dress, system of kin relationships, and institutions such as marriage, coming of age and so on. The message is 'different but equal', diversity within solidarity. The rationale for this approach is that the acceptance of diversity promotes tolerance, while tolerance cannot sustain racism. So far as the setting of multiculturalism is concerned, the classroom best typifies the educational influence. No single favoured research form appears to have become predominant: Taylor (1985) reviews a variety of approaches.

Perhaps one could be forgiven for the comment that the sociological nature of multiculturalism is self-evident. Sociology is essentially bound up with the study and understanding of cultures and societies: comparison has always been a fundamental method of sociological analysis. Multiculturalism is inevitably sociological.

## FROM MULTICULTURALISM TO ANTI-RACISM

Anti-racism, the fourth model, grew up in critique of multiculturalism during the 1970s. The problem with multiculturalism was held to be that integrating cultures does not necessarily attack racism. It was perhaps not too difficult to be tolerant of Hinduism in India or Rastafarianism in Jamaica. But if those religions were in your neighbourhood, and the cause of ribald comment, tolerance had to compete with powerful local pressures. In practice, a programme of multicultural education may find itself competing for pupil loyalty against racist abuse, graffiti and jokes. Learning at the intellectual level may have little impact on normative-attitudinal levels where racism lurks. The focus of anti-racism then, was to prevent racism, rather than to discourage it by seeking multiculturalist improvements in race relations. Since the anti-racist aim was to break the socialisation cycle which perpetuated racism, it was not surprising to find anti-racism following

multiculturalism into the education sector. The ultimate goal was an anti-racist culture – one that actively discouraged the development of racism.

Anti-racism has spread as a method to all the other models, although not at a uniform pace. In the academic world, despite discussion and writing about the topic, higher education lags well behind the advances made in some schools. As Moore has shown (1988) race and ethnic perspectives have as yet had little impact on higher education curricula. Race relations practitioners of Model 2, can adopt an anti-racist perspective in their thinking and writing.

But where anti-racism has sometimes found more active alliance is with multicultural education. In some schools and Colleges of Further Education, the concept of a whole-school-policy (for example, Lynch 1987) has gained ground. In some versions, this policy is related to opposition to institutional racism – an important concern of anti-racism. The anti-racist perspective is also to be found in the training model, such as the training programmes along anti-racist lines developed by Saul Alinski's organisation in America.

What anti-racism has to offer in the struggle against racism is a set of ideas aimed at cultural and structural change. Racism, according to this way of thinking, is not a superficial quality of British culture. Rather is it a cultural manifestation of deep-seated inequalities in the social structure. Thus Troyna and Williams (1986) discuss a variety of perspectives on the development of anti-racism.

In tactical terms, anti-racism is apt to support political education in schools and colleges (see for example Rex 1987). Political education affords a context in which anti-racist ideas might properly be discussed. Other tactics include political action at the local level or community action (Ben-Tovim 1986), and the exposé, that is, showing how politics actually operates to the disadvantage of black people, in the hope that this will precipitate change.

The crucial rationale is the notion of changing structures: 'show how they support racism; operate sanctions against them, if this is necessary and possible, but ensure that they do in fact change'. What do 'they' actually amount to? The answer is institutions, rules, roles, procedures and so on. Anti-racist action could occur in a variety of settings – anywhere in the

dominant societal institutions, any organisation and any group. There is no necessary limit. The research form favoured is equally unlimited. However, thus far, perhaps the interpretivist form has been preferred.

Where lies the sociology in all this? The key issue is the analysis of social change, such as in the work of Troyna and Williams (1986), whose interest in promoting anti-racist policies leads them into an analysis of local education authorities' activities. The Ben-Tovim team (1986) adopted an action-research approach, combining efforts at political change with analysis of political processes of white support for racism.

### WHAT KIND OF TRAINING?

The last model, training and development, can make a claim to be both new and old. So far as racism is concerned, training underwent considerable development in America after World War II. An important catalyst to change was the situation of racial antagonism in the armed forces (Nordlie 1987). In Britain, racism awareness training tended to receive a little more attention after the Scarman Report on the Brixton disorders of 1981. However, racism awareness training has retained its predominantly psychological orientation. Apart from some local authority training during the 1970s, it is associated with a controversial confrontational style, which has led a number of critics to characterise it as worse than useless (Sivanandan 1982, John 1988). During this time too, the Industrial Language Training Scheme began. Although this is much concerned with helping the minorities with language difficulties in industrial settings, the Scheme has tried some experiential work (Murray and Chandola 1980). Yet despite these points, one authority could state that 'the field of training in race relations remains largely unexplored' (Peppard 1980).

Since that comment, the position has begun to change slowly. Some of the training associated with the Training Agency has begun to be applied to race relations, an example being Stairway Training, an independent, self-supporting agency, involved since 1988 in work with minorities. At least one trade union has begun to experiment with training, while a certain amount has occurred in industry and to a lesser extent among

community groups. In some schools and colleges it has been possible to draw on the resources of In-Service Education for Teachers. In the latter, the ideas of multiculturalism have begun to find a place in staff and curriculum development in colleges of further education (DES 1988). Will the training revolution predicted for the 1990s influence race relations too?

What kind of approach should such developments follow? Peppard (1980) suggests drawing on the resources of management training. The CRE's two volumes on training (1987) seems to take a similar line. But McIlroy (1981) is not so sure, pointing out that much training in industry is narrow and restrictive. His preference is for a training that forms links between the racism within organisations and that within major societal institutions. This model of open organisational analysis seems to offer the most attractive suggestion to date.

Training and development are essentially methods. Training is about changing people and organisations through learning; development is about expanding abilities (Kenney and Reid 1986, Craig 1987). What the training and development model brings to the struggle with racism is the possibility of organisational change. The model is concerned with both the formal and the informal organisational levels. Changing people, developing abilities and skills needs to be seen in this context. The tactics are group work, simulations, role play, games. This is a form of staff development but the goal is less one of career advancement than of enabling staff to achieve some success in contending with cultural and institutional racism. This may involve attempts to influence power structures and key personnel within them – organisational politicking, in short. The rationale is therefore to change organisations by developing the change agent, that is, organisation members. The setting will often be the classroom, used for example for staff assessments, discussions, group work and so on. But experiential activities might be better carried out in social skills laboratories. Equally, in-plant work may be expected to continue, perhaps increase. In Britain, so far, research is nascent. But in America, a wide range of research forms has been utilised; no one type could be said to predominate.

To see the sociology in this model, one must turn again to the concept of change. To change organisations, one will have to study and understand them: their power structure, cultural



forms, institutional patterns and so on. This is the stuff of sociological studies of organisations. Certainly the approach may not be quite the same for training and development. The trainer may often have to start with a course but that is his/her means to organisational analysis. The objective will be to help participants to understand the organisational structure which not only defines them but other organisation members too. Training and development open up the opportunity of a sociology in action, while the perceptions thus achieved will accrue not only to the trainer but also to the participants.

### RACISM HAS TO BE REVEALED

Let us move on now to consider the nature of racism to which the models are opposed. Its ubiquity is largely unperceived by most people. Even when it occurs under their noses, its impact is minimal, perhaps because the white persons concerned are not personally involved. For example, at a school where the headmaster and a teacher responsible for equal opportunities were striving to move towards a form of multicultural anti-racist education, staff attention had to be drawn to a series of racist incidents which had occurred on the premises; although the incidents were occurring more frequently a number of the staff seemed taken aback (Knight 1989).

Because the view is so common that 'there is no problem here', any attempt to tackle racism has to preface action with research. Our own interest in racism among young people necessitated a local study in North East England. Discussions with black students led us to believe that racism was a common manifestation, yet on numerous occasions, we came across people who would tell us that because there were few black people in the region, our research would find little racism. This view was as common among academics as among non-academics, and sadly illustrates how racism is perceived to be attached to black people instead of to white people – its real source in our society.

In the autumn of 1987 and the spring of 1988, we collected data from a sample of two groups of young people in Manpower Services training schemes (business and building) in one town, and a student group belonging to a college in a nearby town.

The students were studying social sciences and were not therefore representative of the whole student body. It is possible that social science students are rather less amenable to racism than other students, partly because a certain type of person may be attracted to social sciences, and/or partly because they are more likely than a number of other disciplines to be educative about race (see Chivers 1989, for more details).

Numbers were limited (65 business trainees, 32 building trainees, and 32 students): the whole study can be said to be no more than suggestive of some young people's racial views in the towns concerned. Moreover, the small size of the sample means that the extent of the analysis is restricted. Even so, the evidence of racism would appear undeniable. About 40 per cent of trainees thought that the minorities were responsible for unemployment. Most of the trainees and half of the students rejected the idea of going out with a young person of the minorities. The notion of interracial marriage was rejected by nearly all the trainees and over half the students. Forty per cent of the business trainees and 59 per cent of the building trainees wanted Britain to be entirely white. Forty-three per cent of the business trainees and 50 per cent of the building trainees believed that most people disliked the minorities. Around a third or more of the trainees thought that the presence of black shopkeepers had harmed their area. Subsequent discussion with the sample showed a considerable exaggeration of the numbers of these black shopkeepers. Over a third of the whole sample said that the minorities should not be allowed to come and settle in Britain. On each question, building trainees expressed more racism than business trainees.

In addition, there was considerable ignorance about the numbers of the minorities. Only 16 per cent of the entire sample correctly identified the proportion of the population in Britain who belong to the non-white minorities, that is, around 4 per cent. Another form of ignorance concerned the number of workers from the minorities still entering Britain. Most immigrants entering since the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act have been kin of workers already here. New male full-time workers have been no more than a few thousand a year. Yet 61 per cent of business trainees and 88 per cent of building trainees thought that 'large numbers of immigrant workers are still entering Britain'. Even a quarter of the students thought so too.

Fortunately, there was evidence of more enlightened views. Thus 95 per cent of respondents thought that the minorities were as intelligent as white people. Similarly, 84 per cent of respondents felt that the minorities should be able to join the traineeship or college where the respondents themselves were studying.

The purpose of this research was to demonstrate the need for training against racism. Thus we were able to use our figures in a course of race relations training workshops, which took place in 1989. At no stage in the organisation of the workshops did the issue of the need for them arise. In this case, at least, we believe this demonstrates the value of collecting evidence before launching into remedial action.

## INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Institutional racism is today perhaps the biggest problem that the minorities have to face. 'Racism is seen and experienced by black people as having much more to do with the way in which institutions work towards them than it has to do with the particular attitude of this or that individual' (Hall 1987: 22). Institutions are accepted forms of behaviour in daily life. They influence the culture and are influenced by it. They are social facts with a social influence. It follows that any institutional change needs to be tackled at the social level; merely changing individual behaviour will not change the institution. Hence, institutional racism will require social action.

The extent and form of institutional racism can be illustrated in education, housing, policing and employment. For example, the Rampton Report (DES 1981) draws attention to the often low opinion held by teachers of children of West Indian origin. Because of this low opinion, the poor performance of these children became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Verma and Ashworth (1988) showed how careers teaching in secondary schools was primarily devoted to disabusing the minority pupils of what the teachers considered unreasonable aspirations. The CRE (1984) investigation into housing allocation in the London borough of Hackney found evidence of consistent racial bias such that black people tended to receive the least desirable forms of accommodation. Just how this could happen may be understood from another study, Henderson and Karn's (1987)

work in Birmingham. Housing officers tended to match the property allocated to stereotyped images of applicants. Black people suffered in consequence.

Racism is well institutionalised in some sections of the police. Ben-Tovim et al. (1986) quote a *Runnymede Trust Bulletin* report about two constables who, when told of a robbery, instantly assumed that they were looking for black youths. Subsequently, a more detailed description explained that the suspects were white. In February 1988, the Manpower Services Commission's *Youth Training News* reported that in the Sheffield/Rotherham area (which reflected the national situation), ethnic minority trainees were under-represented in the employer-led provision, which was most likely to lead on to jobs. Mason and Jewson (1989) drew attention to assessment procedures in applications to companies of their research. Various kinds of unfair discrimination entered into judgements about acceptability, with negative stereotypes disadvantaging the minorities.

Very often, this institutional racism went quite unperceived, while the resulting disadvantage was unintended in any personal sense. Yet the result was that black people tended to find their access to resources blocked. All too often, the minorities did not find themselves competing like members of the principal classes in society, ending up with items of social goods that the rest of society did not want. Institutional racism, such as that described above, is extremely difficult to fight; often it is a silent form of disadvantage that is not even sensed.

The first step is to understand how these institutions operate, that is, what mechanisms are involved in the generation and reproduction of racism? The next step is to identify how institutions interrelate within organisations and relate to the massive societal institutions, such as the education system or the political system and so on. Research is required and some at least will have to be executed as action research so that opposition to racism can be developed while its institutional forms are being revealed. The first stage of reform is related to the social perception of the problem. Social action can then remove it. The institution itself has to be changed and that requires collective agreement and acceptance.

This perception has led to a shift of activity by some of the persons intimately concerned with race relations. It is a

movement from the left to the right in Figure 7.1 above. The shift in action marks a stage in the realisation of what will be required if racism is to be adequately challenged. While the other models (academic, race relations practitioners and multiculturalism) can all make contributions to the defeat of racism in particular instances and situations, these models are less successful in threatening to expose and undermine the institutional nature of racism. By their very nature and method, the last two models (anti-racism, and training and development) are able to do just that.

Let us close by drawing together some illustrations to demonstrate this point. The first example relates to the earlier cited work of Ben-Tovim et al. (1986). The team's political action enabled them to reveal the operation of racism in local policy formation and implementation. Another piece of research and development was concerned with a form of multicultural/anti-racist activity in a college of further education. Here the aim was for a research officer to work with student groups on two engineering courses to find out if they were able to formulate their own equal opportunities policy. Four topic areas were considered: graffiti, racist jokes, abuse/assault, and the distribution of racist literature. The outcome showed that the students were capable, individually, of formulating their own policies against racism (Chivers 1990). They were able to identify institutional racism and to formulate at least the beginnings of an anti-racist culture.

A final example is drawn from the race relations training workshops earlier mentioned. A few participants were able to grasp a number of important relationships. These related to their own activities against racism, their role as defined by the organisation, and pressures from societal institutions. This empowered them to partially redefine their roles so that they could establish new negotiating positions. This perception of relationships is a valuable step in any action to change social institutions and could enable social action to have a crucial impact on the quality of change. This example and the two which precede it were not without their failures, but perhaps these have to be counted as part of the learning process.

The defeat of racism will require more than study and research. Cultural racism will require discussion, action and the

development of policies of good race relations. But if racism is ever to be defeated, it will also require counter processes at the institutional level. New forms of action are being developed for this purpose such as anti-racism and training. Quite possibly other forms will follow. In the meantime, these two require important development and in this respect sociology continues to have a useful role to play.

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# 8 Applied Sociology in the Contemporary British Context

Janet Finch

No one could doubt that, during the 1960s and 70s, British sociology went through a process of transformation, in which theoretical work came to have a pre-eminent place and those who practised it became the elite of the discipline. As part of this process, research defined as applied or policy-orientated was split off and allocated to the discipline of social administration, which was regarded as rather inferior, precisely because it did not privilege theoretical work. All of this is well known (see Bulmer, Chapter 2 of this volume).

In my view, that trend began to be reversed in the 1980s. Certainly my personal perception is that those of us who have worked in applied fields began to find that more colleagues were willing to treat us as real sociologists, in a way which had not previously been apparent. Of course theoretical work still retains its place at the core of the discipline, but we have come some distance from the situation set out by Chris Husbands in his paper to the 1980 BSA conference, in which he described sociology as a discipline where empirical research had 'ceased to be a high-status activity' and 'claims for policy relevance were seen as often disingenuous, or even sinister' (Husbands 1981: 96). Whilst taking Platt's (1986a) point that one has to be cautious in talking about 'trends' in a discipline as a whole – the reality inevitably is more complex than this kind of analysis allows – I believe that it would be accepted by most British sociologists who are professionally active in the discipline that the idea of doing applied work was accorded a greater legitimacy by the end of the 1980s than it was at the beginning of that decade.

If I am correct, sociologists need to do some hard thinking. As a professional discipline, we have begun to re-engage with policy issues without having created much of a stock of intellectual capital upon which to draw, certainly not in a specifically



British context. At the same time, some of the problems which stimulated the earlier withdrawal from applied work are still apparent. The sort of questions which sociologists collectively need to be asking are: What does it mean for sociology specifically to be an applied discipline? What are the implications of trying to create knowledge which is, in some sense, socially useful? If sociologists engage in applied work, do we necessarily have to make compromises? What kind of compromises? I see this chapter as one contribution to engaging with some of those questions, though I certainly do not claim to provide all the answers.

In trying to assess the potential for developing a strong base for applied sociology in Britain, it is necessary of course to engage with relevant aspects of our intellectual history. At this point it also seems important to acknowledge that the intellectual history of the discipline is interwoven with personal biography. I am acutely aware of questions about the status of applied sociology because I was establishing myself as a sociologist in the 1970s, in the period when hostility towards policy-oriented work had become the orthodoxy. Not only had this kind of work been relegated to the inferior discipline of social administration, but its low status was further confirmed by being treated as suitable work for women – my personal perception is supported here by Hilary Rose's (1981) published account of her own experience of the London School of Economics. In terms of intellectual history, what also now seems important to me is that this was a period in which most sociologists seemed very clear about the distinction between social problems and sociological problems, and were often openly contemptuous of work based upon 'taking' the problems of administrators and politicians, rather than upon 'making' our own problems. Applied research was seen as mere fact-finding, which had little connection to the real theoretical issues with which the discipline of sociology should be concerned.

Those distinctions clearly were very important in the intellectual development of sociology as a discipline, and they remain important as a stimulus to analytical thinking. But it now seems much less simple than it once did. Unemployment, for example, has presented us with an issue which in some ways has been *the* social problem of the 1980s, and yet also has raised

some profoundly important sociological problems. Sociologists have been keen to study it – not solely for the pragmatic reason that there was research money in it – and the work that they have produced must be rated as among the best sociology of the last decade, on any intellectual criteria. The public issue of unemployment has led to very significant reconceptualisations in the sociology of work. Of even more long-term significance, in my view, has been the impact of feminist thought upon sociology and the important research which it has stimulated. By definition, this work is rooted in practical concerns and aims to generate usable knowledge which could help to change our social world, directly or indirectly. Yet we are in sight of a situation where the central concerns of sociology could be reshaped by acknowledging the significance of gender (I do not claim that we have quite arrived at this point yet). Following these and other developments, the distinction between social problems and sociological problems seems altogether too sharp.

So I no longer see it as an intellectually defensible option to say that sociologists should continue to ‘make’ our own problems rather than ‘take’ those which we find in the public domain – thus avoiding any possible contamination associated with applied or policy-oriented work. Hence I believe that the questions which I have identified, about the status and orientation of applied sociology, ought to be faced by all of us – individually and collectively – as an intellectual and a professional issue. My own preference is to push through that thinking to practical considerations of doing sociology. So I am focusing upon questions about the kind of dilemmas and choices which we should expect to face when we engage in work with an applied orientation: intellectual, ethical, methodological, political, practical. Since it seems very likely that we will face the prospect of making compromises, we need to consider: which kinds of compromise are acceptable, and which are not?

## MODELS OF ‘USEFUL’ SOCIOLOGY

In order to pursue these questions, we need to look at different models of applied or policy-oriented sociology. So far I have avoided the question of defining these terms and I am not proposing to enter an elaborate debate about definitions in this

chapter. However I do need to make explicit my working definition, in order to develop subsequent discussion. There is a sense in which *all* sociology – even the most abstract and theoretical elements – could be defined as applied knowledge, in that it is concerned with understanding the social world and how it operates. However in referring to applied sociology in this article, I mean to refer to a specific type of sociological activity, not the whole discipline.

My working definition is that applied sociology is concerned with producing useful and usable knowledge on topics which people outside the discipline would recognise as socially important, using perspectives and methods which are recognisably sociological in character. That definition leaves a number of important issues open-ended. Useful to whom? Certainly it need not be confined to knowledge which is useful to governments: there is a well-documented tradition in the Labour movement, for example, which values ‘really useful knowledge’ as part of the struggle of working people against those in power (Johnson 1976). My definition also leaves open the question of *how* such knowledge is generated. No specific sociological methods are automatically included or excluded. There is, for example, space for comparative work (both cross-cultural and historical) in helping us to generate the kind of knowledge which will be genuinely usable in a given social context. As Philip Abrams put it, in the opening sentence of *Historical Sociology*, ‘Try asking serious questions about the contemporary world and see if you can do without historical answers’ (Abrams 1982: 1). However, my working definition of applied sociology emphasises the here and now, in the sense that the issues and topics for study arise out of present social conditions – even if the methods which we use to study them require us to develop broader horizons. It is the kind of work which is very much bound up with social change: studying the effects of economic, demographic or political changes, and often orientated to producing knowledge which could stimulate further social changes.

What models of ‘usable’ sociology are already available to us? This question has been considered extensively by Martin Bulmer and others (Abrams 1985; Bulmer 1978, 1982; Janowitz 1972) drawing on long-running debates, especially in the United States. I would argue that, in the British context,

essentially there have been two models, one of which has been much more prominent than the other. I have developed this analysis in my book *Research and Policy* (Finch 1986) and I will simply sketch the main contours of the two models here.

The first model is found in the dominant tradition within sociology, and in public consciousness. In essence, within this model the role of social scientists is to produce factual information which is directly usable in policy-making. A clear distinction is maintained between facts and interpretation, with the former being the province of the social scientist, the latter of the policy-maker or people who have commissioned the research. The so-called consumer-contractor model of research is an explicit expression of this view: the consumer (user, policy-maker) specifies what he or she wishes to know, then offers a contract to a social scientist who will collect the relevant information. 'Model I' also emphasises the need for objectivity in social scientific work: consumers need to know that the information which they are receiving is unbiased.

