
The Future of Sociology

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Preface

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PART I

THE FIELD OF SOCIOLOGY

The first part of this volume includes basic essays for the field of sociology. In the first chapter, the editors remind the readers of some global trends and suggest in a broad sense where the field may be going. The themes in the first chapter will be encountered several times in the book, but the broad coverage of the book also provides other views of the history of sociology and other prospects anticipated for the future. Borgatta and Cook note that sociology may have been bypassed in some aspects, particularly in the development of research and theory in areas that are viewed as applied. Other professions have grown or developed to fill gaps that could have been opportunities for sociologists. Opportunities obviously still remain, and some, such a positive thrust in the application of sociological knowledge may flourish in the future.

According to Turk's analysis of journal publications, sociological theory as a special interest in sociology has declined. He examines why this has occurred in terms of competing interests, and then suggests particular activities of theorists who are likely to influence sociology. Turk does not anticipate further polarization "between philosophy, speculation, and criticism, on the one hand, and quantitative empiricism on the other."

Costner sees *John Stuart Mill* as setting an agenda in the middle of the nineteenth century for research methodology that has been that of sociology in large part. He gives particular attention to the problem of nonadditive effects and that of designing variables. The complexity of interpretation of data, and indeed of appropriate examination of data, is illustrated in several examples. *Costner* sees the future of methodology optimistically, but not without problems that are both technical and a matter of how sociologists address their research.

Berk's point of departure in considering the place of applied sociology in the discipline is based on the types of challenges and criticisms that have been directed to the profession, even by those who have been constructive supporters of sociology. Forecasting is introduced through an example, and then forecasting models are considered in the context of how values are involved in the process. The avenue of applied social

research is seen as less than easy, but necessary for the progress of sociology.

Readers will find that although they do not overlap directly, the papers in this section touch each other in many ways. This will be seen many times in the coverage in this and the other parts of the volume, and if sociology has coherence this should happen when scholars independently make assessments of the current status and future prospects of the discipline.

SOCIOLOGY AND ITS FUTURE

Edgar F. Borgatta

Karen S. Cook

University of Washington

Sociology as a recognized discipline has existed for at least a century, and as it has developed it has progressed through a number of stages. In the early writings of scholars such as Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Emile Durkheim there were insights and considerations that still attract attention. The early scholars examined social phenomena with a motivation to establish a science, and they accomplished the objective reasonably. Positivism was prominent in the formative period, as was a self-conscious concern for some of the values associated with science, particularly a call for objectivity.

Except possibly for studies that depended largely on enumeration and registration data, however, sociology tended to be dependent on informal observation. The development of more systematic observation and data collection in sociological research, with minor exceptions, does not begin until much later in the history of the discipline. Field studies of varying degrees of inclusiveness occur in the beginning of this century, but the empirical thrusts of the science do not really occur until the 1920s. In fair part, the expansion of sociology in this century is associated with the growth in numbers of departments of sociology and of rural sociology and, correspondingly, of doctorates in sociology in the United States. The current (modern) period of sociology is probably reasonably associated with the 1930s, and with such developments as the support of community research by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the depression years. In addition, during this period the development of systematic field studies was beginning, including the commercial versions of polling.

The social sciences generally began a flourishing period in the 1930s, and during the 1940s, with the period of World War II, some aspects were