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EXCAVATING UNDERAPPRECIATED SOCIOLOGISTS:
A SURVEY OF ASSUMPTIONS AND STRATEGIES
IN ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

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Abstract

Archivally-based research in the history and sociology of sociology (especially the recent work of Mary Jo Deegan on Jane Addams and the Men of the Chicago School, 1892-1918) powerfully demonstrates the central epistemological importance of excavating and rehabilitating the contributions of sociologists who have long been ignored by historians of sociology. Archival experience reveals that uncovering the unknown, the unwritten, or the unrecognized in the history of sociology frequently requires reversing the conventional wisdoms of sociological research. Ten archival research strategies are identified. These approaches are best adapted to long-term rather than short-term research programs. It is concluded that the recovery of institutionally-discounted sociologists through archival research is an important epistemological and emancipatory task in sociology.

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EXCAVATING UNDERAPPRECIATED SOCIOLOGISTS:
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IN ARCHIVAL RESEARCH¹

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Introduction

Recent, archivally-based research in the sociology of sociology powerfully demonstrates the central epistemological importance of addressing the contributions of sociologists who have long been ignored by the intellectual historians of sociology. Full-fledged archival studies not only reconstruct the organizational and biographical details of sociology, they also rescue alternative values and metatheoretical assumptions and place them at the very heart of what many of us mistakenly take to be the received, unquestioned foundations of American sociological ideology. The intersubjectively verifiable empiricism of archival research now raises the entertaining spectre of a collective identity crisis among the

well-placed, unreflexive guardians of received sociological dogma.

Several recent, critical projects make extensive use of multiple archival repositories. For example, Mary Jo Deegan's (1988a) intellectual biography of Jane Addams' work in Chicago insightfully reconstructs Addams' foundational role in American sociological thought and practice. My own recent work on Roscoe Pound (Hill 1989c) excavates Pound's influential but underappreciated role as a first-order sociologist and documents the process by which his record was in part obscured by empire-building sociologists at the University of Chicago. At the organizational level, Marlene Shore (1987) provides a fresh and insightful perspective on the perverse international influence of the male Chicago School. Taking a thematic turn, Roger Bannister (1987) carefully traces the history of "objectivity" in American sociology. Wide-ranging, archivally-based studies are a needed and significant challenge to the unreflexive cant that has too long paraded as disinterested, objective scholarship on the origins and development of American sociological thought.²

Warranting Historical Knowledge

A short browse through the sociology section of well-stocked libraries quickly demonstrates that the empirical ground of the published history of American sociology presented to literate students (and assigned in classrooms and seminars across the country) is warranted primarily on two bases: (1) through reference to and citation of previously published materials (including books, articles, minutes and proceedings of meetings, etc.), and (2) through first-person accounts of disciplinary accomplishments (typically of the "I was there" or "I knew him when" variety). As sources of historical truth, both knowledge bases are vulnerable (1) to the back-slapping momentum of increasingly centrepetal citation practices (aided and abetted by the Social Science Citation Index); (2) to institutional gate-keeping (reinforced by the editorial control exercised by the major university presses), and (3) to unreflexive (as well as purposeful) self-promotion. When these flaws are kept fully in mind, these data sources are important and useful, but they by no means constitute the only available or even the preferable bases of historical reconstruction.

The history and sociology of sociology are, like all social projects, social constructions erected by a host of participants buttressed by a multitude of interdependent, institutionally-ordered resources. As a discipline, however, we have for a variety of reasons too long ignored the rich empirical resources of the nation's manuscript collections and archival depositories when we write histories of sociological thought. These resources also have their share of methodological pitfalls, a point I discuss elsewhere in detail (Hill 1989c, Forthcoming). But, as alternatives to the distortions found in previously published materials and first-person accounts, archival data provide an extraordinarily valuable corrective.

In the same way that previously published materials and first-person accounts demarcate and reinforce the institutionalized fault lines of American sociology, archival deposits also tend to preserve the effluvia of institutionally-defined "important" sociologists. Nonetheless, it is within the nation's archival repositories -- taken as a whole -- that the documentary trace evidence necessary to reconstruct the work and ideas of lesser known, unrecognized social scientists has an important chance of discovery. The

remainder of this paper focuses specifically on institutionally underappreciated sociologists and the methodological assumptions required to unearth their records and their stories through archival research.