This model tends to imply a strong view of the kind of information which social scientists can supply. There is a faith in the importance of 'knowing the facts'. In a sense the social scientist is being asked to provide knowledge which is authoritative and which will settle policy questions. It fits best with a top-down model of policy-making, where policies are determined by skilled administrators and politicians, on the basis of information supplied. Although possibly this all has a rather authoritarian ring, this model of the relationship between research and policy is not necessarily associated with any particular political position. It has been very closely linked, for example, with social reform of the kind promoted within the Fabian tradition in Britain.

The alternative model rejects the idea that a social scientist should simply be a supplier of facts – the technician of policy-making, as some would put it. In 'Model II' facts and interpretation are seen as inevitably intertwined. The creation of all knowledge is seen as a political activity (in the broadest sense of 'political') and claims to be 'objective' are regarded as intellectually suspect.

Given this model of knowledge creation, the idea of social scientists providing objective facts, which will settle policy questions, inevitably is rejected. In its place is put the idea that

the influence of research on policy and social practice is likely to be diffuse rather than direct. The potential 'users' of research are distributed throughout the social system, not just placed at the top. The key role for social scientists is to provide knowledge which will inform political debate rather than settle questions decisively. Useful knowledge of that kind is likely to be in the form of concepts, backed up by evidence, rather than of 'simple facts'.

## THE CASE FOR MODEL II

I think it is important to distinguish between these two models because – as I shall argue – they have different implications for the kinds of dilemma and challenge which sociologists who engage in applied work have to face, and each suggests rather different sorts of compromise. It will not be difficult to discern that my own preference is for Model II. In my view it offers the basis for a model of usable sociology which can clearly be defended intellectually. I believe also that it represents a more realistic assessment of the place of social science in social life. Therefore in the end it is likely to offer a more politically acceptable role for social scientists – perhaps rather paradoxically, given its inherently subversive tone. I have discussed some of these issues in *Research and Policy* (1986). At this point, I shall simply mention three rather disparate pieces of evidence which support my view that the way forward for applied sociology is to conceptualise our activities in terms of my Model II.

The first piece of evidence draws on my personal experience, stemming from an invitation which I received in 1988 to speak at a conference organised by the Voluntary Licensing Authority on the topic of egg donation. The Authority is responsible for formulating guidelines for medical practice in the field of new reproductive technologies, and was considering specifically whether to relax their guidelines in respect of egg donation. The issue was this: should donor and recipient always be strangers or would it be desirable to make it easier to have donation between relatives or friends? Donation between sisters is the core of this issue. This is a field about which I know nothing as a professional sociologist, but I was invited to speak because I was known to be conducting research on kinship

obligations (see Finch 1989, *inter alia*). It was a clear instance of being invited to put my sociological knowledge to use – in this instance, to inform the thinking of other professionals – to help formulate policy.

I found it quite a challenge to think this issue through from first principles. In the end my contribution centred on explaining what we know about obligation in kin relationships, using a minimum of factual information – though certainly I had the confidence of knowing that I *could* provide relevant evidence if necessary. In particular, I spoke about reciprocity and its importance in kin relationships, especially between people of the same generation. I argued that if sister–sister donation of eggs was the expected norm, this would risk disturbing the delicate balance of sibling relationships. The reception I was given was very instructive. Whilst clearly there were opposing views in the audience on the substantive question, both sides began talking about reciprocity and its importance to their deliberations. It was one which helped them to advance an important debate. With due modesty, I can claim to have had an impact here, and the Authority decided subsequently not to change the guidelines. The main point I take from this example is that it is an illustration of the impact of *conceptual reorientation* which, I have argued, is a key role to be played by sociologists who do applied work.

My second piece of evidence in support of Model II draws on the experience of another sociologist. The point of this second example is to underline that the way in which research makes its impact on policy and public debate in reality is indirect and diffuse, and that we should expect it to be so. The sociologist in question is Jan Pahl and the research is her well-known work on the distribution of resources within the household (see, for example, Pahl 1989). I am not drawing here on Pahl's own writing but on a very interesting analysis of the dissemination of her work undertaken by Jennifer Platt (1987), as a case study in the dissemination of research funded by the Social Affairs Committee of ESRC.

Platt followed up contacts with government agencies, voluntary organisations and the press, where these were known to have been interested in Pahl's work. Bodies as diverse as the Inland Revenue, the DHSS and the Child Poverty Action Group found her work instructive in informing their own thinking on a

range of issues. The CPAG used it in a campaign and, as Platt points out, it is likely that MPs and civil servants influenced by this would attribute their increased understanding of resource distribution to CPAG rather than to Pahl. I believe that this is precisely what we should expect. The work we do as sociologists, if it is to be really effective, needs to enter the realm of public discourse; our 'really useful knowledge' needs actually to be *used* by others. It is clear from Platt's analysis that the ways in which people in government and other public bodies became aware of Pahl's work was often informal and apparently accidental, and in fact most of the channels through which the information flowed in this instance were networks of women.

This interesting case study provides a good illustration of what, in my view, is the reality of the impact of research upon policy: diffuse, indirect, partial. The expectations of more direct impact contained in Model I in most cases are entirely unrealistic. I believe one can demonstrate that this is how we should *expect* it to operate by considering the political science literature on policy-making (see Finch 1986: ch. 6 for discussion of this point).

My third and final piece of evidence to support Model II is of a very different order. It comes from the analysis of social science offered by Lord Rothschild in his report on the SSRC in 1982. The source perhaps appears paradoxical, since it was Rothschild's earlier report (1971) which promoted the consumer-contractor view of applied research, which I would place squarely in Model I. But Rothschild explicitly excluded social science from this earlier report and, when he was asked to consider the work of the SSRC in the early 1980s, his discussion in fact implies my Model II. He wrote:

The main purpose of applied social research is to provide material on which it may be possible to conduct more informed debate and make better decisions ... These decisions in a democratic society are not the sole concern of Ministers or officials. Members of Parliament on both sides of the House, journalists, academics, the public at large – all of these are beneficiaries of social science research ... The need for independence from government departments is particularly important because so much social science research is the stuff of political debate ... It would be too much to expect Ministers to show enthusiasm for research designed

to show that their policies were misconceived. But it seems obvious that in many cases the public interest will be served by such research being undertaken. (Rothschild 1982: paras 3.10 and 3.12)

It is worth quoting Rothschild at length because this report is an important statement of what would constitute a politically appropriate applied sociology. It is a view which accepts the inherently critical and questioning character of the knowledge which we produce, and the fact that it may well challenge current political orthodoxies. However it regards these features in a positive light. The role accorded to social scientists is one of producing appropriate and usable knowledge which informs political debate. But it should be acknowledged by all parties to that debate that political questions can be settled only through political processes, not by the application of apparently objective and authoritative knowledge.

Social scientists who have taken the latter view have often been puzzled and disappointed about why their work has had little direct impact in reality. Their sponsors have been equally disappointed about why the research findings upon which they built their policies did not in the end deliver what they promised. There are a number of cautionary tales of this kind in British social science. For example in relation to the sociology of education, the so-called 'political arithmetic' tradition of sociological research was very influential upon Labour Party educational policy in the late fifties and early sixties. Yet when Labour came to power and reorganised secondary education along the lines which this research implied, the results were disappointing all round. This specific example was in fact rather important – in the development of sociology as well as of the Labour Party – in that it fuelled the arguments that real sociologists have no business to engage in policy-oriented research (see Finch [1986] for further discussion).

By considering these different models of what applied sociology can mean, I would argue that it is possible to derive a clear position which offers a suitable basis for its development. I believe that the task should be defined as producing useful and usable knowledge, defined within the contours of my Model II. I see this position as intellectually defensible, realistic and politically appropriate.



Adopting a definition of applied sociology based on Model II also helps to advance questions about the types of compromise which may need to be made in developing such work. It is to this issue that I now turn. Building upon my analysis of the two different models of applied sociology, I shall suggest that the kinds of compromise which we need to make if we operate on the basis of Model II are different from those implied by Model I, and that it is actually easier to devise acceptable compromises if we work within Model II.

## INTELLECTUAL COMPROMISES

The idea that applied work in sociology may entail intellectual compromises was central to sociologists' rejection of it in the sixties and seventies. There was a belief that applied work was intellectually inferior by definition, because it involved empirical fact-finding that had little connection with theoretical questions. Certainly one can find examples of research which seems to fit that description – even of projects in which the research sponsor actively steers the researchers away from the intellectually interesting questions.

Of the many examples I could choose, I will cite the project written up by Kathleen McDermott (1987), funded by the Manpower Services Commission and concerned with the impact of the Youth Training Scheme on unemployed young people in a rural area. McDermott recounts how the MSC consistently tried to encourage the research team to concentrate on studying the young people themselves rather than looking at a broader picture of how the youth labour market worked in that rural area. It is from this broader picture that the intellectually interesting questions arise, but to the research sponsors those questions were settled without recourse to further investigation: they 'knew' that the problem of youth unemployment lies with young people themselves, and it is they who should be researched. In this instance, let it be noted, the research team did succeed eventually in finding ways of broadening the study to address these other questions.

It is this kind of example which makes many sociologists wary of engaging in applied work, especially if one assumes that such battles will not always be won. However, it seems to me that

this is a problem tied very particularly to my Model I, where the researchers are employed by a powerful sponsor (as in this case, a government agency), in a relationship where they are generating knowledge that will be fed in at the top of a top-down process and where they aspire to have a direct impact on policy-making. In such situations, it seems to me very likely that there will be a rather large gap between the intellectual questions which engage the sociological researchers and those which powerful sponsors find relevant to their own concerns.

In Model II the situation looks rather different. Here, social scientists are not claiming to provide knowledge which is usable in the policy-making process in that same direct sense. Rather they are claiming to have particular analytical and conceptual skills which can be put to use in illuminating social problems, but which are not necessarily going to provide authoritative answers. It is precisely the intellectual rigour and the creative reformulation of the issues which are the particular offerings of the sociologist. A well-known example would be Ray Pahl's work on *Divisions of Labour* (1984), which essentially is concerned with re-formulating our understanding of different types of work and their inter-relationship, based upon empirical research which actually began with a rather simpler set of questions. The concepts of 'self-provisioning' and the 'polarisation of households' developed by Pahl in that study have central relevance for a range of public debates and are likely to prove more influential in the long run than the detail of the evidence upon which they are based.

I find it difficult to argue that intellectual compromises are ever defensible. I have suggested, however, that they are much more likely to present themselves in respect of applied work conceptualised as Model I than in Model II projects, which by definition should be research which is positively intellectually challenging, rather than limiting. Of course I recognise that it may be less easy for sociologists to sell their services to powerful sponsors on these grounds but, as I have indicated, I do not see that as defining the limits of applied sociology.

## METHODOLOGICAL COMPROMISES

It is well known that many sociologists who have conducted applied research have felt pressured into adopting certain

empirical methods rather than others. It is the common wisdom in writing on this topic that research sponsors apparently favour quantitative methods and statistical techniques, based on the formal logic of random sampling, control groups, matched pairs and the like. Qualitative methods seem unreliable by comparison and participant observation is probably the method most likely to push sponsors beyond the bounds of acceptability (see, for example, Wenger 1987). If this is true – and I am not convinced that all research sponsors take a uniform view of it – sociologists are potentially faced with methodological compromises. Although as a profession we are more friendly to quantitative work than we used to be, even its most ardent advocates would not regard it as suitable for every possible research investigation.

As with intellectual compromises, I see this type of methodological compromise as most likely to occur in applied sociology Model I. This model assumes that the researcher is creating objective facts which can be handed over to the administrator or policy-maker. Quantitative methods look more reliable for producing that outcome. They have been associated with this dominant model of the research–policy relationship for at least a hundred and fifty years, as I have elaborated elsewhere (Finch 1986). The difficulties of getting other methods taken seriously were starkly visible in the case of Mass Observation, and its relationship to the government during the Second World War (Finch 1986; Platt 1986b).

Model II certainly opens up the space for other methods, in that it implies different concepts of knowledge creation and knowledge use. It is in research which gets close up to the people who are going to use it that most methodological freedom exists, in my view. An example would be studies of classroom teachers and teaching styles, where the concept of the qualitative case study has been quite widely accepted as a means to creating the kind of knowledge which helps teachers reflect upon their own practice (see for example Simons 1980). Indeed I think that there are other signs that the concept of the case study is becoming more widely understood and more generally acceptable.

However, if case studies are indeed going to become more widely used in applied research, this may entail a different sort of methodological compromise. In the worst scenario, case-study research could be discredited by being done too crudely,

with conclusions being drawn on the basis of inadequate data. I see this as a real danger because one superficial attraction of the case study is that it looks quicker and less expensive than a conventional survey. Researchers will be under pressure to conduct case studies in ways far removed from the rigour which methodologists regard as essential (Yin 1989). Real through these dangers are, I do not see them as inevitably entailing serious methodological compromises. The key is to focus research questions onto a range which can realistically be accomplished in the time available, and to make that explicit at the outset, rather than going into the field in an entirely open-ended way.

Worrying about case studies becoming too popular in any case may be a trifle optimistic. I accept that the dominant conception of quantitative research still holds sway in the public consciousness and I think that there is essentially a task of public education to be undertaken with the various groups who might use the knowledge which sociologists create. The task is to make it more widely understood that usable knowledge can be created by various different methods, with none being intrinsically more valid than any other.

## ETHICAL AND POLITICAL COMPROMISES

Ethical compromises have been written about quite frequently in the methodological literature. Issues of confidentiality are the most obvious of these. There are also questions, related to applied work especially, of sponsors imposing controls over what should be published. Thus I think it is important to link together ethics and politics in this discussion because in the literature ethical issues are sometimes too narrowly conceived. As I have argued elsewhere (Finch 1984) I am interested not only in the narrow ethical question of whether an *individual* respondent can be identified in published work, but also in the wider political question of whether the interests of respondents *as a group* might be affected.

In applied research, I think that difficult issues arise in relation to ethics and politics both in Model I and Model II, although the shape of the problems may be a bit different. I have already written about the problems which I experienced

with my own study of pre-school playgroups in inner city areas, where I felt that publishing my data could help to disadvantage the people whom I had studied, and others like them (Finch 1984, 1985). That experience clearly has resonance with a lot of other people. When I wrote about these issues I was implicitly using the first model – I was worried about what would happen if the relevant government department took an interest in my findings, as they had shown signs of doing. My concern was about the potential use of my findings by administrators and politicians, to formulate policies which I believed to be against the interests of the women whom I had studied.

Sociologists who adopt Model II do not necessarily avoid these problems. Indeed they may even be accentuated where the outcome of research is conceptual reorientation. It is quite possible for other people to pick up concepts and misuse them. If you expect the impact of your research to be indirect, then you must also accept that you lose control over it.

In relation to those difficult situations where sponsors want to keep control over publication and dissemination, again I am not sure that adopting Model II would enable one to side-step the difficulties. If sponsors are going to be threatened by the outcome of research which they have funded, there is no guarantee that they will like it any better when sociologists provide conceptual reorientation than when they provide uncomfortable facts.

One way in which to avoid these potentially very difficult ethical and political questions, it is sometimes argued, is to create knowledge which is usable, not by the powerful, but by oppressed groups who can use it to their own advantage to bring about social change. I doubt that such a strategy necessarily avoids ethical and political dilemmas. An interesting example of this has been given by Richard Jenkins, in discussing his work on racism and discrimination in employment selection, based on firms in the West Midlands (Jenkins 1987). He recounts a situation in which he was a researcher committed politically to anti-racism, generating data which exposed a variety of racist practices in employment selection. Yet he felt that it was not proper to regard the research data which he generated as freely available for anyone to use. He recounts an incident where he had to refuse access to an officer of the Commission for Racial Equality, who wanted

information on racist practices in a specific firm which Jenkins had studied. That officer, says Jenkins, could have used the information to ends of which he himself approved. However he felt that principle of confidentiality must count for more.

In this area of ethical/political compromises, I find it difficult to delineate clear-cut principles. It is easiest to be clear about the narrow *ethical* principles, such as: one should take all steps possible to protect the identity of individual respondents; one should be open about one's research purposes when asking people if they will agree to take part. I see very little room for compromise on these. Beyond that, however, circumstances may well arise where it is necessary to make some compromises on broader political grounds, although general guiding principles are difficult to delineate. I suspect that there is no substitute for a case-by-case consideration of what is acceptable and what is not.

## PRACTICAL COMPROMISES

Under the heading of 'practical compromises' I would place all those institutional, economic and personal constraints which may lead sociologists into activities which they find less than satisfactory. This, of course, is not a problem confined to applied sociology.

However I think it is important to highlight one point under this heading. The case which I have been putting forward in this chapter could be read as implying that sociologists have it in our own hands to define the terms upon which applied work is conducted. Some readers will certainly want to challenge that implication, arguing that sociologists often have to take whatever research opportunities present themselves – especially if you are a contract researcher, or if you are in an established post where you have colleagues who will be unemployed unless you find another research grant. Such research opportunities often have constraints built into them, which means that projects are not defined in ways which the researchers themselves would chose. These are the circumstances in which people do end up making a series of compromises with which they feel less than comfortable. In my view, sociologists who are in the happy position of not having to make such compromises (or who have to do so rarely) have a

responsibility to support those colleagues who do. I myself have had one painful experience of being treated contemptuously by another sociologist because I was undertaking an evaluation study on a contract basis, following the 1981 cuts in university budgets, when there was an urgent need to earn money for my department. I vowed never to do that to anyone else.

In general however, I think we *should* be seeking more actively to dictate the terms on which we undertake applied work – but this has to be seen as a collective not an individual matter. It requires sociologists as a profession to find ways of saying publicly: *this* is what useful sociology consists of; *these* are the terms upon which we can be most useful; if you want us to do a different kind of applied work, you will probably be disappointed. The more success we have collectively in this task of public education, the easier it will be for individual sociologists to state the terms on which they are going to be useful, even in the more difficult situations which I have discussed.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have merely touched the surface of many of the issues I have raised: other types of compromise might seem more urgent to some people than the ones which I have highlighted; and I know that I have raised many questions to which I have not provided satisfactory answers. But I do believe that these are the kind of issues with which we should be engaging collectively, as sociology becomes more enthusiastically orientated towards applied work. I believe that the prospects for applied sociology are exciting and challenging, and the outcomes will be to the benefit of the discipline as well as to our fellow citizens. Above all, I believe that it is *possible* to develop ways of doing applied sociology which produce research of the highest standard and in which we can ensure that compromises – if they have to be made at all – are acceptable.

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## 9 A Sociologist in Action

Margaret Stacey

As a sociologist I have been impelled by the fun of gaining new understandings about society and guided by a normative stance which has remained with me since my student days – albeit now in a somewhat more sophisticated form. Fundamentally my actions have been based on a notion of sociology for use and on the enticing idea that sociology could be used to make society a better place to live in. I have not sought to practise a value-free sociology because I believe the nature of the social makes that impossible. However, I early realised that sociological knowledge, once gained, can be applied by anyone to any end, including ends quite alien to those of the original researcher. Consequently, in addition to gaining the knowledge, sociologists like other scientists have to take some responsibility for the way that knowledge is applied.

After work in locality studies in Banbury and Swansea, life events (in this case having children in the 1950s) moved me, via studies of children in hospital, to medical sociology. Here tensions between detachment, necessary for proper research, and involvement, for example in the goal of improving social conditions for children in hospital, came sharply to the fore.

Another important happening was the women's movement, which greatly sharpened my theoretical understanding and raised issues of detachment and involvement even more sharply. Public appointments, to a hospital management committee, the Welsh Hospital Board, and the Michael Davies Committee on hospital complaints procedures, finally led to a seat on the General Medical Council (GMC), the statutory body which regulates the medical profession in the public interest. Here as a lay academic I had responsibility to help medical practitioners do that regulation. It is this research which I propose to use here as an example of a sociologist in action.

Service on the GMC, and the research on it, has been one of the most interesting and one of the most painful activities I

have ever undertaken. The work is interesting because of the insight into the world of medical leadership which it has offered: a medical elite associated at a number of points with other parts of our ruling elites, an arena in which one can see in action aspects of how both the class structure, or at least the status system, and the white male dominated gender order are maintained. The pain comes from a variety of sources: partly from the seriousness in disciplinary matters of weighing the risk to patients' lives posed by an allegedly unprofessional medical practitioner against that person's career; but also from the difficulty of ever making changes, even when many acknowledge the need for change, because of entrenched interests outside the Council's immediate control and reflected within it. Ultimately, however, the pain came, and this I did not realise until I was well into the research, because *au fond* I felt I was helping to uphold a system I could not accept.

## THE TASK OF THE GMC

When the Medical Register was first established in 1858, the GMC was charged with the responsibility to regulate the profession in the public interest. In exchange for protection and privilege in the market over and against all other healers, the profession assured the state that members of the public would get satisfactory treatment if they consulted practitioners registered with the GMC (HMSO 1975).

The GMC's control of entry to the Register is crucial to its effective performance. There are two aspects here: the quality of training medical students receive and the standards achieved by those who are deemed to be qualified. With regard to both of these the Council's education committee has to rely on the competence of the Universities which it is charged to oversee and which it inspects. Furthermore, in any grading system, including those used for medical students, some candidates just fail and some just pass (Furnham 1988). Where the line is drawn is inevitably somewhat arbitrary. A task of the GMC is to see that it is drawn high enough. Having ensured, so far as possible, that newly qualified doctors are competent when they are registered, the GMC has then to 'maintain a register of the competent' (HMSO 1975).

