
The Caravan Rolls On

Forty Years of Social Problem Research

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Most students of human nature and society agree that the common-sense knowledge we have of our lives consists largely of misunderstanding. In part, this occurs because of simple ignorance. As C. Wright Mills argued, people have direct awareness only of the private orbits in which their daily lives revolve, and lack the sociological imagination required to grasp the "intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history." But beyond ignorance we confront deception. Psychoanalysis, for example, teaches that we have but a surface knowledge of our own motives, and that we intentionally limit this knowledge for fear of discovering what lies below. The external world also eludes us. There, history teaches that political power endeavors to conceal its nature behind ideological smokescreens—and, as we saw again in the Vietnam era, behind outright lies.

The success of social science can be measured by the extent to which it expands the boundaries between our private orbits of direct experience and the social and psychological structures that shape them from a distance. And perhaps more importantly, social science can be judged by the extent to which it brings to light relationships between social

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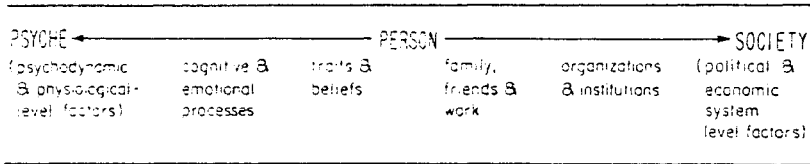


Figure 1: Intrapyschic and Social Influences on Behavior

and psychological structures. We can diagram this task by drawing a continuum of causal factors, stretching outside of the person to the right and inside to the left (see Figure 1). To the right, causal influence runs through the immediate situations or milieux of family, friends, work, and leisure; to the organizations and institutions in which these are embedded; and finally to the political, economic, and technological structures of society as a whole. On the left, this continuum reaches through the person's conscious thoughts and feelings to ways of seeing, feeling, and conceptualizing that are simply taken for granted (such as language, traits, and cognitive schema) and finally to the psychological structures of wishes, defenses, and infantile logic that remain unconscious.¹

Some relationships beg to be noticed: international events hit home clearly at the gasoline pump; anxiety affects work performance. Others are less apparent, but easily discovered: that "Type A" personalities have more heart disease; that welfare policies encourage the breakup of poor families. Still others are difficult to ferret out and difficult to accept: that Oedipal hostilities lie beneath a conflict with one's supervisor; and that the character of work, determined by centuries of industrialization, private enterprise, and unionization, has equal responsibility for such a conflict. How well do the social sciences measure up to the ideal of enlightening us about the more remote influences on our daily lives?

According to the traditional view of science as a set of methods that guarantee a privileged access to Truth, the question should not even be posed in this fashion. All one need do is assess how well researchers adhere to the canons of scientific proof. Those who view the social sciences from this perspective praise its historical emancipation from philosophy and politics, and urge that this emulation of the natural sciences finally be consummated. They attribute the shortcomings of the social sciences either to remaining elements of metaphysical contamination or to the fact that they are "young" sciences still finding their bearings.

A more skeptical assessment comes from those who view science—like other public institutions—as influenced by politics, power, money, and ideology. In the late 1930s, for example, Robert S. Lynd (1940) diagnosed the social sciences as suffering from a “centripital tendency” to spiral away from one another into technical specialties studying limited aspects of social phenomena. These specialties, he claimed, focus on the administrative problems of various social institutions and fail to examine the impact of those institutions on the lives of individuals and on American culture as a whole. To correct this, he called for more interdisciplinary training and cooperation, with “culture” as a unifying concept. In the late 1950s, Gunnar Myrdal (1958) expressed his optimism that the greater involvement of social scientists in policy-making would counter the trend toward specialization. But he also warned of the dangers of commercialization, which he feared might harness researchers to the policies of business and government, muting critical inquiry.