The Research Logic of Feast and Famine

One can easily argue that there is always more work to be done on the historical aspects of sociological scholars who are already well-known within sociology, but we can also wonder, "Does the world need yet another monograph on Durkheim, Weber, or Marx?" Must we add yet more volumes to the scores of histories on the Chicago school when so many other departments remain unchronicled by even a single book? David Riesman (1962: 54-55) once observed that most sociologists "are unwilling to do what the physical scientists take for granted, namely, to undertake work that has very little chance of producing positive results, and then to report any negative findings." It may be risky in terms of instant professional payoff in sociology to devote one's research effort to the archival study of underappreciated sociologists, but there is much work to be done to excavate our now forgotten heritage, a heritage that has been marred and

obscured by racist, sexist, and hegemonic practices in sociology (cf., Deegan 1981, 1988a, 1988b, 1988c, Forthcoming; Hill 1984, 1988a, 1989a, 1989c).

Uncovering the unknown, the unwritten, or the unrecognized in the history of sociology requires reversing the conventional wisdoms of sociological research. The inherent liminality of such a strategy makes it immediately suspect to those who do not fully appreciate the playful element in scientific research.³ Phenomenologically, one must bracket one's presuppositions as to who is and who is "not a sociologist" (Deegan 1987). One must look not to where citation studies and literature searches reveal a feast of prior studies. Rather, one looks counterintuitively in the opposite direction, to where conventional wisdom promises a famine.

In the long run, archival research is a proven strategy for tapping into the sociological activity and collegial networks of sociologists who are not easily traced in conventional literature searches or indexed in the standard textbooks. The initial results of archival research may seem relatively meager, and it may be ages -- if ever -- before one finds an undiscovered cache of significant letters and

unpublished manuscripts in a little-used, out-of-the-way archive.⁴ Nonetheless, there is still much to review and reassess within the major archival collections through which other scholars have already searched.⁵

Pragmatic Strategies

I present here an inventory of pragmatic suggestions for archival researchers in the history of sociology. Regardless of where your search begins, the following strategies will increase the likelihood of successfully helping to reconstruct and rehabilitate the history and epistemology of American sociology. The following methodological suggestions are derived jointly from Mary Jo Deegan's (e.g., 1978, 1981, 1983, 1988a, 1988c, 1989a) several archivally-based analyses of sexism and racism in sociology, and my own archival studies (Hill 1988a, 1988b, 1989b), including my extended explication of the structural factors in Roscoe Pound's erasure from the disciplinary record of sociology (Hill 1989c):

(1) When searching an archival collection, be especially alert for materials related to persons of

minority status, specifically: women, persons of color, and members of oppressed minorities generally.

(2) Examine carefully the records of scholars in schools outside the currently acknowledged "prestige" academies. Be particularly alert for non-Chicago sociologists and their collegial networks. Further, remember that sociological activity flourished on several campuses even though formally-organized departments of sociology were not present.

(3) Be alert to sociological achievements completed outside the academy. For example, in business, philanthropy, or government. Significant sociological work sometimes lies in activities other than writing and publishing. Be open to data in non-academic archives, that is, in repositories operated by cognate professional organizations, trade unions, philanthropic foundations, and government agencies.

(4) Remember that professional training in a discipline other than sociology does not negate the potential sociological import of a person's work.

(5) Look for instances of mentoring in sociology through other than formal student-teacher

relationships. For example, through self-study, collegial discussion, on-the-job revelation, etc.

(6) Do not be immediately dissuaded by seemingly authoritative claims to (or attributions of) professional identities other than sociology.

(7) Consider the possibility that a person may have "multiple" professional identities, only one of which is validly that of "sociologist."

(8) Documentation that persons did not closely identify with sociology at a given time does not mean that they did not identify with the discipline at some other phase during their careers.

(9) Advocacy of views unpopular among or critical of the dominant disciplinary perspectives in sociology may signal the work of a sociologist that was hegemonically suppressed. Be especially attentive to the possibility of epistemological riches in unpublished monographs and rejected journal articles.