There seems to be little detailed knowledge and much confusion about what the GMC actually is and does. Some doctors trivialise it, pointing to the greater importance of the Royal Colleges, the British Medical Association (BMA, the leading medical trade union) and other bodies in setting and maintaining medical standards. Others see the GMC as composed of 'fuddy-duddies' or 'politicos' and not really relevant to everyday medical practice. The GMC itself relies quite heavily on the disciplinary procedures of the NHS to regulate the profession. However, the GMC is undoubtedly important, not only because of the powers vested in it, but also because it is the gatekeeper between state and profession and between profession and public. It may seem to follow other medical bodies rather than lead them, but it is the organisation which defines the bottom line of acceptable medical practice, in which it alone speaks for the whole profession (see also Smith 1989).

While doctors sometimes claim the GMC is too harsh, or quixotic, in its disciplinary activities, some lay persons think that its members acting collectively are too soft on colleagues who behave unprofessionally. They believe that in consequence incompetent practitioners slip through the net, thus putting the public at risk of receiving frankly bad and possibly damaging medicine (Robinson 1988). Many medical practitioners are convinced that more attention should be paid to continued medical competence, whether through the GMC or by one or other form of peer review. A number of medical members of the council worry about the opaqueness of many GMC procedures and about the power which, by statute and practice, resides in the President.

## THE NOT OFTEN RECOGNISED NATURE OF THE SYSTEM

The ethos and the structure of the Council assert the value of elite hierarchical organisation, male and white superiority, and heterosexuality. (The same can be said about the hierarchies of our universities. The evidence for these assertions about the GMC is presented in my forthcoming book. Here I must ask that this crude summary be taken on trust.) A generally kindly

paternalism softens the harsher realities of these characteristics, indeed disguises them from many who work with them. To describe the system in that way is, of course, not necessarily to attribute any or all of the underlying values to individual members.

Many liberal GMC members will be shocked and hurt at my judgement. Some, but not all, members as individuals have positive feelings about the values which underlie the characteristics I mentioned, believing in their moral and political rectitude. I am uncomfortable with them. Medical members who share my values also find the Council a difficult place in which to work.

The practices which uphold these values derive from the high status which British medicine has achieved in a deeply class-divided and ex-colonial society. British society, and particularly its elites, partake of these qualities, which are valued, albeit in different ways, by both the old and the new right. The particularity of the GMC derives from the 'cognitive exclusiveness' of the medical profession (Larson 1977). This also leads to the arrogance so often observed in doctors (but much less often intended); the arrogance/deference relationship is crucial in any hierarchical status system. I shall return to these points later (but cf. Stacey 1988a: chaps. 13, 16, where the background is more fully argued).

Do not leap to the conclusion that, because I feel the GMC as it stands is less than ideal, I would necessarily wish to dismiss and dismantle the organisation. Two compelling reasons ensure this: first, the profession does need regulation and second, whoever does it has to have the co-operation of the practitioners and their leaders. The importance of a united medical profession, independent of government and willing to stand up to it is a further factor (Stacey 1988b).

My specific research on the GMC (supported by grant GOO 232247 from the ESRC) has been on the period in which I served as a lay member – 1976 to 1984 – a period of much change in the structure and functions of the Council consequent upon the Merrison Report on the regulation of the profession (HMSO 1975) and the 1978 Medical Act. In writing on the GMC now (Stacey, forthcoming) I am using this understanding to illuminate contemporary debates about the control of the profession.

The focus of my research has been on the tensions the Council experiences between maintaining the unity of the profession on the one hand and protecting the public on the other, the latter being a statutory charge which is laid upon it. The ability of the council to regulate the profession depends on the latter remaining united, retaining confidence in the Council and accepting its legitimacy to control the profession. The Council's legitimacy in the public eyes has not in the past been at issue.

The most difficult conundrum which I have tried to unravel in the course of the research has been as follows: the Council's members and leaders are people of high ethical standards who care about the delivery of a good service, believe they are doing a good job and continually strive to do better. *Yet* they operate and support a system of regulation which neither ensures the continuing competence of practitioners, nor adequately disciplines the incompetent.

## CHANGES IN THE COUNCIL AND ITS CONTEXT

In the 130 years since the GMC was founded there have been immense social, economic and political changes; medicine is an altogether different activity, involving a complex division of labour, large-scale organisation and having at its command powerful tools, requiring skilled and sensitive use. Furthermore, patients have developed *both* greater scepticism about *and* greater faith in medicine than in former days.

It is rather more than 20 years since the stirrings began which led to the Merrison Report of 1975 and the 1978 Medical Act. That shake-up was started by a rather miscellaneous group of radical youngish doctors who finally rallied the profession to reform behind the cry 'no taxation without representation' – the introduction of the annual retention fee being the precipitating cause of the trouble. Michael O'Donnell alone of those 'rebels' survives as a GMC member. During those upheavals of 1968–73 the GMC nearly lost its legitimacy as a regulator of the profession (Stacey 1989a; and forthcoming).

The reforms of the 1970s were profession-led. In addition to introducing a majority of elected medical practitioners to the Council, the reforms also included some the Council itself

wanted. Changes of the 1980s – as well as those which are likely to come in the 1990s – have been encouraged by ‘consumer’ criticism expressed through patients’ associations and the media, and by a right-radical, apparently pro-consumer, government. Medical restrictive practices, over which the GMC presides, were named by the DTI in Cmnd 331 (HMSO 1988). The GMC has been subjected to review by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (HMSO 1989a).

Although some judge them quite inadequate (e.g. Robinson 1988), important changes *have* taken place in the Council in the last decade and are recognised by some lay members (interview with Smith in 1989). For example, my research shows a clear movement in the ‘blue pamphlet’, which spells out what is acceptable professional practice, from an almost exclusive intra-professional focus on matters such as advertising and ‘gentlemanly’ behaviour towards issues to do with the quality of patient care (Stacey 1990). However, my research also shows that most of these and other changes came as a result of external pressure, albeit pressure which gave forward-looking members of Council opportunities to propose reform.

In part how one judges the reforms must depend on what one thinks the GMC is or should be doing. If what one is looking for is a body which not only lays down clear guidelines about acceptable practice, including in clinical areas, but also pursues miscreants relentlessly – and is seen to be doing so – then the changes made must seem minuscule. If what one believes the GMC should be doing is looking to some way of ensuring that doctors who are incompetent are found out, perhaps through a system of privileged reporting to peers, given opportunities for retraining or whatever, and ultimately removed from the Register only if they do not comply, then again the reforms to date do not seem very large.

The Council was not designed as a complaints machinery, or a way for aggrieved patients to get redress – the latter was designated as a task for the law courts. The GMC was really set up to protect the profession against other kinds of practitioners (GMC 1973), a protection justified through its promise to ensure that registered practitioners were safe to consult. At the outset concentration was on education and entry requirements and the expulsion of ‘bounders’. Those doctors who still see the protection of themselves and their profession as the GMC’s

main task will think that the changes in the way the GMC does its job have gone too far.

It is understandable that the GMC should be seen (as Jean Robinson, 1988, seems to see it) as the most important or final piece of complaints machinery for aggrieved patients and – short of the law courts – the only one available for private patients. Disappointment is immense when lay people discover that dealing with incompetent doctors is *not* a main concern of the Council. One medical member suggested that the GMC should concentrate on improving its handling of obviously incompetent doctors because publicly ‘that’s its most important service, that’s what people think it does’ (interview with O’Donnell in 1988).

However, in the past, following the doctrine of clinical autonomy, doctors have thought it would be quite wrong for the Council to interfere in clinical matters, except in the grossest case. The 1983 Council guidelines, in moving nearer to the area of competence, spelled this out. The Council is not ordinarily concerned with errors in

diagnosis or treatment, or with the kind of matters which give rise to action in the civil courts for negligence, unless the doctor’s conduct in the case has involved such a disregard of his [*sic*] professional responsibility to his patients or such a neglect of his professional duties as to raise a question of serious professional misconduct. A question of serious professional misconduct may also arise from a complaint or information about the conduct of a doctor which suggests that he has endangered the welfare of patients by persisting in independent practice of a branch of medicine in which he does not have appropriate knowledge and skill and has not acquired the experience which is necessary. (GMC 1983: 10)

The last sentence in that quotation constitutes an important change in moving towards the control of continued competence to practice. In the same year the GMC indicated to practitioners that any reports they felt they might have to make about a doctor they thought unfit to practice were privileged utterances – a signal that covering up dubious activities for a colleague was not necessarily an appropriate professional response.

Doctors, like all other workers, do not want to 'shop' their mates. To that understandable distaste is added the strong indoctrination about the unity of the profession, the equality and 'brotherhood' [*sic*] of all qualified practitioners, which played such an important part in the establishment of the profession (Larson 1977). On the whole my research suggests that up to now in the inevitable tension between maintaining professional unity and protecting the public, the balance has been tipped to the profession. A serious question arises as to whether a doctor-dominated body, even with a lay presence, can ever adequately discipline doctors in the public interest.

Up to now most doctors believe profoundly in the doctrine that only peers can judge peers. In what sense is this really correct? Clearly lay persons require guidance as to what, in any given circumstance, appropriate medical diagnosis and treatment might be. However, in my experience (and that of other lay members) members of the laity are perfectly able to understand the kernel of medical judgements and intelligently to adjudicate between conflicting advice.

Medical practitioners have difficulty in understanding what it is like to be a patient and what patients, their relatives and friends take to be relevant evidence. Although doctors always feel beleaguered and vulnerable, they are individually and collectively actually in a much stronger position than patients (Watkins 1987). This would argue for at least a majority of lay members on the Council – a proposal which many doctors will find anathema, although some have actually proposed it.

## REFORM AND SELF-REGULATION

Three sorts of proposal are made by those who think professional self-regulation can never work well in the public interest. One suggests that the disciplinary functions of the GMC should be handed over to the law. One trouble with that is that lawyers (whose own profession is presently found in need of considerable reform) are no nearer understanding the ordinary patient's point of view than medical people – furthermore the law is expensive. The second, a right-radical proposal, is that entire control should pass to a totally lay body (Green 1985).

A more moderate proposal, which in some versions includes separating the disciplinary from other functions of the GMC,



suggests a large increase in the numbers of lay members on the Council. The GMC has recently increased their number – the *proportion* had actually *decreased* after the 1978 reform, but they remain a small minority, not much than 10 per cent of the total.

In the present climate some further reform seems inevitable. If it becomes accepted that the profession is not regulating itself adequately, the task of control could be given to others. Medical practitioners may prefer to initiate more rapid changes themselves. Members of the public would be advised to examine carefully any proposals doctors may make, for it is not certain that even well-intentioned doctors can themselves devise a system equally fair to professional and patient. Better perhaps that from the start doctors, patients and potential patients work together to devise an improved system.

The Council in 1990 has a committee working on a procedure for regulating competence which is likely to be separate from or parallel to its present disciplinary and other control procedures and associated with some local machinery. The Council is involving lay members in that process. However, I have in mind something much more open, with a wider base and discussions in the public arena. The question is not only whether the in-house discussions are likely to come up with the sort of radical revision which may now be necessary. A wider range of lay and medical opinion than is presently available to the Council could well be involved in and in an open arena.

Is the profession likely to co-operate with such an open discussion and what likelihood is there that the GMC might initiate it? On past performance the likelihood is not great. The Council tends to keep discussion within its own walls and among an agreed list of other medical personnel. The answer will depend to some extent on the balance of reformist and conservative tendencies in the profession. It will also depend on how medical leaders read the situation; how much they think needs changing to preserve the autonomy and unity of the profession; how much they feel non-medical bodies are a threat; or feel an urgent need for their support. My guess is that at present they do not feel either of the last two too much. For the President of the GMC the decision involves a judgement about how to balance pressure for necessary reform against what the profession will take.

To ask for the principle of professional self-regulation to be opened to public discussion is to ask a lot. The profession

successfully kept that issue off the agenda of the Merrison Committee in 1973: a series of very firm statements were made about it (see Stacey 1989a, 1991, and forthcoming). In addition to a general protectionist attitude, the reasons were clear. The profession was seriously disunited, the legitimacy of the GMC was under threat. The one thing it was possible to be sure all would agree on was the value of self-regulation. No doctor wanted state or local authority regulation (although some wanted state funds).

I suspect that the profession may, in its own interest, have been unwise to block that discussion (Stacey 1989a). In the early 1970s there was little challenge to the idea of professional self-regulation and less monitoring of how well the professions were regulated. Proposals to remove the privileges bestowed by restrictive practices had then hardly been heard. The proponents of the free market economy had not yet turned their attention to the professions. Green (1985) did not publish his right-radical proposals for the abolition of the GMC and its replacement by a body of lay trustees until 1986. Merrison had paid scant attention to suggestions that the GMC should be replaced by an all-consumer body. It is likely that in the early 1970s the principle of self-regulation, even if thoroughly discussed, would have been reaffirmed. Such is rather less likely now.

Freidson's (1970b: 215, 222–5) suggestions for US medicine that there should be more administrative control over the medical profession hardly found an echo among British sociologists who were aware of how little control administrators seemed able to exercise over doctors in the NHS. I do not recall that in the analyses of the power of the medical profession, which generally implied there was too much of it, British sociologists made any *policy* recommendations to curb their power. Rudolf Klein was one of the few to raise his voice (Klein 1973; see also Klein and Shinebourne 1972).

## BALANCING CONSERVATISM AND REFORMISM

The strongly internalised service ethic in medicine is related to many progressive features of the medical profession (Stacey 1988b). In the present context these have to be weighed against factors which made the profession profoundly conservative.

This raises the old debate in the sociology of the professions between service and self-interest: the debate between those like Durkheim and Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) on the one hand, who see the professions as dedicated to service and performing an important role in ensuring social stability and, on the other, those like Terence Johnson (1972, 1982) and Eliot Freidson (1970a, 1970b, 1977, 1983) who see the professions as powerful bodies acting in their own self-interest. Latter day sociologists, using materialist arguments, have tended to come down heavily on the side of self-interest.

My observation of the GMC at work suggests that neither school is entirely correct. It was from these observations that my conundrum, mentioned at the outset, arose. Council members and leaders are well-meaning and kindly, of high ethical standards, care about the delivery of a good service to the patient, care about their profession, its ethical standards and its performance, believe they are doing a good job and continually strive to do better. (There are of course exceptions, but you can expect that anywhere.) *Yet* in the GMC they operate and support a system of regulation which neither fully ensures the continuing competence of practitioners, nor adequately disciplines the incompetent (Stacey 1990, 1991).

Medical practitioners suffer from a 'subjective illusion', which ideology creates, of the value to them as individuals of the institutional arrangements established and also of their value for the patients – as Magali Larson (1977) points out in her study of the rise of the professions. She argues that in carving out a place for themselves in the market, the rising modern professions had to develop a distinctive commodity. For this distinctive form to emerge '*the producers themselves have to be produced*' (p. 14, her emphasis). This implies training and socialisation to provide recognisably distinct services for exchange on the public market. A '*crucial* intervening variable' (p. 25, emphasis in original) which Larson identifies is 'cognitive exclusiveness'.

In the course of their unique and common training, the service ethic necessary for the successful marketing of the professional product becomes more or less strongly internalised. In my observation the service ethic remains a real and important factor in the minds of individual medical practitioners, as well as continuing to be recognised by leaders of

their collectivity as essential for the continued legitimation of market domination. The service ethic may become diluted by the often alienating conditions of delivery of modern health care, the bureaucratic organisation of the hospital, the specialisation of tasks and increasing state interference.

The service ethic can also be diluted by the profit motive, as we need to remember in the debate on the future of the NHS (HMSO, 1989b and the 1990 parliamentary debate). Here we should note that the profession is in a much better position to behave ethically when it is able to treat patients according to their medical condition rather than having regard either to whether the patient can afford to pay or to the amount of profit to be made. The raised level of surgical and medical interventions in private or fee-paying medicine compared with publicly provided medicine is well known (see Radical Statistics Health Group 1987: 106).

The majority of the British medical profession remain in favour of the NHS as we have known it. The BMA is in open conflict with government about the future of the NHS. A main reason is that, within the NHS, medical practitioners can treat a patient's condition as they perceive the condition requires without regard to the patient's social or economic circumstances. It is true that doctors have done quite well out of the NHS, but they are by no means as rich as some of their colleagues in the US or in parts of Europe. The security of employment and the possibility to do a good job – and here the service ethic is involved – count for a great deal.

The service ethic may offer the possibility of reform – indeed is demonstrably a source thereof. What, however, is it that makes so much of the medical profession, and especially its government, so conservative? It is not enough to say material self-interest, because this can pull medical practitioners in a variety of different directions. Other factors are at work. Some have to do with the structure of the profession itself; others reside in the surrounding society.

The General Medical Council has, for example, to gain the acceptance of the Royal Colleges, the BMA and other medical bodies before it can propose changes of any significance. This immensely slows down attempts at reform (Stacey, 1989b, and forthcoming), since one resistant body can call a halt to the

entire procedure. It may take literally years of patient work to wear down the opposition. The upshot is almost certain to be a compromise. When discussions are sufficiently far advanced the GMC may call a conference of elite medical bodies and a few selected members of the laity to prepare the way for new developments.

## STATUS, IF NOT CLASS, DIVISION

In addition in the surrounding society there are important questions of class and status. Sociologists of the professions and analysts of stratification systems are not agreed about where the professions come in terms of the class system, although their status is agreed to be high. Would sociologists in Britain all even agree with Larson (1977: xvi) that the medical profession, although stratified within, is certainly not working class? Freidson ignores class entirely in his otherwise powerful analyses. Larson's (1977) historically based account probably remains the best extended analysis of professional power in relation to class and status (unhappily it is gender blind).

In Britain today, practitioners range from the petit bourgeois (I think of the single-handed GP with a corner-shop of a practice and untouched by the Royal College of General Practitioners) to the upper middle class and wealthy. At mid-century the aristocracy could still not accept medical men as equals because they worked on corporeal bodies – manual work was inappropriate for any gentleman. I lack evidence about current aristocratic attitudes. Rising medical practitioners of the nineteenth century rated being accepted as 'gentlemen' very high. Stories are still told – nowadays as jokes about times past – of doctors being shown to the tradesmen's entrance when making a professional call on a sick member of the gentry.

Whatever the view of other sociologists, those studying the professions have retained an interest in status (Macdonald 1989: 56). Individual and collective status clearly matter a great deal to occupations which claim to be professions. Keith Macdonald (1989) describes and analyses the conspicuous consumption, elegance, ornateness and waste of space which has gone into major professional buildings since the late eighteenth

century. These buildings are statements about collective status. Of those he surveys, that of the Royal College of Physicians, opened in 1964, and the associated complex of buildings in St Andrews Place, score highest on all his measures. (He covers three accountants' organisations, surgeons and physicians.) Professional members were prepared to put large sums of money into their buildings and to touch others for grants and subventions. The medical profession emerges as particularly skilled at getting money from foundations. The palatial interior of the Royal Society of Medicine's extended and refurbished Wimpole Street building, opened in 1987 by the Queen, is the most recent example I know where the medical profession has made a strong statement this way. Judging by the attributions posted in it, the Society was greatly helped in this enterprise by a variety of pharmaceutical and similar companies.

Status is expressed in many other ways: dress is important, the pinstripes of senior consultants for example. An open collar and no tie – even sometimes no shirt – is one mark of rebels and reformers. Sociologists have paid too little attention of recent years to the monarchy and its role in maintaining our status system and in legitimating the class structure (but see Rowbotham 1988). The most prestigious of the buildings Macdonald surveyed were opened by members of the royal family.

To have one's name appear in an honours list remains an ambition for many people in a wide range of occupations. Knighthoods, baronetcies and peerages are among the rewards for outstanding medical service. The service may have been to members of the royal family as their physicians or surgeons, or honours may be earned through service in medical organisations or to the state. Being Chief Medical Officer of England seems to warrant an instant knighthood.

GMC members are no exception to this status-striving which I think has two effects. The first is that those who do not care about gaining honours find themselves freer than others to criticise and innovate within the profession. The second is that those whose ambitions include achieving honours have to be extremely astute politicians if they are to innovate and still 'keep their noses clean'. The skill of some leaders of the medical profession in reconciling conflicting interests, remaining in power and gaining honours, is impressive. However, in the past resultant changes have not been notable for their

radicalism. But then encouraging radical change in the professions has not *hitherto* been the mode of government of our ruling elites. In the ancient structures of medicine, of which the General Medical Council, being only just over 130 years old, is quite a youngster, the old mode of elite rule is in direct conflict with the new.

## REFORM FROM WITHIN?

What is the likely outcome of this conflict? The aim of the profession will certainly be to maintain control, to retain autonomy – autonomy in the clinical setting and in regulation – and to retain market privileges. Medical audit of some sort is being widely talked about among medical leaders. The stress remains on audit by peers. Those who want honours will be anxious to listen to what government wants. They will also be listening to their electorates and the nominating bodies. Such doctors are unlikely to move radically – just enough to retain power and authority for the profession. They may well concede more negotiating rights to ‘consumers’, but whether they will share power with them or with alternative healers on anything like equal terms is more dubious. However, in all these negotiations the liberal reformers and the left libertarians may be able to influence outcomes; there is no doubt that the right radical influence will be present.

Some of the revision which is needed has to go well beyond the central machinery of the GMC. A locally-based medically-controlled method for uncovering the incompetent has been spoken of. There is the question of the relationship of the NHS complaints procedures to the GMC procedures (Robinson 1988; see also Stacey 1991). The relationship between the GMC and the Royal Colleges bears closely on the question of the control of specialist competence. The exclusion of alternative healers from the NHS derives from the special relationship of registered medical practitioners to the state. This does not limit the freedom of alternative healers to practise, but does prevent them working within the NHS. Consequently they cannot provide their services free at the point of delivery. The arrangement also limits patient choice, not only because of this but because it forces patients to use official medicine where any certification is necessary.