At the same time, C. Wright Mills (1959) argued that American social science had become obsessed with detailed studies of isolated milieux to the neglect of psychological and social structures. He further observed that as social science became professionalized and began “selling its wares” to industry and government, it produced more and more “knowledge” tailored to the administrative problems of running bureaucratic organizations and providing the underprivileged with welfare and social services. With some skepticism about its real prospects, Mills, too, called for more interdisciplinary cooperation. Jean Piaget (1978) recently surveyed the field of psychology, also found it lacking on this score, and made yet another plea:

With the present state of knowledge, it would, in fact, be regrettable and visionless to leave such collaboration to chance encounters or individual initiative. Interdisciplinary cooperation is necessary and must be organized [Piaget, 1978: 652].

Jurgen Habermas (1970, 1973) steps beyond these criticisms to claim that social science has become so intimately tied to the practical problems of bureaucratic control that it has embraced a scientific and technical style of thought. He contends that this apparent “rationality” is actually highly ideological, in that it automatically leads to defining social problems as technical issues in terms congenial to the interests of those already in power. Taking a similar approach, Gouldner (1970) undertook a historical analysis of major sociological paradigms. He

concluded that the functionalism dominant in American sociology contains at its very core ideological assumptions that reflect an administrative rationality congenial to the bureaucratic institutions that organize so much of the modern social world. Three more specialized lines of research converge in support of these general criticisms: history of science, self-criticism, and knowledge utilization.

History of Science

Studies by historians of science such as Kuhn (1970, 1977), Lakatos (1970), and Feyerabend (1975), and by sociologists of science such as Merton (1973, 1977), Hagstrom (1975), and Ben-David (1966, 1975) show that even the natural sciences do not progress autonomously in accordance with their own rigorous rules. These researchers have demonstrated that many scientific controversies and achievements cannot be explained without invoking "external" factors ranging from generational conflict within the scientific community to the investment of competing theories with symbolic significance in major political struggles. In spite of a paucity of historical studies, a probable majority of social scientists recognizes from personal experience that at least three major types of "external" influence operate on their fields:

a. Funding. The investigation of *social* phenomena depends no less on funding or science policy decisions than does research on subatomic particles or cancer. Before World War II, for example, the field of "clinical psychology" consisted of administering and scoring mental tests, rather than conducting psychotherapy. The Veteran's Administration's large-scale funding of traineeships (to provide disturbed returning soldiers with the therapeutic manpower² psychiatry either lacked or withheld) virtually created clinical psychology as it exists today, comprising roughly half the membership of the American Psychological Association. The pervasive influence of funding patterns spreads through direct research grants and the support of research and educational institutions, in addition to financing professional training programs. With federal funds increasing enormously since 1945,³ researchers and practitioners alike have followed the money with an eagerness that led one prestigious psychologist to speak of them as "profiteers."⁴ Like the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association and other social science associations actively engage in congressional lobbying (such as for a National Health Insurance Plan that includes provisions for payment to non-M.D. psychologists for therapeutic treatment).

(b) *Professionalization.* The state of the academic job market and the rules of "publish or perish" exert a widespread influence on the complexity of research undertaken, and the development of new research fields. Similarly, the growth of industry and government markets for knowledge and skills has led to the creation of research programs outside of academia, to professional careers devoted to the solution of administrative problems and the delivery of social services, and to substantial consulting ties with academia. All of these developments focus research attention on a range of problems predominantly relevant to the sponsor. In the area of consumer decision-making, for example, the vast quantity of marketing and advertising research dwarfs that which might help to reduce needless consumption.

(c) *Public issues.* While the debate continues about whether social psychology should be science or history (Gergen, 1973), it is clear that much of it *is* history, and even more of it is inspired by contemporary events. The *Authoritarian Personality* study, Milgram's obedience experiments, the intelligence and heredity debate, and the growth of research on helping behavior after the Kitty Genovese murder are a few examples of research that arose in response to social events and made a significant impact on "basic" research in a number of disciplines.