(10) Be alert to behind-the-scenes organizational and administrative "shadow work" (Illich 1982) that facilitates teaching, research, and publication by others.

By recognizing, evaluating, and following the suggestions outlined above, the probability of locating

and documenting presently unrecognized sociological activity is increased. The short-term result may prove "negative," but this work necessarily involves a long-term strategy. The exclusionary consequences of decades of structural inequity and sociological hegemony are not easily or quickly recovered or repaired.

Epistemology and Historical Research

The recovery of institutionally-discounted sociologists through archival research is an important epistemological task in sociology. It can be asked, "What difference does it make that the sociological ideas of unremembered or undervalued sociologists are recovered and treated to modern evaluation?" The difference is potentially profound. For example, the modern rediscovery of the massive published work of Jane Addams, Roscoe Pound, W.E.B. DuBois, Harriet Martineau and others as sociology (as opposed to "social work," "jurisprudence," "Black studies," "literature," or "journalism," for example) has the same potential import for sociology that finding a trunk filled with unpublished manuscripts authored by Emile Durkheim, or Max Weber, or Karl Marx would make.

In a hegemonic system, discounted or little-known sociologies are not ipso facto worthless, unproductive, or uninteresting. It is simply that they are not read, not cited, not reproduced, and not extended. Evaluation of their intellectual import for modern sociological theory and practice is quite a separate matter. To our collective chagrin, we observe that many of us have been reinventing the wheel when we ought to have paid considerably closer attention to the insightful work of unsung sociological pioneers.

The rehabilitation of long forgotten but nonetheless powerful ideas not only saves effort now wasted on reinvention, but points constructively to a richer sociological future. As theorists, we can and should ask, "What if?" What if Addams, or Pound, or DuBois, or Martineau, for example, had become the theorists of choice in one of today's hegemonically dominant schools of sociology? What would that sociology look like today? Using their recovered work and rules of logic, what alternative sociology can be reconstructed. Asking "What if?" as theorists differs fundamentally from asking "What if?" as historians. History has an empirical reality, it cannot be materially changed by playing "What if?" games (albeit

our understanding of this reality shifts and fluxes as continuing research brings previously unconsidered evidence to light and new interpretations are proposed). As theorists, however, we can reconstruct alternative sociologies based upon archival recovery and the modern intellectual evaluation of theories previously discounted and undervalued by hegemonic factions and schools in sociology. These recovered intellectual systems, when fully articulated, become alternative intellectual antecedents for sociologies which we can choose to adopt or reject in our near and distant futures. This work widens our metatheoretical options and increases the richness of our sociological heritage. This ultimately is the promise and hope of a more reflexive history of sociology.

Footnotes

1. This paper presents a partial discussion of methodological issues explored more fully in my doctoral dissertation (Hill 1989c). I thank Mary Jo Deegan for her helpful comments on the present attempt to summarize these ideas in compressed form. This paper may be quoted and/or cited with proper attribution.

2. It should be observed here, as a note of caution, that studies built largely on the resources of a single or small number of archival repositories typically reflect the limited scope and biased perspective of the collection(s) consulted. For sociological examples of this problem, see Bulmer (1984) and Simpson (1988).

3. The theoretical distinctions of liminality and play are nicely set out in Deegan's (1989b) theory of American ritual dramas.

4. Unpublished gems await patient researchers, and sometimes deserve publication in today's journals. The draft of J.O. Hertzler's (1979) account of sociology at the University of Nebraska was written circa 1930 but lay unnoticed in a departmental file drawer until Mary Jo Deegan found it. Similarly, the draft of George E. Howard's (1988) account of Nebraska sociology, written in the late 1920s, was found in a university archive. Reference to Mari Sandoz' (1988) early example of ethnomethodological resourcefulness, written circa 1930, was discovered in her archival correspondence and the actual draft was later secured for publication from the private archives of her literary executor.

5. The first step in locating relevant archival materials in major collections is to consult the Index to Personal Names in the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, 1959-1984. However, the Index to Personal Names is at best a rough and general guide. Many additional and useful materials will be located only through on-site research in the nation's numerous archival collections. For a list, see the Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the United States (2nd edition, Oryx, 1988).

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