An underlying question is whether cognitive exclusiveness, once so essential, is really necessary for the profession any more. Is not the body of knowledge so large that parts of it can be securely shared? Deregulation along government lines outlined in Cmnd 331 (HMSO 1988) on restrictive practices implies curtailing professional freedom as it has been enjoyed and if carried through literally would dismantle the profession. In the case that the need for some exemptions from free trade continues to be agreed, as seems likely, the reasons for them and in whose interest they may function requires to be clarified.

So far as to whether the power of the professions is used beneficently or otherwise, I have concluded that neither side in the sociological debate is altogether correct. The service ethic does tend towards more publicly responsible medicine than might otherwise be achieved; an organised and powerful profession can work in the public interest. However, occupational self-interest in this as in other occupations has consequences which are not beneficial for patient or public. More sophisticated analyses of professions and professionalism with better empirical grounding than we have hitherto achieved are required. The questions of the likely effects of a diminution of cognitive exclusiveness and of the retention of restrictive practices are examples where this is necessary. In the latter case sociological analysis would include additional evidence to that provided by the occupation itself in defence of the restrictions.

My analysis so far has two kinds of implication for sociologists in terms of action. The first has to do with what should be our stance in relation to the attacks upon the medical profession; the second has to do with the implications for sociology itself, specifically how should the British Sociological Association see itself in professional terms? The issues involved have to do with the division of labour, the organisation of workers, the organisation and use of knowledge, and with claims to exclusivity. In considering these problems, the social, economic and political context should, of course, never be overlooked.

## TO SUPPORT THE MEDICAL PROFESSION OR ITS DISMANTLING?

Many of the sociological arguments about the power of the professions might seem to support the notion that the medical



profession as a highly privileged body should be dismantled. However, there are certain cogent arguments against that (Stacey 1988b). Crucial questions are: Would a deregulated profession be likely, or able successfully, to oppose government proposals or actions when necessary in the interest of the health of the people? Would not the interests of different individuals and occupational segments within medicine be so diverse that such would be unlikely? Would the occupation not rapidly begin to lack a coherent vision even of its *own* collective good?

This question arises from the observation that although the arguments for deregulation of the professions are couched in terms of the free market, it would be naive to consider deregulation simply in those terms. Rather deregulation has to be seen in the context of a government which, while professing liberal values of free competition and private enterprise, has strengthened central government control in many aspects of life in a manner unprecedented in Britain: controls which interfere with free speech, the media, education and research.

In the course of this centralising process, all those structures with political power and resources sufficient to oppose or obstruct government programmes have been systematically tamed and weakened. Structures which came between the individual citizen and the state, such as trade unions, local government, the universities, have all been diminished and restrained in this way (Halsey 1988). Seen in this context the programme to deregulate the profession emerges in rather a different light.

We know that the theory and practice of medicine has had many beneficial consequences. We know also that the power of the professions, while generally exercised in a most conservative and self-interested manner, has, from time to time, been pitted against reactionary proposals, as in the case of abortion law reform. Scientific pronouncements of epidemiologists have drawn attention to deficiencies in the government's public health policies – I think of salmonella and listeriosis. Is it not in the interests of a centralising government to destroy the organised profession?

Perhaps there are conditions under which one could support the notion of a continued powerful profession. The conditions would be that patients, the subservient health care occupations and alternative healers would be given more equal status with

official medicine. This is to propose encouraging and working with those biomedical professionals who for the common good seek to reduce the self-serving elements of professionalism. Watkins (1987: 18–21) calculates such members constitute about 20 per cent of practitioners judged by the criterion that they support non-establishment causes. The argument also implies working with those who know the profession must change to survive, although they might prefer to retain the status quo. Here again a much more sophisticated analysis of professionalism, and specifically of the medical profession, is needed than as sociologists we have hitherto had.

### TO PROFESSIONALISE THE BSA?

There have been many attempts to make the BSA more 'professional'. I distinctly recall being disqualified by my then employment status from entry to the University Teachers Section which flourished for a while in an attempt to be the 'professional' section of the BSA with strict entry 'gates'. Sociology is of course different from medicine in that it is not a 'consulting profession' in the sense that law and medicine are (Freidson 1970a: ch. 1), although the new-style market economy does seem to be sprouting 'consultants'. Despite these attempts the BSA has generally followed a model whereby it seeks to encourage high standards of work through conferences, courses, seminars and publications and generally to support its members and develop some sort of collegiate sense. In this it has succeeded well, although perhaps best in the various specialist groups within the Association. In general the Association has not sought to control entry. Quite apart from a wish, correct in my view, to avoid elitism, it would be quite impracticable to try and limit those who seek to study society – so many do it in so many ways; to attempt to establish an exclusive base of knowledge about society is impossible. Furthermore, salient sociological knowledge is taken on board and used as soon as it is created.

The more I have learned about old-style professions in the course of my recent research, the more I wish I could advise the BSA (and indeed any other occupational association) not to try to adopt that model. The notion of profession as we know it

today developed along with industrial capitalism. It was (and is) as much about gaining and maintaining status as about good training and good practice. It has the effect of cutting the professionals off from their clients and the public. Old-style professionalism is based on a class and status model inherited from the days of the colonial empire. I would not want to see sociology locked into that model. Just as it is necessary in order to practise good medicine, so in order to practise sociology well, to do good research, it is necessary to assume the equal worth of all human beings, whatever may currently be the oppressions or inequalities they suffer or the privileges they enjoy. This cannot be done if the discipline locks itself into a status-striving hierarchy as a prime feature of its organisation. A feature of the universalistic NHS much valued by medical practitioners has been that it made it possible for them to treat the condition as needed, without consideration of *who* the patient was.

## A NEW KIND OF PROFESSIONALISM

Old-style professionalism has had its day. If the professions, and I think particularly of medicine, attempt to hang on to the old model and to preserve as many of the sacred cows as possible, the demise of a well-organised occupation could result and the valuable aspects of professionalism with it. The end result could be different from anything intended and have unwanted consequences for the profession and public. Better that there should be recognition of the need for radical change and the establishment of a new concept of profession within which attempts to preserve the best of the old model, while modifying it to fit the new circumstances, would be in order.

A service which sociology can perform at this time is to continue to analyse the nature of professions, their history and organisation, their relation to the total society, their place in the division of labour; to examine the use made of the notion of 'profession' by many occupations and to relate the theories of professions to those of contemporary occupations more generally. It is crucial to examine the contribution the professions make to maintaining social differentiation and the consequences of that, but also the extent to which members are aware of what they are doing in their occupational control. All

this involves careful, detailed empirical study and careful examination of the values which underlie professionalism. It also requires of sociologists an uncomfortably high level of individual and collective self-awareness.

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# 10 Researching the Sociology Curriculum

Jon Gubbay

In his 1986 BSA Presidential address, Martin Albrow called for a positive affirmation of the value of the sociology degree as providing both a liberal and a broadly vocational education. People opt to study sociology 'for their intellectual and personal betterment' and because 'it may provide a highly suitable education preparatory to work'. (Albrow 1986: 339) Only a small proportion of those graduating with a degree in sociology become full-time sociologists, whether in academia, research units or elsewhere. However, it might be claimed that many of them profitably use the skills, knowledge and abilities acquired from their sociological studies in their occupations and general life. To judge whether this might be a convincing case in support of the sociology degree, we need first of all to know what is taught and learned. This was the task of the BSA's Degree Curriculum Sub-Committee, and the research which has been undertaken by the author to construct a picture of what is currently being taught.

Collecting, organising and presenting such information will necessarily be a complicated task since curricula vary significantly from one department to another and there are no generally agreed categories for describing them. It is true that some sociologists know what is taught at several institutions other than their own, through being external examiners and through personal and research contacts, though this knowledge is likely to be quite limited and impressionistic. Moreover, it has not been pooled into a coherent statement of the overall pattern of sociology curricula in the UK, nor is it clear how this might be done. (However, see CNAA *Review of Sociology* 1988.)

The first phase of the current research involved visits to six sociology departments in higher education for interviews with staff, a meeting with students, and administration of questionnaires to staff and final-year students. The study aims to

identify problems, ambiguities and disjunctions in curricula as well as assess the extent to which they embody a coherent rationale. This part of the research is intended to help clarify concepts and issues as well as provide illustrative data. Given the sensitivity of some of the information being sought and thus the requirement of confidentiality, conclusions drawn from this ongoing phase of research are stated here rather obliquely and should be regarded as tentative. The report on the six case studies will be published as soon as possible after they have all been completed.

The BSA Executive took the initiative in setting up a Degree Curriculum Sub-Committee which has been providing very welcome support and advice for the first phase of this research. This guidance continued into the second phase, when the conceptual framework was tested out and data collected from a comprehensive postal questionnaire survey of sociology teachers. My presumption is that the curriculum at any institution is a very complex social product arising from the interactions of many people over a considerable period of time and subject to a great variety of constraints and influences. Even key participants in the creation of a curriculum may be more or less unaware of how it was formed and the assumptions and purposes it embodies. Accordingly, these assumptions and purposes have to be *inferred* from how those who produce the curriculum respond to inquiries and be *decoded* from documents like course guides, reading lists and examination papers.

The central task of the study was to find out what is taught and by what methods. It would be quite easy to collect a large quantity of the sort of documents referred to above but such an approach would quite miss teachers' implicit purposes, such as developing students' writing skills or encouraging them to approach published material in a critical frame of mind. Such aims rarely figure in the formal documents. Besides the complications deriving from the existence of implicit as well as explicit aspects of curricula as taught by teachers, there is a crucial element even more refractory to analysis and description, namely the curriculum as experienced by the students. These considerations somewhat undermine the distinction between curriculum and pedagogy, for *what* a student learns may depend on *how* the learning is done. For example, even though the manifest task is to write an essay on a particular

topic, the student might learn through performing this task about use of the library, how to construct logically ordered arguments and how to discipline oneself for meeting a deadline.

A curriculum for a discipline may be thought of as consisting of six elements, as follows:

1. The purposes embodied in the courses and the curriculum as a whole
2. The content of courses in the discipline
3. The rules regarding compulsory and optional courses and their sequencing
4. The content of courses outside the discipline, whether they are compulsory or optional and how they relate to courses within the discipline
5. The system of student assessment
6. Teaching methods (pedagogy)

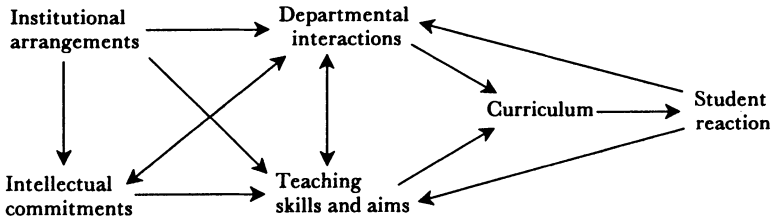
Pedagogy and assessment have been included, as well as the content and the way it is organised, in this rather broad conception of curriculum on the grounds that the six elements interact to constitute a whole (Bernstein 1971: 47).

I have tended to assume that the system of assessment is crucial for the students in defining the content of the curriculum. For them, it is the grades they get for essays and examinations that really count and work not perceived as contributing to assessment is bound to seem relatively marginal, however much their teachers urge it on their attention. My research investigates this assumption and the associated disjunction between student and teacher attitudes towards cue-seeking and the instrumental pursuit of high grades.

The set of categories used for describing curricula must be drawn from a theory which identifies causal factors in key aspects of curriculum and pedagogy. Sociology teachers are only likely to treat the results of the research seriously and as the possible basis for comparison or review of curricula if they consider the categories in which the research is presented as valid. So it is important for my purposes that the conceptual scheme is tested in empirical research, widely publicised and developed through debates in conferences and journals.

As a first stage in constructing these categories, it is supposed that curricula, whether for sociology or any other subject, are moulded fairly directly by four causal factors, as follows:





*Figure 10.1* Direct influences on the curriculum

- (a) The interactions of the group of teachers in the department, in particular the decision-making and negotiating practices in devising syllabuses and allocating teaching responsibilities.
- (b) The intellectual commitments of the teachers in their discipline and how it relates to other disciplines.
- (c) The repertoire of teaching skills possessed by teachers and their views about desirability and effectiveness of alternative teaching and learning processes.
- (d) Institutional arrangements in the college, including the way the department is located in or cut across by other groupings and, accordingly, the scope of its autonomy.

These four factors interact among themselves and respond to student reactions, hypothetically along the lines indicated in Figure 10.1.

The figure focuses attention on the micro-social processes of curriculum construction by which members of a department combine their individual aims and teaching skills, subject to institutional constraints and the influences of their various intellectual commitments.

Students are not generally powerful agents in devising the curriculum but neither are they passive recipients of it; they contribute to its formation through complaints, praise and suggestions for change; enrolling or failing to enrol in particular courses; working with or without enthusiasm; being well prepared or poorly prepared for later courses in a prescribed sequence, and so on. Consequently, there is feedback from the students leading to modification of teachers' aims and means in the teaching process and also to the department as a whole, promoting changes in syllabuses, teaching allocations or even reviewing the whole programme.

Teachers' intellectual commitments, as well as affecting the curriculum, are affected by what they teach and the departmental and institutional context. The presence in a department of people with 'dissident' intellectual commitments, especially where their theoretical position invalidates the 'scientific' status of sociology, might be expected to generate acute difficulties in constructing a coherent curriculum – but my research suggests that this is not necessarily so. Given time, the social context and the routines of teaching often soften the challenge of the dissident theoretical position, so it is treated as just another viewpoint within sociology which students should be acquainted with. Although there may be constant bargaining and flux in the curriculum, departments often manage to institutionalise the conflict between incompatible paradigms.

Initially, I had supposed that there were strong centrifugal tendencies in any sociology curriculum because of chronic paradigm debates and specialisation in research. Curriculum coherence and continuity might nevertheless be secured by a charismatic or authoritarian head of department, a high degree of consensus among the members (whether by 'accident' or recruitment policy) or a lethargic reluctance to change a formula that has appeared to be adequate in the past. The threats to curriculum coherence, and therefore the efforts needed to combat them, are greater where there are relatively powerful multi-disciplinary schools and organisationally weak disciplinary departments, for then the intellectual and teaching interests of department members tend to draw apart. I had hypothesised that, in all departments, the curriculum would 'drift' for a few years as the staffing of courses changed, research agendas shifted and student demand altered until the point where the rationale for various elements of the curriculum was lost or forgotten. Then, perhaps precipitated by expressions of student discontent the forthcoming appointment of a chair or some external shock, the curriculum would come up for explicit discussion and reconstruction. However, this does not appear to be generally true for, in some circumstances, departments seem able to preserve considerable continuity, so that change is a matter of evolution within an established structure. In particular, continuity appears to be fostered by discipline based departments.

To consider what other factors might promote evolution, the analysis needs to move on from the micro-social and beyond the

institution. The corresponding elaborated causal map is indicated by Figure 10.2. Some comments may make this clearer.

One factor identified in the figure is the socialisation of teachers through their own higher education and earlier teaching experience. In particular, the LSE curriculum, as it was in the 1950s, has been transmitted to other departments by people who were once there or in departments where that curriculum was influential. (i.e. Modern Britain in the first year; 'core' courses in Theory/Thought, Comparative Social Structure and Change, Research Methods; third year options.) One of the consequences for those departments which have evolved their curriculum within this well-known and well-reputed format is that it appears to their members to define the essence of sociology as a discipline. This consequence has further effects in stabilising the structure of their curriculum. Peers at other institutions could be expected to readily acknowledge the value of this 'standard' curriculum but those who depart from it have to be able to provide cogent justifications for being 'different'.

Since teachers develop and change their views of their subject partly through their research interests, journals and conferences provide important influences on intellectual commitments and, thus, eventually the curriculum. Occasionally, major paradigm debates polarise faculty between departments or, indeed, within them – with profound consequences for the overall pattern of curricula. The succession of paradigms that have become influential – functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, Althusserianism, ethnomethodology, feminism, critical theory and so on – have each left their marks on the curriculum.

What the already rather complicated-looking Figure 10.2 leaves out is the historical changes in interactions between these factors. For example, full employment and economic expansion of the 1960s, with its associated rapid growth of higher education and optimistic political climate, combined to promote curricula experimenting with new interdisciplinary combinations motivated by concern for the personal and intellectual development of the students. The harsher current economic circumstances, including those of colleges themselves, tend to shift curricula towards the teaching of marketable skills and abilities. Meanwhile, teachers in some subjects and

departments are involved in preparing students for professions, their intellectual commitments and teaching aims are likely to be greatly affected by views of the professional bodies concerned, especially if there is a system of validation. Probably the most important influence of this sort in the sociology curriculum has been the conditional course exemptions available for social work training. A further factor has been an anxiety about presumed student demand, and inter-disciplinarity is now largely a *defensive* response by small departments.

## CURRICULA AS IDEOLOGIES

My research classifies curricula in terms of ideologies, that is according to the implicit or explicit justifications and explanations of them that can be elicited from those who participate in their creation and maintenance, particularly the teachers. To classify curricula in this way makes the assumption, discussed above, that it is the interaction of the members of the department that has the most direct determining influence on the curriculum, with student reaction and factors external to the colleges having more indirect effects. It is also asserted that curriculum ideologies can be distinguished in ways that relate them cogently to all the factors discussed above. The reader will have to judge from what follows whether these claims and assumptions are valid and possess analytical power.

I assume that possible explanations and justifications for curricula are orientated to the following 'domains':

1. Preparing students for socio-political roles
2. Developing students' personal capacities
3. Preparing students for occupations
4. Reproducing knowledge and the educational system

Within each of these domains one can distinguish several contrasting curriculum ideologies, as set out below. These ideologies will rarely if ever occur in their pure form but will be combined together, possibly in inconsistent ways. The proposed research will test the validity of these distinctions and is bound to lead to substantial refinement of the categorisation.

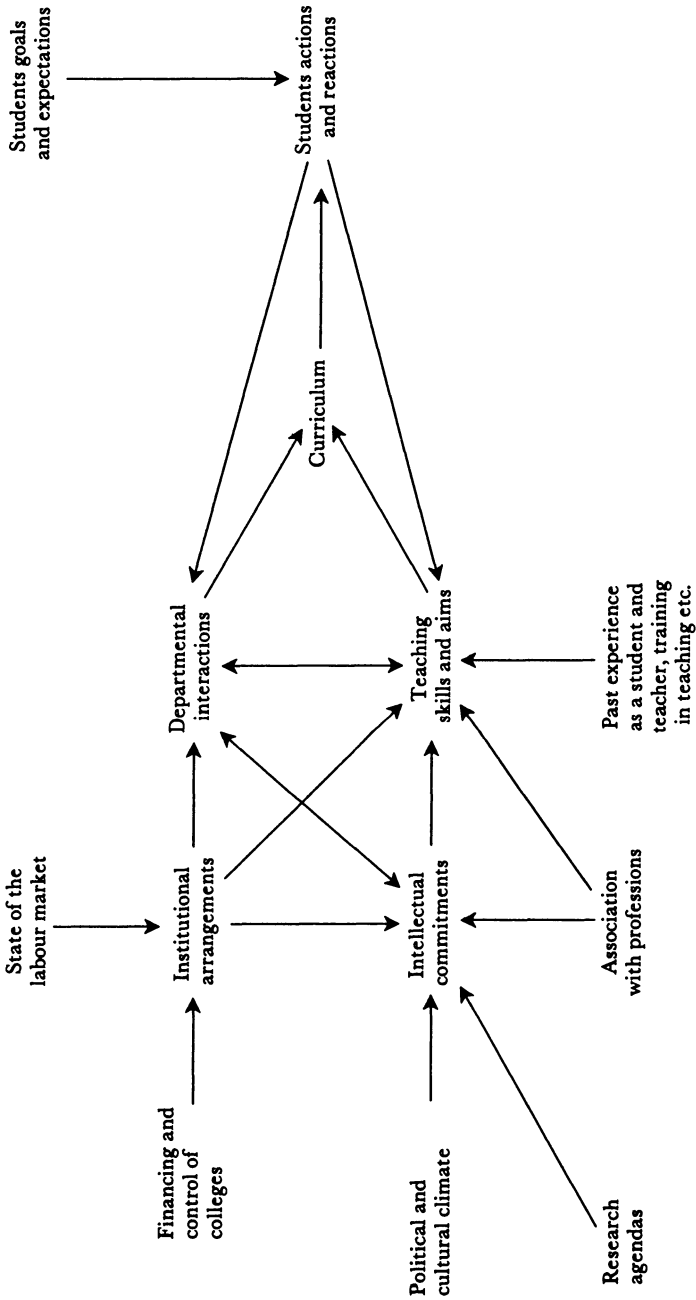


Figure 10.2 Direct and indirect influences on the curriculum

## **Socio-Political Preparation**

*Elite.* The curriculum aims to give students exclusive knowledge which sets them apart from the world of commerce and money making, for it assumes that they are already privileged. The curriculum confirms their status and gives them the capacity to command others. Students are treated as young gentlemen (and, possibly, ladies) and the forms of teaching avoid anything that could be seen as 'drilling' or impertinently intrusive. Approved values are conventional conservatism and patriotism.

*Dynamic leadership.* This curriculum encourages students to be worldly, confident in themselves and to acquire a compulsive drive to personal success. Graduates should be good at handling groups and persuading other people to adopt a particular course of action. There is a disdain for abstract theory or outdated knowledge. The teaching method should include situations where students can develop their capacities for leadership and initiative, simulate the 'real' world outside the college or provide opportunities for industrial placements.

*Citizenship.* The curriculum aims to equip students to understand and analyse social and political issues of the day. They should be able to read a quality newspaper or journal intelligently and critically. Students should be equipped with skills suitable for making inquiries and, where necessary, criticisms of bureaucracies and possess the sorts of social skills that are appropriate to participation in pressure groups. Their education should give them a lively interest in contemporary affairs and they should acquire a 'social conscience'. An appreciation of theoretical disputes is important in so far as it permits understanding of social issues in depth, but such knowledge should not be esoteric.

## **Personal Development**

*Humanism.* Here the emphasis is on developing the student as a rounded personality. Students should be able to make choices about what to study and how to study but should be encouraged to make these choices with responsibility for their

consequences. Thus, some students may choose eclectic combinations of courses in sociology and other subjects while other may select a more conventional sequence of courses within the discipline. If they are well thought out, either option could be equally valid. The education should be liberal in the sense of freeing students from prejudices and dogmas. Learning in democratically structured, co-operative and highly participative groups is very desirable.

*Entrepreneurialism.* Here the emphasis is on developing an individualistic and goal-orientated personality type. The form of teaching should encourage competition among students and reward those who show initiative and who are 'top' of their class. The content should not be constrained by conventional disciplinary boundaries and should be constantly directed towards practical implications for action.

### **Occupational Preparation**

*Skills training.* The curriculum should be directed towards the acquisition of marketable skills. It is effective performance of specified tasks that is required rather than initiative, imagination or the exercise of judgement. Students can best be trained in these skills by means of a succession of graded practical exercises and regular testing. The learning tasks may build up into considerable complexity and difficulty but they do not involve theoretical debate or intellectual challenge.

*Profession.* Here the curriculum is directed towards the needs of a profession and so requires a sufficient theoretical basis for students to be able to exercise judgement. However, theory should be directed to its applications. Where the profession is multi-disciplinary, as with medicine, the pull of the diverse disciplinary components should be subordinated to the central aim of acquiring the ability to practise the profession. Note that some professions correspond to a single discipline (e.g. law) but many disciplines are associated with more than one profession or only with a quasi-profession (e.g. nursing and sociology). Teaching methods need to combine academic study with inculcation into the characteristic practices and values of the profession.

*Pre-profession.* The curriculum is not geared to direct entry into a profession and may, indeed, leave open which one of a number of professions can be selected. Therefore it may not have as great a practical and socialising role with regard to that profession as in the previous type. However, it aims to provide useful background knowledge, skills, expectations and learning capacities such that the graduate is better able to cope with post-graduate professional training. It may also include material specifically required for admission into a professional training course or exemption from some part of it.

*Learning capacity.* In this explanation and justification for a curriculum, what is emphasised is not the acquisition of particular skills and knowledge but the development of the *ability to learn* new skills and knowledge. Material is included in the curriculum less for its intrinsic value than because it affords good learning experiences. That is, all other aspects of the curriculum should be subordinated to pedagogy. Although, of course, students learn particular contents, the underlying purpose of this is seen as building up their repertoire of ways of learning. Students are encouraged to be reflective about their own learning processes. The presumption behind this curriculum ideology is that there is a considerable need in the middling layers of the occupational structure for people who are mentally flexible and adaptable.

### **Knowledge and Educational Reproduction**

*Communication.* The curriculum is directed towards processing acquired knowledge so that it takes a form suitable for communication to others. What is required is the ability to pick out the essential elements of a discourse and express oneself clearly in written and oral forms without the appearance of bias. The seminar is a particularly appropriate teaching method, since it demands that students respond and relate to the concerns of other people and also contribute positively to ongoing discussion. Imaginativeness is demanded less for the creation or criticism of knowledge than for devising means of communicating it to others.



*Academia.* In this curriculum ideology, the teacher is seen primarily as a scholar/researcher who lays out his or her knowledge in front of the students, typically by means of lectures, in a prescribed sequence of courses. Stress is placed upon written work, with a special emphasis on logical argument and objective assessment of evidence. It is only those students who pass severe tests devised by the teachers that can take on the role of apprenticeship into the academic community (Collier 1982). Methodology is given a prime place in the curriculum. It is also crucial to inculcate a sense of the characteristic data of the discipline, distinguish the discipline sharply from others and come to an appreciation of its history – including the thought of its founders.

*Inquiry.* The emphasis in this curriculum ideology is on developing students with the combination of inquiring minds and skills in research. There is no pretension of intellectual profundity as with academic ideology, but, rather, research is viewed as a practical activity of gathering, sorting and presenting data. Thus great importance is attached to courses on research methods techniques and much of the required written work is in the form of projects and dissertations. Students, it is assumed, learn by doing research in however modest a form.

## COMBINATIONS OF IDEOLOGIES

It is evident from the above descriptions of the categories of curriculum ideology that they presume affinities which, although plausible, need to be tested empirically and may well be found to be wanting. For example, my case studies suggest that an insistence on firmly defining the core and boundaries of the discipline does not necessarily correspond to the other stated features of academia. Furthermore, these curriculum ideologies do not neatly fit into the four domains identified above. For example, inquiry and academia are preparations for occupations as researchers and academics respectively as well as justifications of curricula in terms of the development and transmission of knowledge. Another example of the way these

ideologies somewhat cut across the domains is that dynamic leadership, in prescribing capabilities and dispositions, also implies the development of personal qualities. These tentative findings suggest that some reformulation of the above defined categories will be necessary.

Having aired some reservations about the above categories, I now move on to hypothesise that certain curriculum ideologies across the four domains are typically combined together in a relatively small number of characteristic ways. More specifically, I would expect that teachers who think that, with respect to one domain, the curriculum *should* serve a particular purpose are likely to have corresponding preferences in other domains. Also, I expect that the same combinations of curriculum ideologies tend to apply for what informants report is the case in a department's curriculum. To investigate whether this is true and, if so, to discover how the combination of ideologies varies from department to department, I have asked teachers two sets of questions about each ideology, namely what they think *should* be the case and what they think *is* the case in their department. This should throw light on the curriculum as a social product, as distinct from the sum of intellectual commitments of the individual teachers.

The hypothesised configurations are represented in Figure 10.3 and summarised below:

*Liberal:* Citizenship, humanism, learning capacity

*Market orientation:* Dynamic leadership, entrepreneurialism, skills training

*Service:* Pre-profession, communication

*Higher learning:* Academia, inquiry, profession

*Traditional leadership:* Elite, humanism

With regard to the *liberal* perspective, the claim is that an education which encourages creativity, personal autonomy and willingness to criticise authority when necessary will promote the general ability to learn effectively, a rounded personality and an active interest in the social world. On the other hand, the *market orientation* views education much more individualistically and instrumentally, in terms of its return on investment of time, effort and money. What I have referred to as the *service* configuration is a less well defined grouping of curriculum ideologies appropriate to those seeking careers in school

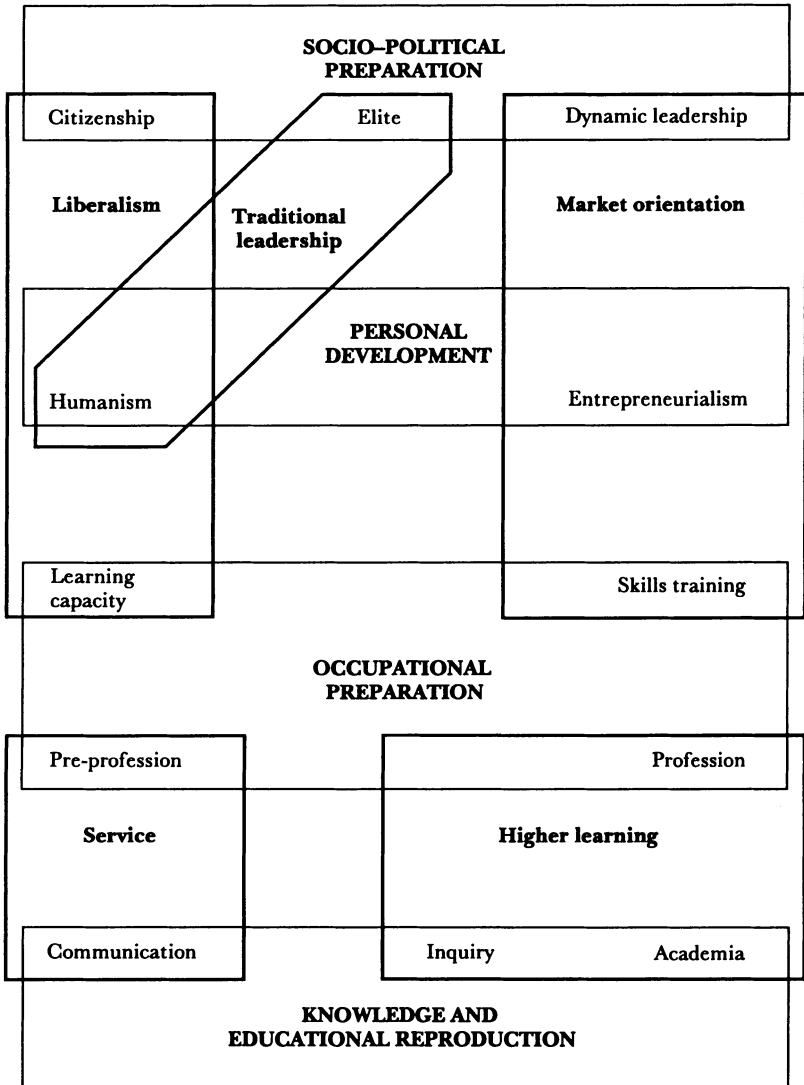


Figure 10.3 Configurations of curriculum ideologies

teaching, the caring professions, journalism and other ‘talking and writing’ occupations. *Higher learning* is also a somewhat disparate grouping for, in academia, research is subordinated to scholarship (unlike inquiry) and knowledge is for its own sake

(unlike profession). Nevertheless, there are bonds between these curriculum ideologies since academia defines itself in terms of advancement of knowledge and thus includes inquiry. Also, teachers in higher education are members of the 'academic profession' and, particularly in the case of the best established professions, are often important members of their specific professional association. The link between academia and profession is crucial for professional associations since membership of them is conditional on credentials of academic standing. Finally, *traditional leadership* is education which endorses the sense of superiority of those destined for social and political leadership. It takes this destiny for granted and thus disdains the acquisition of skills or the promotion of personal ambition, which are associated with achieved status.

To indicate how these concepts might be applied, some heroically broad assertions about developments in higher education will now be formulated.

Up to the end of the nineteenth century, the ancient universities constructed their curricula around two configurations, namely *traditional leadership* (e.g. classics, history) and *higher learning* (e.g. medicine, theology). These two combinations overlapped somewhat, especially in the case of law, for this provided a training for those who were to both administer and direct the state machine.

The nineteenth century foundation universities were, from their origins, hostile to *traditional leadership* curriculum and stressed *service* and professional education.

The rapid growth of the universities in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly the new ones, because of its conjunction with relative prosperity and full employment, promoted *liberal* education. There was a political consensus that prosperity depended on and made possible the creation and diffusion of new and 'open ended' knowledge. 'Warwick University Ltd' became a *cause célèbre* precisely because it was too closely geared to the immediate needs of employers.

*Market orientated* curriculum ideologies, which had formerly been relatively weak in the universities and strong in the polytechnics, became more prevalent throughout higher education in the grimmer economic circumstances since the mid-1970s. Contract funding, credit transfer and modularisation of courses, the growth in proportion of mature students and

increased college dependence on fee income will all have the effect of intensifying this trend.

Even if these sweeping generalisations have some validity, at any point of time there is bound to be considerable variation within each college and from one college to another. Indeed, within departments one can expect to find eager enthusiasts for externally influenced change, bitter opponents and those who are bemused and acquiescent. Thus, the study will aim to ask not only what curriculum ideologies are present in a department and how they are combined but also what sort of diversity and conflict there is over these matters. This may range from a high degree of consensus through tacit allocation of autonomous 'patches' to continuous warfare.

## THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIOLOGY'S CURRICULUM IDEOLOGIES

Much of the above discussion has been presented in general terms that might apply to curriculum of any subject but, of course, each subject has had its own particular history of development and location in the colleges and its sequence of research agendas and paradigms. In order to suggest how ideologies of the sociology curriculum have developed over time, I shall again present some rather sweeping hypotheses.

Up until the mid-1950s the emphasis was placed on establishing the respectability and scope of sociology as a discipline and also in showing that its 'scientific' methods could produce valid knowledge about social problems and social structure. Thus, the dominant curriculum ideologies were those of the *higher learning*. (Abrams, 1981) In the period of university expansion in the 1960s, sociology grew particularly rapidly and became 'fashionable'. Faculty were recruited as sociologists even though their own higher education was often in different disciplines. These developments were associated with the *liberal* justifications and explanations of curricula. Largely in reaction to what was perceived as an actual or threatened dilution of the discipline, *liberalism* was challenged by calls for *higher learning* in some departments. Students were required to have a better grasp of the core of the subject, which was defined as theory, history of sociology and 'scientific' methods of research.

However, this trend was compromised by a number of currents opposed to 'conventional' sociology, including ethnomethodology and Marxism. In particular, the overt social conflict of the late 1960s, which deeply involved the universities, stimulated a vigorous Marxist impact on the curriculum. This often involved efforts by its protagonists to colonise courses, polarise debates between Marxist and non-Marxist theoretical perspectives and, indeed, criticise the coherence and 'scientific' status of sociology as a discipline. Thus, from the 1960s there have been a number of paradigm debates, associated with various different sorts of Marxism, ethnomethodology, feminism and a rather diffuse series of critiques of positivism. What is remarkable, however, is the extent to which these threats have been absorbed by members of a department 'agreeing to differ' and by alternative paradigms being presented as rather abstract issues in sociological theory. Paradoxically, therefore, the initial challenge of Marxism, and to a lesser extent ethnomethodology and feminism, was to develop into a strengthening of academic ideology.

Throughout all this period, there were a significant number of sociologists who persistently advocated a curriculum justified in terms of preparation for the profession of sociologist. The real difficulty with this position, as indicated at the beginning of this paper, was simply that a very small proportion of all sociology graduates go on to be full-time sociologists. However, it still retains considerable force within many departments, not least because its supporters present their case in grounds of intellectual commitment rather than pragmatism. In very recent years the case for professional orientation may have gained support because the age structure of sociology faculty is such that there will be a staffing crisis unless more 'professional sociologists' are produced by the late 1990s.

Many of the faculty who were appointed in the 1960s when the *liberal* ideology (and Marxism) were current, are still in post, often in positions of academic leadership. As indicated above there are many factors that will have subsequently influenced their views but, nevertheless, those perspectives retain considerable resilience. Now the weight of external pressures is pushing in the direction of the *market orientation* and, as a result, considerable adjustments are being made to curricula, for example in areas of statistics, computing, research

methods, report writing, industrial placements and the drive towards applied sociology.

### ACTION ON THE CURRICULUM?

Consider the following apparently straightforward proposal. Teachers of a discipline should reason with one another in order to arrive at decisions on which thinkers, concepts and substantive fields students of that discipline need to understand, and also in order to decide appropriate ways to design and teach courses. Such a 'modest' proposal could be implemented through discussions within departments and then, on a national and international scale, through publication, conferences and the auspices of the discipline's professional associations. It might seem perfectly reasonable to expect teachers of a discipline to do this.

It could be argued in support of this proposal that, if a measure of consensus cannot be established, this must be because what is being considered is an eclectic bundle of subject matter rather than a discipline. Thus there would be no valid claim for it to be institutionalised in higher education as a discipline. If the teachers of a degree course could not state clearly and cogently what students should gain from it, then there would be grounds for doubting the coherence of the degree and suspecting that the teachers are unable to identify its purposes or unwilling to be accountable for their achievement. The failure to agree on a basic curriculum would be to puncture the pretensions of the 'discipline' or of its practitioners.

However, the proposal to hammer out an agreed national or international curriculum would probably seem pious, naive and dangerous to most teachers of sociology in higher education. There are several pragmatic, principled and political reasons for this.

First, there are a number of conflicting theoretical frameworks to which teachers make more or less strong intellectual and emotional commitments. There may be little difficulty in agreeing that students should be exposed to a range of different viewpoints but the specific selection and form of comparison is much more problematic. Second, reflecting this

endemic theoretical conflict, there is a lack of agreement on the boundaries of the discipline and, indeed, a significant proportion of teachers take the view that disciplinary boundaries are arbitrary anyway. Third, even where there is some measure of agreement about the subject matter, there is disagreement about the relationship between the component parts, in particular their relative importance. While it may be difficult enough to resolve such disagreements at the departmental level, it would be virtually impossible nationally, let alone internationally. Fourth, sociological perspectives are quite often sceptical, critical and debunking of convention and authority, and accordingly, there is an understandable fear that explicit statements of aims and methods would make the discipline – or some aspects of it – a sitting target for powerful enemies. Fifth, it is sometimes asserted that minimising collegial pressures on what individuals teach and protecting the autonomy of departments permits the fearless pursuit and communication of knowledge. The banner of academic freedom may, of course, be used to dignify more self-serving motives among teachers, such as insisting on pursuing their own interests in their teaching or even maintaining low levels of effort and competence.

Although these objections to attempting to construct a generally agreed curriculum have considerable force, there is nevertheless a strong case for other forms of reconsideration and innovation. Many sociology teachers interviewed expressed the view that the discipline had been through very hard times in recent years and there was now a need for a positive re-thinking of what student should be learning – neither opportunistic adapting to pressures nor persisting with curricula inappropriate to current circumstances. Of course, this begs a lot of quite specific questions about the desirable extent and nature of ‘flexibility’.

This chapter outlines and proposes a preparatory phase to a process of curriculum review, namely constructing out of a series of case studies a set of categories for describing curricula which will, hopefully, be generally acceptable. The second phase, which has been done, was to conduct a national survey of sociology curricula and disseminate the results. The third phase will be up to sociology teachers as they consider the implications of these findings for possible changes in their practice.



These research projects are certainly not intended to lay the groundwork for a national sociology degree curriculum. Rather, the aim is to gather and collate information on curricula in a way that stimulates argument in each department about what changes to make and does so on the basis of greater knowledge of what happens elsewhere. Specifically, each department will be so informed that its members will be able to assess whether it gives higher or lower priority than most other departments to liberalism, market orientation, higher learning or whatever. The aim is not to exert informal pressure on those departments which maintain an unusual curriculum; on the contrary, it might encourage departments to make themselves more rather than less distinctive.

Be that as it may, the purpose of the current studies is to stimulate debate about fundamental issues in the curriculum – what, how and why students should learn sociology – and thus to assist in the renewal and invigoration of the subject. The question of what, how, and why students should learn, is echoed in the practice of sociology itself. What should it be about, how should it be practised, and why – apart from our own self-interest – should there be any sociology at all? To the extent that sociology exists in its teachers and teaching, a better understanding of the curriculum is the key to a better understanding of British sociology in the last decade of the twentieth century.

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# 11 Graduate Labour Markets and the New Vocationalism in Higher Education

E. Stina Lyon and Kate Murray

The concept of 'vocationalism' has for some time been part of the policy debate on the nature and future of higher education. A decade ago, fears of an 'overproduction' of graduates in an economy in recession increasingly led to concern about the 'employability' of graduates. Large student cohorts with increased participation rates in higher education entered a labour market with fewer jobs, and with available jobs not always perceived by employers as matched by graduate skills and qualifications. With the recovery of the economy, however temporary, the demand for graduates again increased. New labour demands, especially in the areas of technology and finance, again called into question the ability of higher education and its students to 'deliver the goods'. The agenda for government policy-making continues to be dominated by notions of matching educational expenditure to the requirements of the economy.

The 'manpower planning' model of the relationship between higher education and the economy, which has informed much of the policy debate on vocationalism, sees the role of higher education as that of providing a mechanism for regulating the supply of qualified labour. Through a combination of two things, first, a planned provision of places on vocationally relevant courses offering skills in shortage, and second, wage mechanisms in the labour market reflecting employer demands, the 'fit' between education and production should become closer and students more efficiently channelled into the economy. The model assumes an economic rationality on the part of both students and employers in seeking and filling jobs, and a unitary conception of both 'graduate' and the 'graduate labour market' in the manufacture and interchangeability of graduates

as 'goods'. Such assumptions give rise to a series of questions concerning the apparent 'mismatch' between supply and demand in the production of graduates, questions which cannot easily be answered by that model, and which call into doubt the power of market mechanisms in themselves to regulate the supply of graduate labour.

While the demand for graduates continued to rise, there still remained some graduates who found it difficult to get jobs and who remained both un- and under-employed for considerably longer than other graduates (Brennan and McGeevor 1987; Boys and Kirkland 1988; Morgan and Scott 1988). The demand for places on courses known to have poorer employment prospects continues, while employers cry out for more graduates in some fields, and there is growing shortage of graduates from some subjects (Tarsh 1987; Pearson 1988). Despite excellent employment prospects in technological subjects, women do not seem to respond to market 'cues', but remain concentrated in non-numerate subjects.

There is seen to be a mismatch between the kinds of particular skills required by employers, and the skills graduates have to offer over a range of competencies from numeracy to motivation to work. Graduate skills are seen as not relevant to the demands of work (Bradshaw 1985; Lyon 1988a). As a consequence some graduates, notably those most difficult to employ in graduate-type work, become employed in lower paid jobs and occupations not normally in need of graduate qualification, thus to some extent leaving graduates 'overeducated' and 'overqualified'. This is also likely to influence processes of 'professionalisation' of marginal occupations traditionally not of professional status. A particular feature of this 'mismatch' is that between graduate expectations of work and the actual experience of employment, indicated by a high level of turnover of jobs amongst graduates in the first years of employment, sometimes at cost to employers (Mabey 1986). Such issues of mismatch call into question the power of market mechanisms by themselves to regulate the supply of graduate labour, at least in the short term.

Decades of sociological work on the failure of vocationally orientated school reform radically to change labour-market opportunities for lower-class school leavers, should alert us to more critical and structural approaches to the relationship

between higher education, qualifications and the labour market than that offered by the manpower planning model (Gleeson 1983; Bates 1984; Moore 1987). There has however been little equivalent sociological attention paid to the primary labour market and the process of graduate entry to it.

It is the main contention of this chapter that problems in the graduate labour market, whether they relate to over- or under-production of graduates, are more a consequence of stratification and the inequalities in society at large, than of the lack of vocational orientation on the part of higher education. Hence, the many and varied policy attempts to reshape higher education in order to serve the changing demands of industry and the labour market are in our view as unlikely to result in a closer 'fit' as the many schemes introduced for school leavers over the last decade, unless as great deal more attention is given to the way access is given both to different types of curricula and to different types of jobs.

It is our intention in this chapter to explore some of these questions using data from current surveys funded by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) of graduate employment patterns. The HELM graduate panel survey is a longitudinal project at present in its second stage. It comprises samples from two cohorts (1982 and 1985) of CNAA courses and its graduates. The 1982 cohort has been surveyed four times, and at the time of writing the 1985 cohort is being surveyed for the second time. (For further details of these surveys see Brennan and McGeevor 1988, and Lyon, McGeevor and Murray 1988). Using evidence from these surveys, we will look at the role of degree courses as 'filters' mediating between the social and educational background of students and work, and at the social context of student aspirations and course choice.

## EDUCATION AND THE LABOUR MARKET

When issues relating to inequality in higher education have been debated, they have mostly been concerned with patterns of entry, not with the relationship between differential entry patterns and final employment opportunities (Warren-Piper 1981; Acker and Warren-Piper 1984; Finch and Rustin 1986;

Fulton 1988). An exception to this is the work of Rosemary Crompton on the occupational success of professional women, to which we will return later (Crompton 1987). Post-war educational reforms leading to widening access, coupled with an expanding white-collar labour market, brought with them a popular faith in a 'tightening bond' between higher education qualifications and jobs, whereby merit and ability rather than the accidentals of birth were becoming the criteria of success for those that made it beyond the crucial stage of A-levels. Though still a middle-class preserve, once in higher education, its rewards have in themselves been seen as sufficient for entry to an elite labour market of high earnings and brilliant prospects. The strength of this faith amongst the educated classes can perhaps best be seen in empirical evidence, which shows that level of parental education is one of the more important factors in determining higher education aspirations (Redpath and Harvey 1987; Raffe 1988).

The dominant sociological models of the relationship between education and the labour market can be grouped under two main headings. The first sees the function of education as a sorting and selection mechanism for individual talents. The other sees the role of education in more conflictual terms as an agent in the maintenance of power of the ruling elite, male and/or capitalist, where the function of education is more one of legitimating exclusion, than of offering useful skills.

Both perspectives have brought critiques of the liberal meritocratic reform perspectives dominating official policy debates in the post-war decades. For the former, the growth in the number of credentials awarded overall has been seen to lead to an inflationary process (Collins 1979). For the second perspective, the strength of the relationship between financial and cultural capital is seen as a key non-meritocratic force which underlies all educational ventures, and which is so fundamental to capitalist industrial society as to be impervious to intra-educational reforms designed to improve mobility rates. As Brennan and Silver note in their book on vocationalism in higher education, the social and economic functions ascribed to educational qualifications are not only many and varied but contradictory, and 'whether they also reflect an actual educational experience of the slightest relevance to

actually doing a job seems almost immaterial' (Silver and Brennan 1988: 26)

What the models have in common, however, is a view of education as a dominant 'filtering' mechanism between a stratified society on the one hand and a specialised and stratified division of labour on the other.

When it comes to debates about the ways in which *higher* education contributes to this process of 'filtering' however, the debate has been more closely anchored in the first of the two main perspectives discussed above, with less attention being paid both to the labour-market effect of social differentiation within higher education, and to the segmented nature of the graduate labour market itself. Critical discussions surrounding issues of vocational relevance in higher education have been directed more towards whether directly 'serving' the manpower needs of the economy is a proper function of higher education, than towards the legitimacy of its underlying rationale of improving employment prospects for graduates.

## SEGMENTATION AND THE GRADUATE LABOUR MARKET

The structure of the labour market and the jobs available within it lead to particular requirements for graduate recruitment. A brief analysis of labour-market conditions is therefore important in order to understand the process of graduate entry to it. In his work on education and social mobility, using Scottish data, Payne argues that primacy in the explanation of mobility cannot be given to education, but has to be found in the industrial composition of society (Payne 1987). This should open the study of the role of credentials to a range of more specific empirical explorations of the relationship between education and the labour market in that the labour market is divided into different types and sectors, each one of which may have a different degree of tightness of fit with educational qualifications. Career chances may be further constrained by a process of segmentation of labour-market opportunities both within and between different industrial sectors.

As expressed by Giddens the labour market is 'a system of economic relationships founded upon relative bargaining

strengths of different groupings of individuals' (Giddens 1973). This relative bargaining strength gives rise to 'segmentation', a system of differences of economic opportunities and reward amongst comparable individuals (see Barron and Norris 1976; Hakim 1979; Dale 1985; Doeringer and Piore 1971; Kreckel 1980; Ryan 1981). 'In-market' segmentation can take many forms, the main one distinguished in the literature being that of a duality between the primary and secondary sectors, the former containing the higher paying jobs, with mobility between the two sectors restricted.

In their paper on theories of labour-market segmentation, Loveridge and Mok develop a dual model of 'primary internal' segmentation, consisting of sub-segments with jobs which are skill-specific, need training and have good promotion prospects, job security and high material rewards, and 'primary external' segmentation, consisting of sub-segments with jobs which are less specific in skill content, need less vocationally specific training, but on the other hand still command relatively high material rewards and job autonomy. They see the latter sector as containing a large number of jobs that have lost their skill content and promotion chances because of structural changes in organisations and technology, especially in the white-collar sector. In their words, this 'sector could be dubbed as the cooling out segment for frustrated graduates and other higher educated white collar workers' (Loveridge and Mok 1980: 395). This white-collar sector low in skills content as well as income and career prospects, is also where the problems of 'under-employment' and 'over-education' have been seen to reside (Smith 1986; Tarsh 1987). It is also the sector where women graduates are more often to be found.

In this process of 'compartmentalisation', the labour market is not the first point at which segmentation takes place. Ryan introduces the important concept of 'pre-market' segmentation, that is the differentiation of opportunities to enhance one's productive potential through schooling, doing a degree or other training programmes before commencing employment (Ryan 1981). The close relationship between education and social stratification means that some individuals enter the labour market with distinct advantages in the power and capabilities to bargain and compete over jobs. Such capabilities contain a large developmental component associated primarily with the

school, access to which is in itself markedly differential according to social class, gender and ethnicity. With different degree courses and disciplines able to control the structure of admissions and admission criteria, the role of pre-market segmentation can be expected to be significant in the role of higher education as a 'filter' into the various sub-segments of different sectors of the graduate labour market.

If pre-segmentation through the process of schooling sets up the initial barriers to open competition for entry into the labour market, mechanisms of 'social closure' may operate in the same way from the other end through particular segments of the labour market erecting barriers to the recruitment of particular kinds of labour. Such barriers may be formal and based on certifications, qualifications and skills, or more informally based on cultural, racial or gender expectations of what constitutes a 'typical' employee in a particular field of employment. As Jenkins points out in his work on racism and management recruitment practices, employers, professional organisations and trade unions look for employees and colleagues who are both 'suitable' and 'acceptable' for the nature of the work they are to undertake (Jenkins 1986).

The argument presented here is that the flexibility of the criteria for what constitutes suitability and acceptability for a job may vary between segments of the labour market. Employers will look in different labour markets for the three kinds of intake Pearson has identified as significant in graduate recruitment: 'high flyers' for senior management positions, specialists with particular skills and qualifications, and a more general intake recruited as potential junior and middle managers (Pearson 1976). For the former, personal qualities of long-term value to the firm may play a greater role than for the second category. The third group is one for which the particular nature of the qualification itself is of less significance than its general status. From the point of view of our discussions about segmentation, the former two can be seen as 'primary internal', with the latter as 'primary external'. There is a centre and periphery to the graduate labour market.

In her work on the career patterns of professional women, Crompton (1987) has developed the concept of a 'status matrix' to illustrate the complex interrelationship between social and individual characteristics and the nature of qualifications that



combine to make up the 'package' of labour market 'currency' that an employee brings to the market. A status matrix is a kind of model with which recruiters work, in which different qualities of a personal and credential kind get their standing and salience in relationship to each other (Crompton and Sanderson 1986; Crompton 1987). Each recruiting organisation operates with a different matrix as a setting for the evaluation of candidates for jobs. There are labour-market settings where a looked-for social skill may rest on a particular status characteristic such as being a male, or having a 'respectable' accent. Conversely, being female may be treated as an 'occupational handicap', requiring compensatory characteristics and abilities such as exceptional excellence, or the possession of a skill in short supply amongst male graduates. The value of an educational qualification is determined by its position in the matrix, rather than by its own inherent nature.

The power to determine how much a particular qualification is worth in recruitment situations lies with employers, and the needs of the labour market at any one time. At the present time, for example, the shortage of engineers in the labour market is leading to new approaches to the recruitment of women both into engineering education and to jobs (Pearson 1986). The differential skills components required in different sectors of the economy, with some sectors demanding very tightly regulated and specific qualifications and experiences, and others requiring few specific skills beyond more general intellectual graduate abilities, would lead us to believe that very different rules operate for graduate recruitment into different sectors of the economy and for different segments within each sector. The less skill-specific a particular sector of the labour market, and the lower the demand for graduates, the more we might expect other dimensions of a status matrix to become significant in recruitment. The more specific the skills content, and the greater the demand for those specific skills in the market, the less other status dimensions should be important in the selection for jobs.

As graduates have already gone through a lengthy period of differentiation according to social characteristics, credentials and skills before entry to higher education, the role of degree subject become important, not as a factor determining the process of entry to the labour market, but as a stage in the

process of channelling different types of student into different labour-market conditions.

## COURSES INTO EMPLOYMENT

Courses and their degree qualifications constitute a most important 'filter' in the process of differentiation that leads to

*Table 11.1*

Changing employment status, 1983–85: 1982 cohort (per cent)

<i>Subject Field</i>	<i>Full-time employment</i>			<i>Full-time study</i>			<i>Unemployed</i>		
	<i>1983</i>	<i>1984</i>	<i>1985</i>	<i>1983</i>	<i>1984</i>	<i>1985</i>	<i>1983</i>	<i>1984</i>	<i>1985</i>
Arts/Humanities	36	65	71	25	5	6	32	15	8
Social Science	47	75	79	22	4	6	25	10	4
Business management	81	90	97	8	2	1	9	4	0
Science 1	52	71	79	22	15	8	22	6	4
Science 2	72	79	81	10	7	6	15	4	3
Built environment	80	81	92	5	3	0	10	8	2
Engineering	75	91	95	9	6	2	15	2	2
Art/Design	42	69	78	18	4	1	30	12	7
Interfaculty	40	72	78	22	3	4	32	9	4
All courses	54	75	80	18	7	5	23	8	4

*Source:* Brennan and McGeevor 1988: 20

segmentation. Courses can be seen to act as 'regulators' of segmentation in the way they channel predetermined student orientations and aspirations into degree subjects with more or less well defined relationships with different types of labour market in the primary sector. Whether a particular course becomes a 'meal ticket' or not depends on the nature of student demand and admissions, as well as on the demand for particular skills by employers; not on its degree of vocationalism as such. By their choice of course students place themselves in different markets.

When we look at the empirical evidence in the study of the role of courses in 'mediating' student orientations and the short-term employment prospects of graduates, there are several key aspects of early graduate employment status to consider. First, there is the variation in the rate of change over time in the numbers of full-time employed relative to those in further study or those unemployed. Second, there is the extent of movement between different types of employment and jobs with graduates chasing more attractive jobs. Third, the quality and the level of the jobs gained relative to aspirations need to be considered. Using these indicators we note the different

*Table 11.2*  
Changes in perceived job quality 1983–85 (per cent)  
(HELM sample, 1982 cohort)

	<i>Engineering</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Social Science</i>	<i>Arts/ Humanities</i>
Average income	1983 £6638 1985 £10005	1983 £5262 1985 £10054	1983 £5032 1985 £7853	1983 £5055 1985 £8115
Experiencing difficulty getting job appropriate to qualifications 1985	29	24	58	51
In preferred job				
1983	63	73	49	44
1985	65	58	59	54
Felt overqualified				
1983	44	37	58	56
1985	25	18	37	38
Not in traditional graduate work 1985	20	13	24	23
Actively seeking different work				
1983	19	12	32	36
1985	15	12	19	21

*Source:* Brennan and McGreevor 1988: 35–6, 40, 42

labour-market conditions graduates from different subjects enter.

For the 1982 cohort of CNAAs graduates, shown in Table 11.1, who entered the labour market at a difficult time, the change is quite marked in the first three years, especially for subject areas which started off with comparatively high unemployment rates.

Looking in detail at four broad subject areas in Table 11.2 we see that for the 1982 cohort the gap between subjects in employment status narrowed over the three years after graduation. Further, after three years, more Arts/Humanities and Social Science graduates still feel overqualified relative to the work they do. They have gone through considerably more changes in employment status, and a slightly higher percentage of them are still actively looking for a different sort of job than graduates in Engineering and Business Studies, the most commonly given reason being a desire for better career prospects. The Brunel/HELM survey showed similar subject differences in the graduates' perceived opportunity structure. The sense of overqualification is strong for many graduates (see Boys and Kirkland 1988: 50–3, 57).

In their book on vocationalism in higher education, Silver and Brennan (1988) develop an important model of the relationship between subjects in higher education and the labour market which helps to explain these patterns. Silver and Brennan's two-dimensional model in the first instance differentiates between courses with a specific course/employment relationship and those with diffuse ones. Second, subjects may be differentiated according to the degree of vocational relevance of their content, from that of providing complete training for a vocation or profession to that of transmitting only the most marginal and accidental of vocationally relevant skills. The juxtaposition of these two dimensions gives a typology of possible kinds of course/labour-market relationships (see Silver and Brennan 1988).

Degree subjects with specific course/employment relationships, such as engineering, may act as sole or partial regulators of labour-market entry, and they may do so offering vocational training which is more or less complete. A specified degree may act as sole regulator of entry to a well-defined field of employment in which case the degree itself becomes a 'licence to practise'. If the output is matched by demand, the perfect

manpower planning situation has been achieved. Constraints imposed by employer needs and by the requirements of professional bodies will keep both students and course teams firmly orientated to the particular market for which they train. For such students occupational choice takes place *before* entry to higher education, and a level of commitment to the vocational objectives of the course can be expected.

There is of course only a guarantee of a job at the end of such a course as long as there is an employer-demand for its graduates. Through close involvement with the curriculum, admissions criteria and standards in general, professional and statutory bodies and large employing organisations are able to contribute to the regulation of the relationship between supply and demand. In view of the time-lags in the operation of regulatory mechanisms, the fit is seldom perfect. Recent years have seen both overproduction and underproduction of certain types of professionals. There may even be contradictory forces at work between the demand for standards and the need for labour. (An example of this is the recent development in teacher training, where on the one hand rules of admission were made more stringent, demanding O-level (or GCSE equivalent) maths, but on the other hand a shortage of teachers may necessitate a new form of certification of less academic standing.)

Much of the provision of higher education lies more towards the opposite corner of this matrix with degree subjects having diffuse links to employment, where there is a much more complex relationship with the labour market. Graduates from vocationally relevant but occupationally non-specific courses such as business studies and social science, enter an 'open' labour market, not regulated by professional bodies or other statutory mechanisms, i.e. without the protection of a fixed 'currency'. As employment outcomes are diffuse, varied and indeterminate, major career choices within broad areas of employment remain to be made at the end of the degree course, or during the first years of 'tentative' employment experiences.

As Silver and Brennan point out, it would be a mistake to regard such course/subject types as 'non-vocational'. Though without explicit vocational preparation, degree subjects in this general category may contain curricular features of vocational relevance whatever the discipline offered, such as quantitative, commercial, administrative or communicative skills. As the

degree is only one attribute a graduate brings into the labour market, and not a particularly strong currency in its own right, vocationally relevant features of the curriculum such as numeracy skills, may provide some 'bargaining power' in the market. The greater the competition in the market, along with other more social characteristics, the greater role such vocationally relevant skills may be expected to play. Such general skills, in recent policy debates referred to as 'transferable skills', or 'competencies' are of course also related to other social and educational experiences than those provided by higher education (witness the role of GCSE maths in recruitment practice, as noted by Morgan and Scott, 1987).

There are indications that where employers can recruit in a relatively open employment market they look more to individual skills and attributes than to the particular type of degree subject (Gordon 1983). More general qualitative aspects of the subject or qualification come to matter in evaluating its labour market potential such as the academic standing of its intake, or the status of the institution where it is taught. In other words, increasing the general vocationalism of subject content may not increase the currency of the subject in an open and competitive market if other aspects of the course and its students are held in low esteem. (For evidence of institutional differences between university and polytechnic graduates from similar subjects, see Boys and Kirkland 1988.)

There are also subjects which relate to an open market, and which do not offer employment-relevant curricular input apart from use of the most abstract and general kind, for example humanities, fine arts and the pure sciences. Here curricula are not designed with employment in mind, and students do not join with immediate and specific employment motivations. These also tend to be the courses where, it has been argued, the expansion in student demand has outpaced the growth in the open graduate labour market, and where 'extra-curricular' factors can be expected to play the greatest role in recruitment processes. In an open labour market for a variety of non-specific white-collar work, and with no professional or statutory regulatory mechanisms to put the brakes on admissions and standards, such courses have also been the ones taking many of the new kinds of non-standard students entering higher education in the 60s and 70s (Evans 1984).

The different kinds of 'currency' that degree qualifications possess is clearly not a fixed one. A slack demand for a particular kind of engineer will immediately affect and decrease the power of such degree courses in the labour market, as conversely a lack of demand for places on engineering degree courses will increase the demand for such labour. A vocationally specific degree course is if anything more sensitive to fluctuations in labour-market demand than a more general degree subject with some curricular vocational relevance, such as business studies or social science, where a more diffuse labour market over time may offer alternatives of various kinds.

It is in subjects short on curricular content of direct vocational relevance, such as humanities, that one might expect a greater extent of underemployment and a greater amount of overqualification in the labour market. What seems clear is that controlled and regulated segmented graduate labour markets cannot be treated as equivalent or interchangeable with more diffuse and open ones. They are different markets with different rules serviced by different courses.

For Silver and Brennan, the nature of the degree subject and its relationship to particular kinds of labour market is the focus. It is crucial to emphasise that different kinds of student choose different degree subjects for reasons only partly to do with labour-market opportunities. In fact for many students, by the time they come to contemplate entry to higher education, the market for places on courses is not an open one, nor are courses always chosen with a specific labour-market outcome in mind. Though important as filters into the labour market in their own right, courses do not constitute the first point in the process of segmentation. Choice of course in higher education is in itself an outcome of those earlier processes of differentiation, which we have referred to as pre-segmentation.

## STUDENT ASPIRATIONS AND ORIENTATIONS

With success in the labour market varying between types of subject, it is important to see the extent to which different subjects attract students with differing motivations and orientations. To choose a subject is also to choose a particular relationship to the labour market, and in some instances to

close off the possibility of entry to certain sectors of the market, however good the employment prospects in those sectors. At the point of applying for a place, students are already in sub-segments of labour-market pre-segmentation. Students who for various reasons opted out of doing maths and science O-levels, or who completed secondary school with only one A-level, have already before they enter higher education been excluded from parts of the primary labour market. As Fulton has recently so forcefully pointed out, the selective, specialised, elitist, and we would add patriarchal, nature of secondary education closes doors very early on for some pupils (Fulton 1988).

This process is reinforced by the type of higher education subject taken. Subject *per se* does not alone determine employability of graduates. One could say that the nature of a particular subject mediates between, on the one hand, students' previous educational experiences, motivations and aspirations, and on the other specific labour market needs. The importance of this in relation to aspects of labour-market segmentation lies in the fact that student aspirations and earlier educational choice are 'stratified' and related to the social class/status and gender characteristics of students, and hence to their early educational careers in schools and further education colleges (see Warren-Piper 1981; Acker and Warren-Piper 1984; Brennan and McGeevor 1988; Lyon 1988b; Boys and Kirkland 1988).

Factors of gender, class, educational background, ethnicity and so on, all play a role in shaping vocational goals and their degree of specificity, as well as labour-market opportunities at any one time. Orientations of students entering higher education are formed at home, at school, and through varieties of personal and work experiences well before enrolment. From an early stage in a pupil's career, an interaction develops between the gaining of credentials and vocational aspirations. Options become 'closed' through the nature of credentials accumulated and the types of institutions attended. Early specialisation, and the absence of a common type of entry qualification for higher education, create a strongly stratified and gender-segregated secondary, and especially upper secondary, education.

As argued above, by 'choosing' particular courses of study, graduates engage in continuing pre-segmentation by making themselves available only in particular markets (Gatley 1988).



There is a major and consistent difference between the men and the women of the HELM cohorts in the nature of GCSE and CSE examination passes, with the more numerate and technological subjects stronger amongst the men. This is reflected in the gender distributions of subjects taken at the polytechnic. There is also a more general trend shown of women less frequently undertaking occupationally specialist courses (Table 11.3). (On the categorization previously discussed, see Silver and Brennan 1988.)

*Table 11.3*  
Type of course by gender, per cent

Row	General list	General list plus	Occupational General list	Specialist list	-N-
Men	20.6	31.8	13.9	33.9	1400
Women	31.5	25.1	17.4	26.1	1236
Total	25.6	28.6	15.6	30.2	2630

chi sq  $p < 0.001$

*Source:* Adapted from Gatley 1988

The evidence that can be discerned from the HELM 1982 cohort data on the role of class shows that, although a weak relationship exists between social class origins and the destination of graduates, as the above discussion would lead us to expect much of this variance disappears once controls are introduced for the type of subject undertaken. This leads to the suggestion that working-class graduates might have a tendency, like women graduates, to undertake those courses which have poor employment outcomes. The process by which students enter a higher education course is as important in explaining labour-market outcomes, as the nature of the subject itself.

## INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC CHOICES

Many students do not choose their higher education courses solely with short-term vocational intents, but with more general and longer-term personal aims, interests and aspirations for the

future. Indeed for some, the higher education experience is as much about discovering a commitment to a vocation as about pursuing one. In the recent Brunel-based study of polytechnic and university graduate entry into the labour market, students showed little consensus over which particular aspirations were most important, with students from the more vocational courses in commercial subjects, engineering and law more likely to attach importance to extrinsic rewards in terms of financial benefits, social status and promotion than students of humanities, arts and social sciences for whom more intrinsic rewards stood out as important. This subject difference also showed up in the wish to use degree knowledge in future work, which was high for students of law for example, but low for history students. Most students in the Brunel survey thought long-term career prospects more important than immediate salary gains and 'many were prepared to be unemployed after they graduated until they found the job to which they aspired'. (Boys and Kirkland 1988: 26.)

The HELM Graduate Panel Survey has made similar findings for both its cohorts. When asked about the role of higher education, graduates do not entirely share the government's views on the importance of labour-market preparation. For all the graduates in the initial sample, the greatest importance of all was attached to the role of higher education in the generation of new knowledge and personal growth and development. The training of specialists for industry and commerce ranked third in the list of suggested priorities.

Subjects of study were shown to be again related to the selection of perceived goals, in that business and engineering graduates attached rather less importance to personal growth or helping the disadvantaged, than graduates in other fields. Graduates in these subjects were also distinctive in placing 'training for industry' at the top of their list. Arts and humanities students were alone in placing 'personal growth' at the top of their list, and along with social science graduates they also saw 'helping the disadvantaged' as important.

Gender differences in aspirations have also been shown to be marked, with women seeing the value of higher education in more intrinsic terms. (Chapman 1988). This is related to degree-level subject choice, with women opting for subjects that are 'people' orientated rather than those leading to better pay,

status and economical and technological development. It is very difficult to know whether gender differences in occupational aspirations are a consequence of gender differentiation in school, or a cause. Suffice to say here, that there is an ongoing interaction between motivations and choice of study that carries on into the labour market.

As different courses in higher education set different entry standards and offer different relationships with the labour market it is not surprising that there are shown to be a higher proportion of women and non-standard entrants and mature students on courses in social sciences and humanities than on many more explicitly and primarily vocational or science-based courses. (Evans 1984; Brennan and McGeever 1988). Students entering higher education by non-traditional routes, as well as women and working-class students, have also in other studies been shown to be less motivated by specific occupational considerations. (Harrison et al. 1977; Redpath and Harvey 1987). Different categories of students are at different stages perhaps in the process of 'finding their place' in the labour market, a process which has both external and internal constraints.

Lest it be thought that the strength of non-vocational orientations amongst students and their subject relatedness is a British phenomenon, it is worth noting that similar findings have been made by a cross-national European study into student orientations, the FORM project. (Dipplehofer-Stiem 1984). European students overall in this study seem to display a wide variety of goals and interests, and they see higher education as servicing a wider range of goals than employment. Further, this 'broad' approach to higher education was also manifested in the reasons the students gave for selecting their field of study. Intrinsic aspects were shown to predominate over extrinsic ones, with special interest in the subject, and aptitude, seen as more significant than good career possibilities and future incomes. However, greater importance is attached to the latter by students in business and economics, traditionally more 'male' subjects.

Interestingly, this study shows that a deterioration in the market may not necessarily be accompanied by a change of attitudes. When presented with the choice between studying a subject they find really interesting, and studying a subject offering good career prospects, most students in all the coun-

tries opt for the former possibility. As a result, concludes Dippelhofer-Stiem, 'it is possible to talk in terms of idealistic, non-materialistically orientated attitudes and values on the part of young highly qualified individuals as far as their notions with respect to the advantages and results of higher education are concerned' (Dippelhofer-Stiem 1984: 323).

To sum up, recruiting employers as well as potential employees operate within market conditions which are subject to certain external constraints of student aspirations and choices made during a process of pre-segmentation. Aspects of the mismatch as discussed above have roots which go a great deal deeper than the vocational responsiveness of higher education subjects. Those subjects which exhibit the lower employment rates, such as arts/humanities and social sciences, cannot produce students capable of competing in the market employing systems-analysts and engineers, however vocationally orientated their content, nor will students choose the latter type of subjects, if they have not already developed an adequate background and motivation towards such fields long before entering higher education.

## TYPE OF GRADUATE, TYPE OF WORK

In this final section, we will try to bring together the above discussions by looking at some evidence of how courses with different relationships to the labour market show signs of both pre-segmentation, and in-market segmentation, with consequent different early career trajectories for men and women graduates. The HELM 1985 sample offers an important opportunity for using gender as a variable in relating aspects of pre-segmentation to in-market segmentation. We will here again look at four key subject areas: Engineering, Business Studies, Social Sciences and Arts/Humanities. The HELM sampling process was designed to approximate as far as possible a ratio of 150 men to 150 women from each subject area. The extent of pre-segmentation is already reflected in the fact that for some subjects the sample gender ratio proved impossible to achieve, with only 33 women electrical engineers to 238 men, and only 13 women mechanical engineers to 260 men. In all, according to the CNAAC conferment files for 1985, the 46

women in the sample constituted the totality of women graduating from polytechnics in these two engineering subjects that year. This is in contrast to the 1494 men that gained degrees in these subjects.

As can be expected, the situation in arts/humanities is the reverse, with such courses being female-dominated. Of the four subject areas discussed here, it is only business studies and social sciences that have a close to equal proportion of men and women. Like secondary school subjects, courses are strongly 'gendered', and gender differentiations in type of qualifications gained will over time by themselves channel young women into different areas of the labour market.

As the availability of jobs differs between areas of the primary labour market, so do the rewards offered in terms of, for example, income and job status. Women graduates from courses with more advantageous employment potential, such as engineering and business studies, should do better than those without qualifications in high demand. Looking at Table 11.4 and 11.5, we see that as regards both employment status and income, women in these subjects have done well. There is considerably less of a difference between the men and the women within these – from a labour market point of view – 'high status' subjects, than between the women and others graduating from different subjects. Almost all of both the men and the women graduating from engineering and business studies are in full-time work two years after graduation. This is true of only less than half of both the men and the women graduating from arts/humanities courses. Further, two years after graduation women graduates of both engineering and business studies earn on average considerably more than both men and women from social sciences and arts/humanities courses.

In fact, there are at present clearly pay-offs in the literal sense of the term for women pursuing what can be termed gender non-conventional educational careers. The specificity of qualifications required and the demand in the labour market for them, means that for these women the status dimension of gender carries less weight in the recruitment process than the skills they have to offer. They become 'high fliers' with bargaining power in the labour market, at least initially equal to that of their male colleagues.

*Table 11.4*  
 Employment status by course and gender  
 HELM Sample 1985 cohort, two years after graduation

	<i>Engineering</i> n = 238 men n = 26 women		<i>Business Studies</i> n = 58 men n = 68 women		<i>Social Sciences</i> n = 50 men n = 61 women		<i>Arts/Humanities</i> n = 75 men n = 88 women		<i>All Courses</i>	
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>		
Full-time work	90.0	94.5	91.4	88.2	60.0	73.8	42.9	46.2	76.2	74.7
Full-time study	4.7	-	3.4	1.5	12.0	6.6	14.8	11.1	10.5	8.9
Self-employed	1.7	2.8	1.7	-	4.0	3.3	12.3	11.0	4.8	4.2
Part-time work	1.3	-	1.7	4.4	6.0	8.2	13.9	13.5	2.9	5.3
Not seeking work	0.8	-	-	1.5	4.0	1.6	-	9.5	1.4	3.1
Unemployed	2.1	2.8	1.7	4.4	14.0	6.6	16.3	9.0	4.2	3.8

*Table 11.5*  
Median total income by course and gender  
1985 cohort two years after graduation

<i>Course</i>	<i>Men</i> £	<i>Women</i> £
Engineering (electrical/mechanical) n=238 men, 26 women	10 750	10 862
Business Studies n=58 men, 68 women	10 910	10 335
Social Science n=50 men, 61 women	9 034	8 405
Arts/Humanities n=75 men, 88 women	8 438	6 570
All courses	10 200	8 743

Yet few women leave higher education with qualifications leading to entry to the 'centre' of the primary labour market. Instead they graduate with less specific degrees offering skills for which either the demand is less, or there are fewer economic rewards offered at the 'external' end, that is the 'periphery', of the primary labour market. Women are more commonly found in the public or voluntary sectors (56 per cent compared with 40 per cent of male graduates) and more often as semi-professionals or lower grades (64 per cent compared with 47 per cent). Various white-collar and service jobs in the public sector can be said to constitute much of the 'primary external' segmentation.

For the 1985 sample of polytechnic graduates, 77 per cent of social sciences graduates and 64 per cent of the humanities/arts graduates entered the public sector, but only 9 per cent and 10 per cent respectively of business and engineering graduates. From Table 11.6, which presents a kind of 'league table' of the 'top ten' jobs for men and women, we can see the important role for women's employment played by jobs in the public sector such as teaching. Jobs in areas such as social welfare do not appear at all in the top ten categories for men.

Traditionally, the conditions of employment for women at the top end of the public sector have been seen to be more conducive

*Table 11.6*  
Types of work: largest categories for men and women  
HELM sample, 1985 cohort

Type of work	Men %	Type of work	Women %
Accountancy	12.4	Teaching	13.1
Programming	7.0	Accountancy	10.4
Other engineering	6.1	General admin.	7.9
Engineering Design	5.9	Other management	4.8
Teaching	5.8	Programming	4.2
Estate Management	5.1	Estate Management	3.8
Other management	4.5	Art/Design	3.6
Surveying	4.4	Social/Welfare	3.2
General admin.	4.1	Science Research	2.9
Systems analysis	4.0	Lab. Technicians	2.6

*Source:* Lyon, McGeevor and Murray 1988: 8.

to combination with family responsibilities, the price of which is, amongst other things, lower pay. The hierarchy of labour-market objectives is different for those with family responsibilities or other impingements on the capacity to work than those set on full-time working careers free from domestic responsibilities. This is true for men as well as women. As can be seen from Table 11.4 above, the largest category of graduates not seeking work and hence not even placing themselves in the labour market, is that of women graduates in humanities/arts, 9.5 per cent, and interestingly, male social science graduates, 4 per cent. For all other subjects this category is virtually empty. The bargaining power of individuals with actual or anticipated responsibilities outside work may well be compounded by the types of qualification they seek in the realistic assumption that they would be excluded from competition with the 'high fliers'. Neither employers nor women themselves expect careers in engineering or finance to be occasionally interrupted by domestic responsibilities and child-bearing.

Turning now to labour-market differences between men and women graduates within each subject (as presented in Tables 11.4 and 11.5), there is also some evidence in the HELM data of



what has here been called in-market segmentation. Apart from engineering, women's salaries are consistently lower across subject areas than those of men, with the largest difference in art/humanities. Two years into employment, male graduates are also more likely across all subjects to be in full-time studies. This is also true in engineering, where close to 5 per cent of the male graduates, but none of the women are pursuing full-time studies. This is likely in the long term to create a gap between income and the position of the male engineers relative to their female counterparts.

It is also the case that women across the subjects consistently express greater difficulties in finding the jobs they want than men do, in particular in social sciences and arts/humanities: certainly more of the latter are in part-time jobs. In-market segmentation is having an effect on women's experiences relative to that of the men, even in areas where the overall prospects are good. Again, entrenched employer habits and prejudices, coupled with women's apparent lack of trust in careers not conducive to their concerns, may inhibit a speedy response to an increase in the demand for labour.

It is difficult to measure the level of work a graduate is employed to do, and the extent to which a degree has made him or her over- or underqualified for the work at hand. If we look at graduate's own feelings of overqualification, the picture of the relationship between in-market and pre-market segmentation gets more complex. On the whole, early on in their careers, men feel more overqualified than women, except in arts/humanities. But the overall subject differences remain important. If the few women that enter the labour market with engineering and business studies degrees have a considerably better prospects than other graduates of both sexes, the reverse is shown to be the case for men graduating from social sciences and arts/humanities degrees. Differential labour market demands may lead to the simultaneous inclusion of women into a male-dominated area with labour in short supply, and the exclusion or lack of opportunity for men in poor growth, low pay and traditionally female-dominated areas. The fact that women across the subjects consistently express greater difficulties in finding the jobs they want than men do also needs to be explored further. As with income differences, a couple of years after graduation in-market segmentation may have begun to

have an effect on women's experiences of work relative to that of men, even in areas where the overall job prospects are good. It is again a combination of recruitment needs and practices and the different career expectations of men and women that leads to segmentation processes. These over time become entrenched. This is not a situation that is conducive to a flexible labour market.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have focused on the short-term effects of choice of degree course in higher education. The long-term input into the quality of lives of individuals of particular kinds of credentials in higher education, both in employment and outside it, is a largely uncharted domain which we hope will gain more attention in the future. There is more sociological work to be done into the long-term returns, both real and perceived, of higher education on incomes, job satisfaction and non-monetary factors for men and women from different strata of society. The anticipation of long-term rewards of various kinds relative to those in a similar social situation but without degrees, are part of what makes up the orientation and motivation profiles of individuals choosing a course and a career.

The 'status-matrix' an individual carries with him or her into the labour market is not only an outcome of a set of structural positions, it is also in the process of being made through a series of choices and decisions based on the value attributed to various, often incompatible, goals such as financial security, social stratification, labour-market flexibility, and credential status. Using C. Wright Mill's notion of white-collar 'status panic', Smith makes the observation in a paper on graduate underemployment, that the long-term status benefits of higher education for otherwise marginal students may offset fears regarding the level of monetary awards. (Smith 1986) In making career decisions, graduates are by no means guided by financial rationality alone.

In view of the multiplicity of factors that enter into the process of pre-segmentation as discussed above, and the fact that the demand for labour in the primary sector is ultimately determined by industry, government, professional regulatory

bodies and the economy in general, shifts in demand between these sectors cannot be expected to have a speedy response from students entering higher education. Social and labour-market demands for higher education do not concur, and more sociological work of a policy-orientated kind is needed to show how and why. In their mutual preconceptions about which kinds of jobs are worth pursuing for which type of graduate, employers and graduates create obstacles for each other in ways which leave jobs unfilled and some graduates in unsatisfactory employment, or indeed, unemployed.

The early social, gender and curricular differentiation of schooling that ultimately defines a particular graduate, makes labour-market flexibility across different sectors and across different segmentation boundaries difficult, not only because of differential skills requirements, but also because of the differential social needs, motivations and orientations of different categories of students. It is our contention that in the contradictions to which this gives rise, problems of 'mismatch' will continue to occur, against which an imposed and abstract ideology of vocationalism will remain relatively powerless. If this is so, then attempts to 'vocationalise' all courses in any particular direction will do little for those at present excluded from parts of the labour market by virtue of, for example, secondary school qualifications or an absence of required career aspirations. For graduates in structurally and motivationally more advantageous positions, increased vocationalism will only add yet another set of less formalised credentials to be assessed by an increasingly complex process of labour-market recruitment. This may be of some value to employers, but problems in the labour market in filling shortages in some areas will remain, as will the unsatisfactory position of certain groups of graduates, such as women and mature students, within it.

Are there any immediate policy conclusions that can be drawn from the above? Should higher education simply continue its so far fairly half-hearted attempts to make its courses more vocationally relevant, to bring in a few extra non-conventional students and to leave its own potential influence over the rest of the education system well alone? We believe the evidence presented above points to the importance of contributing to and supporting a restructuring of the education system as a whole in favour of a less specialised, less differentiated

system, where qualifications gained early in an educational career do not create a series of obstacles to potential later shifts in career development. The introduction of a national core curriculum is a beginning, with science and numeracy at the heart of a shared curriculum setting universal standards for both girls and boys.

Higher education and employers need to make both training, retraining and jobs offered to students attractive to *potential* 'high fliers', who at present choose to fulfil themselves and their career expectations elsewhere in traditionally female occupations perceived to be more conducive to family responsibilities. The recent demographic downturn may well force changes on employers to bring traditionally male jobs within the aspirations of both women and mature and minority graduates. Over time we can expect that the starkly segmented picture as presented in this chapter will give way to a more positive labour market for non-traditional graduates, and a more flexible labour force for employers.

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# 12 Skills and Capacities in the Sociology Curriculum

Martin Albrow

Serious work on the undergraduate curriculum in British sociology has begun. The CNAAs, which has always had a watching brief for the discipline as a whole in the public sector, has produced a useful survey of sociology degrees (1988). The paper on research methods in the curriculum by Payne, Lyon and Anderson is one of the fruits of that and it helpfully picks up the long-standing concerns of the Social Research Association (1989).

The British Sociological Association followed up the suggestion in my 1986 Presidential Address (Albrow, 1986) and established a Degree Curriculum Sub-Committee. Geoff Payne and Jon Gubbay have spearheaded the work of this committee, the latter initiating research on the ideology of the sociology curriculum which is reported in this volume (Chapter 10). One of the most helpful aspects of that work is its analytical approach to influences on the curriculum and the conceptualisation of the student experience as a product of a complex set of interacting factors.

The intention of this chapter is to contribute towards change. In other words, in Gubbay's terms this is a contribution to curriculum ideology. It is premised on the same kinds of distinctions which he draws, as for instance between research agendas, intellectual commitments and teaching aims and skills. These are often conflated. Too often it is assumed that the academic's commitment to the pursuit of knowledge guarantees the content of a curriculum and the value of the student's experience. The result is that the lecturer's knowledge interests tend to exclude concern for the skills and capacities the student may acquire. Payne et al. remarked in their study on the 'absence of Aims statements dealing with research skills', for example (1989: 263). As an examiner I have yet to come across a systematic approach to skills and capacities

within a university degree course in sociology. This chapter seeks to promote an interest in such an approach.

## ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE AND GOAL DISPLACEMENT

Sociology tends to be defined by its teachers as an academic discipline. Attempts to define it as a professional activity have taken second place. Whereas subjects like medicine and law are practitioner-led when it comes to syllabus construction, sociology is teacher-led, or even writer-led. The result is that of the many virtues which a study of sociology could convey it is scholarship, on my overall impression, which gains the greatest plaudits.

The student goes through an induction into the use of authorities, appropriate citation and referencing and acquires a knowledge of who wrote what in which publication. The book list attached to the syllabus becomes the authority for this procedure, and simultaneously the legitimation for the course and its lecturer. If we forget the purpose of scholarship it is very easy for it to become an end in itself and do proxy for more fundamental values.

Scholarship in the way it is pursued now is a relatively new phenomenon, a product of nineteenth-century historiography. Its original purpose was to help us to establish facts. The doyen of the German historians, Leopold von Ranke, sought to amplify the information from original source material by referring to eye-witness accounts, and to pit competing accounts against each other, as a way of getting at what actually happened. The assumption was far from relying on authorities as automatic conduits for truth: almost the reverse was the case. As many tests as possible were used to try the veracity of their accounts. It was the basis of what became known as the historical method. Do we today employ and teach our students to employ the same kind of tests for the authors we and they cite?

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that in our undergraduate degrees we do not. Overwhelmingly they represent an encounter with a discipline conceived as an accumulation of literature, rather than as body of findings or an armoury of methods and techniques. I would not deny the utility, within the framework of disciplined study, of knowing one's way around



the literature. But to my mind there is no excuse for the dominance, amounting sometimes to monopoly, which the scholarly, not to say scholastic, mode of intellectual activity has obtained in our degree programmes.

It is intimately connected with a set of shibboleths in higher education which reinforce each other and represent a minimal kind of consensus on teaching methods – the reading list, the essay, the three-hour examination paper, the twelve or so ‘questions’, the three or four ‘answers’ displaying above all knowledge of what important sociologists have written. There is a place for this, I repeat, but not to the exclusion of other modes of intellectual activity. When this pattern is repeated, not just two or three times, but until it becomes the exclusive mode, and the student prepares for a collection of papers which all are of this mould, it becomes a straitjacket upon a sociological education.

It is an educational medium which has had consequences for content too. Or at the least it displays an elective affinity with a prevalent model for sociological accounts of the world, namely the one which suggests that the social world is to be interpreted through certain powerful theoretical systems, or in a weaker form, from a particular perspective. Since the system or perspective is clearly a contested intellectual product, it happily fits with the model of scholarship as the focus of sociological education.

These are to my mind the three main forces which reinforce each other and generate the contemporary dominant mode of sociological education: the interplay of scholarship, examination method and theoretical system. They exercise such a hold on us in universities and polytechnics that we have almost forgotten that it need not necessarily be this way, and indeed in other disciplines that they do things differently.

Indeed, we have to ask further whether we do want to represent sociology as an ‘idea-led’ discipline. Economics certainly is that kind of subject but others are not. Neither history nor geography can present themselves in that way and yet their educational claims are in the ascendant at the moment. We have to ask the rather basic question, which in some ways we are least fitted to answer because of our commitments to the discipline, just how fruitful has theory been in our subject. To my mind, getting as far outside as I can, it is difficult

to identify what one might call theoretical advances except in perhaps very specific areas, say in work on laboratory sciences or crime waves, or within very special conceptual frameworks, say with the idea of autopoiesis in systems theory. Amazingly there has been no suitable text to replace Coser and Rosenberg's collection of readings which was first published in 1957, probably because no one has any longer been prepared to identify a coherent corpus of ideas which could command widespread assent.

If we are not convinced that it is in theory that the glories of our subject are fully displayed, we have to ask whether there are not other features which deserve equal or greater prominence as with, say, history, facts and methods. If we explore Smelser's *Handbook of Sociology* (1988) we may be very disappointed by the evident lack of theoretical coherence which the discipline displays, but we might be very encouraged by the extent to which it is possible to derive an account of the way the world was in the 1980s in the reports of achievements in specialist areas. The documentation of processes and changes in the world we inhabit, which each issue of a sociological journal contains, is impressive and only a digest of the massive contribution of research which sociologists make to the knowledge base of modern society.

Less overtly displayed but fortunately taking on ever greater significance in our own teaching are the methods through which we establish those facts. The repertoire of available techniques and procedures for coming to factual judgements is ever expanding and increasingly in demand outside the academic world. Whatever contortions public and private agencies go through to sever the links between social research and sociology, the discipline as broadly conceived and practised remains the natural home for the sum total of methods by which we establish the way things are in contemporary social life. This is even the case where the initiative for developing a method has been taken by people outside academia. We are reluctant in our teaching to absorb advances in research methods which stem from the work of social research practitioners, but nonetheless eventually, as say with focus groups, it does filter through to our students. Sociology departments are the natural, if often chilly, homes for such education and training in these fields.

What I am driving at here is that neither of the latter two of the sociological holy trinity – Theory, Methods and Empiricism – are either good vehicles for or best pursued as the advance of scholarship, although one has to admit that the constraints of the syllabus and examination frame within which we work often produce absurdities, like essay questions on sampling and questionnaire design, which cannot begin to demonstrate that the student has any competence at either.

### DILEMMAS IN THE LEGITIMATION OF THE CURRICULUM

Let me repeat that the purpose in engaging in this kind of auto-critique is to enhance the ability of our discipline to meet the challenges to its educational functions in the society in which we live. For all kinds of reasons we are falling short of providing our students with the full educational potential that the subject possesses. I have mentioned three reasons already: over-emphasis on scholarship, traditional examining methods, and theory-led syllabuses. There are other reasons which are too many and far-reaching and not under our control. Here I am talking about the peculiarities of British sociology as a cultural product at a particular juncture in British history, but in the short run there is little we can do about these. (An account of them is available in a volume edited by Nikolai Genov in a chapter entitled 'Sociology in Britain after the Second World War' [Albrow 1989].)

What we can do, and should because those of us who are still teachers within educational institutions are charged with that responsibility, is to review the rationale behind our teaching. This is neither a routine nor a mundane operation. Too often it is seen as a necessary chore to be gone through for visiting evaluation committees. But we are in fact dealing with the legitimation of our work as teachers in higher education and the world outside sociology teaching is sophisticated enough to want something compelling.

Let me repeat a point I made in my earlier Address. Just because there is some useful sociological work going on in research institutes and government departments, in no way does this guarantee that sociology will enjoy the status of a

major subject within higher education. The present government has found demography of great interest and use, but provides negligible support for it and it struggles to survive in our universities.

Neither does the intellectual achievement of a subject area guarantee its survival. If that were the case, departments of classics and philosophy would be expanding rather than being closed. These are tragedies against which we should be working. To use student demand figures as a main justification for maintaining or closing departments is philistine and short-sighted, and probably disingenuous, since that demand is dependent on a perceived prestige emanating from elites, and measured out in the recruitment procedures they choose to employ. What has happened is not that these disciplines have declined in the terms which we as academics would recognise as valid, but that the extrinsic justifications for their pursuit by students no longer persuade elites in the British social system.

Despite appearances to the contrary, the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake is the core legitimating value for institutions of higher learning and which they must defend to retain any autonomy. But it is much inferior as a motivating factor for support for higher education among politicians, civil servants and students than it is among academics. For them the labour market and instrumental values are bound to be more important. If it were a matter of knowledge for its own sake, we would not even bother with formal courses and examinations, as radicals in the sixties made us uncomfortably aware. They have arisen to testify to the extrinsic worth of the pursuit of knowledge, to proclaim that the qualified person has a range of skills and capacities which can be put to use outside the institution. If it were simply a question of reproducing our own labour power as knowledge producers, we could rely on apprenticeship. But we teach vastly more people than could ever be absorbed into the academic world or even into the world of social research. We are educators for life in the modern world as well as seekers after truth and as such we are bound to justify the kind of education the study of sociology can provide.

From this point of view it is not prudent or sufficient simply to say that what students shall be given in a sociology degree is

what we understand sociology to be. For a start it is a subject with a rich profusion of varieties and nuances and so choice has to be made. Secondly, it is not evident to outsiders that sociology can provide the same kinds of chance to enhance marketable skills and capacities as other disciplines. Thirdly, we do need to show that as teachers in higher education we are self-conscious and concerned as educators and not simply professional sociologists who have found a convenient niche in which we can do our own thing.

Explicit attention to our curriculum and its rationale is owed to our students. It ought also to be a congenial preoccupation for sociologists especially. For to be conducted adequately it has to draw out and upon a philosophy of mind and theory of the contemporary world. It is not a trivial task to enumerate and classify the qualities which a sociology degree can promote. It is all too easy to stumble around among terms like 'analysis', 'critical appreciation', 'sensitivity', to know that we will recognise these things when we see them but be unable to demonstrate in a convincing way that they convey something real. But not all the qualities we seek to cultivate are equally intangible, and such difficulties are challenges to overcome. But it is no less than a philosophy of mind which is activated in the pursuit of these objectives.

We are equally involved in the theory of the contemporary world, since the skills and capacities which are required for the successful accomplishment of occupational roles in the modern economy and in particular in the sectors of management administration, human resources and social services are now enormously diversified and are being separated and combined in ever more complex ways. Novel job-designations are being created at an extraordinary rate to express this complexity; project coordinator, technical team leader, forward planning officer, corporate planning manager, programme adviser, strategic planning manager, research analyst, qualitative researcher, information retrieval officer, complaint examiner – these are just taken from the columns of one issue of *The Guardian*. They represent an enormous output of collective ingenuity devoted to capturing the nature of the emergent needs of the modern state and economy. The boundaries of traditional occupational divisions have been burst and we as

sociologists ought to be able to understand better than anyone else what that means in terms of degree-level education.

Quite apart from these forces which impinge upon our curriculum, our own definition of knowledge goals and the requirements of the modern occupational structure, we do of course have an additional factor which provides encouragement and strength for our work, namely the widespread motivation among our students to learn about themselves and their place in modern society – what I called, after Albion Small – the sociological movement. This cannot be underestimated as a factor in curriculum design. It is perhaps the most popular legitimation for our work, but it does exist in tension with both the value of academic autonomy or pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and the skills and capacities requirements of the wider society. The exploration of self as a core for sociological education requires separate treatment. For the moment I want to concentrate on skills and capacities.

Now, although I have suggested that curriculum design in terms of skills and capacities is somehow extrinsic to the nature of sociology as an academic discipline, it would be quite wrong to suggest that in some way our soul is to be sold to the devil. In the Faustian legend this is what happens when the scholar departs from the course of true knowledge and looks to power. But that is a poetic plea, and in Goethe's case somewhat tongue-in-cheek, against the advance of a Baconian spirit which had begun to dominate science, and which was embedded at an early stage in modern social theory. As one of our great predecessors, Adam Ferguson, put it, 'men are to be estimated, not from what they know, but from what they are able to perform; from their skill in adapting material to the several purposes of life' (1766: 48).

That was not a throwaway remark. It is part of a chapter entitled 'Of intellectual powers', in which he sought to relate the development of social theory in particular, and knowledge in general, to the development of the wider society and to address the same problematic as the one with which I am concerned: how can we resolve the paradox that the modern development of a scientific discipline results in a growing quest for knowledge for its own sake, while at the same time it is only through engaging with the real world that our knowledge is

validated and converted into the power to do things? He follows that remark with this marvellous passage:

It is peculiar to modern Europe, to rest so much of the human character on what may be learned in retirement, and from the information of books. A just admiration of ancient literature, an opinion that human sentiment, and human reason, without this aid, were to have vanished from the societies of men, have led us into the shade, where we endeavour to derive from imagination and study, what is in reality matter of experience and sentiment: and we endeavour, through the grammar of dead languages, and the channel of commentators, to arrive at the beauties of thought and elocution, which sprang from the animated spirit of society, and were taken from the living impressions of an active life. Our attainments are frequently limited to the elements of every science, and seldom reach to that enlargement of ability and power which useful knowledge should give. Like mathematicians, who study the Elements of Euclid, but never think of mensuration; we read of societies, but do not propose to act with men: we repeat the language of politics, but feel not the spirit of nations; we attend to the formalities of a military discipline, but know not how to employ numbers of men to obtain any purpose by stratagem or force. (Ferguson 1766: 49)

The dilemmas we face then are not unique or recent. They can be seen as a structural contradiction within modern society whenever principles are distinguished from practice, or teachers from practitioners. It is obviously acute in professional areas such as medicine, architecture and law, but rapprochement between the two wings of the profession is regularly re-established after periods of growing distance. In the case of sociology, conceived as an empirical discipline, determining and accounting for the facts of social life, doctrines of objectivity and value-freedom render the problems of the teacher even more acute. Radical and committed versions of the subject try to simplify the situation, as do technocratic interpretations of the functions of social knowledge, but from the empirical standpoint, represented classically by Max Weber, the sociologist is seeking to extend common experience to the point of

finding universally acceptable propositions, even if they have to be ephemeral as the world changes. Even if sociology does not represent the Comtean keystone in the arch of science it is no accident that it was a sociologist who has made the most eloquent plea for the independence of the modern academy.

I want to conclude this section of these reflections by suggesting that skills and capacities are actually more intrinsic to the sociological enterprise than they are even to so-called professional and technical subjects. To a very large extent in those fields, it is acknowledged that the scope for didactic activity is limited and the codification of knowledge is bound to fall short of what will be learnt in practice. What is taught is only a very partial preparation for later work. But the accomplishment of objectivity about social relations, represented discursively, is an activity into which the student is inducted from the first moment, although it would be wrong to suggest that there is never preparation for that moment or that there is a radical break from everyday knowledge.

## A SKILLS AND CAPACITIES APPROACH

The skills of the sociologist represent an extension of experience, a development of the capacity to create a commonly accepted account of the way the social world works. Or to put it another way, it is the skill to create a set of common understandings; that is generated precisely by the pursuit of objective knowledge about society. That necessarily involves mediating the special skills involved in the practices of modern social life, that is, to arrive at an understanding for practical purposes of the skills of other occupations too. The intrinsic skills of sociology involve coming to terms with the skills extrinsic to it which are pursued as part of the broader occupational culture.

Disciplines and fields of study do not differ from each other along one dimension. They reflect and relate to the functional spheres of social life in a variety of ways and at differing levels. It would be wrong, for instance, to suggest that sociology can do for 'the social' what economics can do for the economy. But it would be equally mistaken to underestimate the high value that



is placed upon the intrinsic skills of sociology in the occupational sphere. We receive that testimony daily from the wide variety of occupations which include sociology as part of their own curriculum. Our problem is that we have not conceptualised them adequately for our own purposes and have allowed them to remain at the level of the taken-for-granted or the pre-conscious.

I want us to lift our skills out of the shadows and especially to concentrate on our comparative advantage in relation to other fields of study. This means unpacking the experience conveyed by the term 'social', still the core issue. As Walter Wallace has said: 'It is no revelation to say sociology investigates social phenomena, but exactly what do we mean by 'social' phenomena? How are such phenomena defined generically? This is the single most crucial question for the future of sociological analysis' (Wallace 1988: 31). I share his view of the centrality of this concern, without however expecting a 'generic definition' to deliver rewards. Like Weber I would expect that kind of definition to be at the end of the enquiry (which means we will never arrive at it) and for the purposes of investigation would make do with something more limited and circumscribed for operational use.

But it is the sector of sphere of the social which we claim as our special concern and it is there we can seek for our comparative advantage in furthering the skills and capacities of our students.

The CNAA *Review of Sociology: Courses and Teaching* does suggest that the comments I made two years ago apply equally to university and polytechnic sociology degrees. Aims and objectives of courses 'are typically expressed in a very general and high minded way' (p. 11), say the authors of the section on research methods. A large proportion of them do not even mention research methods skills, even though the authors found evidence of increased interest and improved offerings in this area. But as we have all experienced, methods is a ghettoised area. Moreover, to my mind, it is wrong of any philosophy of education to conceive of 'skills' as confined to one small area of the curriculum.

Take theory, for example, the CNAA review points out that it is overwhelmingly seen as a philosophical subject. I agree with

what the authors say and would concur with the implied criticism. At the same time I am inclined to say, 'Would that it were!' For if our sociology graduates did receive a grounding in some of the more formal aspects of logic and the analysis of language, for instance, it would genuinely represent enhanced capacity to think. But how often are the objectives of theory courses stated in terms which would allow one to identify the capacities which they might promote?

The fields in which sociologists have worked, represented in the curriculum by 'empirical courses', are, like disciplines, not differentiated from each other on a single plane. 'Race', 'Media', 'Family', 'Religion' are, for instance, not of the same order of things. The approaches to them as fields for research and the theories surrounding them interweave at a number of levels. The problem arises, however, that since theory and methods are separated off from them, this diversity of levels is flattened out into the well-known format of what has been found out (syllabus topics) and by whom (book list). Yet each one of these favourite sectors for sociology courses has its own set of specific modes of theory and methods of research and therefore opportunities for acquiring different kinds of skills and capacities.

Let us just contrast, say, the family and religion. Any course on the former is bound to take account of the negotiation of day-to-day activities by parties to intimate relationships. It is a subject which lends itself to the exploration of gender stereotyping, identity formation, conflict resolution. These are issues of direct concern to all kinds of counselling services. To teach the sociology of the family without giving the student at least a minimal chance to become acquainted with counselling skills, even if they amount only to self-help sessions on seminar participation, is not just a missed opportunity as far as future career options are concerned but also a gap in understanding the field. The study of the family has then its own special advantages.

The same is true of religion. Here the comparative advantage this field has compared with the family is the opportunity to explore the relationships between text, belief and action. Here the skill of interpreting a text is in terms of understanding its potency within a set of beliefs with charged emotional importance. It is a sector in which structuralist theory has been

illuminatingly applied. The outcome is of course Manichaeism in its double nature. I will leave it to the reader to decide whether understanding, or even gaining, religious faith is more or less important than designing advertising campaigns.

All sociology courses with the marginal exception of computing and statistics courses, and those not always, place an enormous importance on texts, obviously those which are read, but even more those which students produce themselves. The text is time and again the main sociological output and yet we rarely consider it in terms of genre, purpose and technique, except at the most instrumental level of all, passing examinations and making grades. Yet one of the main requirements of the modern world is precisely the production of texts of all kinds which carry conviction as representations of realities, whether as official reports, memoranda, instructions, code books, etc.

Historically the rise of the essay as the typical student output over a wide range of disciplines had a great deal to do with the requirements of the higher levels of the civil service to provide easily digestible accounts for administrative and political purposes. Nowadays the world's needs for texts far outstrip that requirement. Sociology as a discipline is centrally concerned with the quest for the objective representation of social reality in all its forms and yet we stay within extraordinarily confined limits with student essays. The undergraduate dissertation survives as a form only with the greatest of difficulty, as the CNA report suggests.

Here some of the newer orientations in theory and method of the last twenty years have an enormous contribution to make to our educational work. Whatever the detractors of ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and the like can claim about diversion of attention from structural issues, it remains true that they have placed the issue of the accomplishment of practical activities in the centre of their concern. I am convinced there will be major pay-offs for sociology from this work over time and also for our work as educators. For instance, Paul Atkinson's *The Ethnographic Imagination: Textual Constructions of Reality* (1990) addresses the key question, just how do we as sociologists convince others and even ourselves that we have captured reality within the written text. It is a timely response to (though in its writing it anticipated) the pertinent remark in

the CNA A Review, 'Perhaps it was suggested we pay too much attention to how we collect data and not enough to how we use it, in sociological writing' (p. 18).

In my Presidential Address I proposed that we should use the simple device of the curriculum matrix to enable us to analyse the skills and capacities content of our courses. Some demonstration of its use might be helpful.

In the cause of practising what one preaches, I offer a version (modified by criticism and experience) of a document which has been used in a real context to encourage a skills and capacities approach to the curriculum (see Table 12.1). It is much more elaborate than my original example of a matrix, but it is still at an elementary level. Any one of those identified skills and capacities deserves a book. Even so, to my mind extraordinarily, I have never come across anything similar at the degree level in our discipline.

Such a brief document is intended to assist in the discussion of curriculum revision. It cannot be guaranteed to produce a good degree programme. Real quality will arise *within* the framework rather than *from* a formal approach. But curriculum planners do need to identify the premises behind their choices and thus provide a basis for rational discussion among themselves and with outside bodies.

The headings and items listed can serve as a check list of the qualities which degree students in sociology might be expected to develop and/or acquire for themselves during their period of study. Balance between the components identified here will depend in any degree structure upon the quality of student intake and educational targets, in particular upon the occupational sectors to which the degree is orientated.

Selection and balance of the components in any one course will be very specific and depend greatly on the interests of the particular lecturer. But scope and balance of the degree curriculum *overall* depends upon being able to identify skills and capacities promoted in individual courses and thus having the possibility of arranging for complementarity across the degree – strength in diversity.

The specimen course guide for a hypothetical course in 'Mass Media and Modern Society' is designed to show how more precision in the formulation of aims and objectives and in other arrangements for teaching and examination makes it possible

*Table 12.1 Skills and capacities checklist*

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A. Academic craftsmanship	
1. scholarship	4. critique
2. interpretation	5. design
3. rhetoric	
B. Presentational skills	
1. written	3. graphic
2. oral	
C. Technical skills	
1. computer use	3. information retrieval
2. audio-visual aids	
D. Social skills	
1. listening	4. empathy
2. organising	5. co-operation
3. negotiating	
E. Theoretical skills	
1. maths and statistics	3. modelling
2. logic	
F. Conceptual capacities	
1. sociology	4. economics
2. philosophy of social science	5. psychology
3. ethics	6. history
G. Life experience development	
1. workplace	5. foreign language
2. interpersonal	6. political
3. creative expression	7. multicultural
4. community service	

---

to identify particular skills and capacities which the course is intended to develop.

Naturally the relation between the checklist and the course guide is open to debate. It may, for instance, be more advisable to link mathematical and statistical skills (E1) with the analysis

Table 12.2 Specimen course guide

Skills and capacities checklist reference	MASS MEDIA AND MODERN SOCIETY
	Course intended primarily for final-year undergraduates in any social science discipline who may be interested in working in or with the mass media.
F1	<i>Aim:</i> The aim of the course is to promote an understanding of mass communication as a social process.
B3, E3 A1, 2 D3	<i>Objectives:</i> The student will learn to construct models of communication processes; will be able to identify the structure of ownership and control of the mass media in Britain and know how access to the media can be obtained; will be able to present and analyse the cognitive and moral arguments about the content of radio and television programmes and be able to identify the interest groups which seek to win those arguments; will be able to design and evaluate a media impact study and become familiar with the basic principles of opinion research; will be able to demonstrate experience in a media work situation.
A3, F3, E2 A4, D1 C3 A5, E1, D2, F1, F2 F5, C1 G1	<i>Teaching Arrangements:</i> There will be ten lectures on the sociology of the mass media; five lectures and five classes on communication theory; five two-hour seminars with presentations and debates on censorship, broadcasting ethics and bias; 20 hours workshop attendance for the media impact project. An attachment lasting a minimum of a month part-time will be arranged in a media-related work situation.
D1 B3 G3 G6	
G1, G2	
B1, B3, A1, A2, A3, D1, E1	<i>Written Work:</i> One essay of 2000 words; one graphic representation exercise; interview schedule and interpretation of interview data, content analysis of radio programme; report of 3000–5000 words on a work situation based topic.
B1, 2, 3 A1, 2, 3 D1, 3 D2 B1	<i>Examination Arrangements:</i> 25 per cent of the total marks will be awarded for performance in an unseen written examination paper with two questions to be answered in three hours. 25 per cent will be awarded for assessed seminar and class work, including presentation and participation. 25 per cent will be awarded for media impact project work. 25 per cent will be awarded for the work situation report.

of news bias than with audience impact. Presentational skills (B2) may be developed in the context of making a radio programme more than in a seminar context. However, the point is that the checklist and course guide between them focus the debate on precisely what the pedagogical aims are and enable teachers to prepare a syllabus with a collaborative approach to the repertoire of objectives which may be appropriate.

Attention is diverted from the book-list, of course, and I have not sought to provide one. There is bound to be more attention to materials than to texts and here accessibility will be a prime determinant of what is chosen. I expect that reading will be more guided than would be the case otherwise. But sociologists have produced numerous studies now which would amply reward selective study. This degree of guidance need not militate against the development of critical awareness either. It remains open and necessary to pit the Glasgow Media Group's work against critics such as Martin Harrison (1985) as well as the TV companies.

Some may argue that I have prejudiced the terms of the discussion by choosing a field like the media and by framing it almost as a 'media studies' course. My reaction to that is that the specific contribution of sociological work can be better understood embedded in this way than in more narrowly defined 'Sociology of the...' courses. Moreover, many of the major intellectual contributions which a Sociology of Media course will wish to draw on come in any case from non-sociologists. Do we keep students from Adorno because he was a philosopher or from Chomsky because he is a linguistic scientist? Moreover, I would argue that this issue is not specific to the media; it characterises all institutional sectors and social fields. The real world is not defined by sociologists but by people living and practising in it, and they generate their own theoretical approaches from the most mundane to the higher professionalised.

Such statements, if developed, would take us far beyond my remit here. To ground them fully is ultimately impossible. They are not based on sociology, although they may inform it. They fall within what Gubbay in Chapter 10 calls 'curriculum ideology'. I make no apology for that. Belief in sociology is still belief. I want to see it unashamedly staking its claim to enhancing the competence of its students to meet the demands of living and working.

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