Self-Criticism

Some social scientists have criticized their own fields for biased definitions and research interests, and also for a general acceptance of established institutional arrangements. Liazos (1972), for example, took the sociology of deviance to task for concentrating on "nuts, sluts and perverts" to the neglect of white-collar crime, lying by public officials, and the kind of covert institutional violence that allows landlords to leave lead paint peeling off the walls of tenement housing. Ryan (1976) described how a major pharmaceutical concern put out posters warning "Lead Paint Can Kill!" and a large urban health department put out a coloring book warning poor parents and their children to keep away from it. Meanwhile, laws that would send landlords to jail for allowing lead paint to be exposed in rental units go unenforced.

Bisno (1956) and Cloward and Piven (1977) attacked social work's focus on the personality and family factors in their clients' difficulties.

Gusfield (1975) documented the nearly exclusive concern with driver characteristics as the causes of auto accidents—to the neglect of vehicle and highway design. In the field of industrial psychology, Baritz (1960) alleged that researchers have put themselves in the service of management, ignoring labor's concerns. More recently, Nord (1977) charged that studies of job satisfaction have explored "an incomplete and biased set of dependent variables," usually those of interest to management, such as productivity and absenteeism. We would have a very different sort of knowledge, he says, if researchers had been studying self-actualization, organizational democracy, equity, and justice.

In a historical account of suicidology, Light (1973) showed how psychiatry essentially took ownership of the field, defining suicide as a psychiatric problem needing psychiatric intervention. Judging from data on suicide rates, however, this professional appropriation of the problem has had little impact. Finally, Sampson (1977) argued that American psychology in general reflects American culture's "self-contained individualism" by treating both desirable and undesirable characteristics as if they are located entirely within persons, rather than within collectivities.

Another set of recent critiques comes from persons angered by the way social scientists have studied them. Morin (1977), for example, examined 139 studies of homosexuality listed in *Psychological Abstracts* between 1967 and 1974 and found a pervasive antihomosexual bias of two sorts. First, homosexuality was studied largely in terms of diagnosis, causes, and cures—thereby defining it as a pathological state. Second, these articles failed to study the issues gay people most want to learn about: the consequences of self-disclosure, the dynamics of gay relationships, and the development of positive identities. Protests by gay organizations have led to official redefinitions of homosexuality by the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association.

On virtually every issue involving gender, women have challenged the way they have been studied and are pioneering new ways of examining sex roles, socialization, adult development, marriage, family relations, and career achievement. Ehrenreich and English's *For Her Own Good* (1978) brings together a number of forceful criticisms of experts' advice to women. But in no area has the antipathy of women toward researchers run deeper than with regard to rape. Research on rape traditionally has been split between the pathology of the offender

and the pathology of the victim and, as Albin (1977) documents, the first of these projects usually led back to another woman—wife or mother—as cause of the male's crime. The second, running from Freud through Amir (1971), produced a considerable literature on the woman's role in "precipitating" rapes. Meanwhile, cultural values supporting male aggressiveness and the impact of rapes on victims received scant attention. Brownmiller (1975), Davis (1978), Hilberman (1977), Wood (1975), Largen (1976), and others have condemned this victim-blaming and undertaken needed studies on victims. Albin (1977) summarizes the position taken in many of these critiques when she writes that psychology's victim-blaming

was the inevitable outcome of a derogatory societal view of women, of a psychology dominated by men who shared and promulgated this view, and of research designs that reflected this male culture and male psychology. The culture thus spawned a science that affirmed and then exaggerated it [Albin, 1977: 429].

Mills' examination of social pathology textbooks (1943) pioneered the empirical study of these issues. He found social problems treated as if they were separate, practical problems occurring in isolated situations and analyzed largely in terms of a "paste-pot eclectic psychology." More recently, Caplan and Nelson (1973) examined the research by psychologists indexed under "Negro" in Psychological Abstracts for the first six months of 1970. Coding abstracts for the type of relationships investigated between personal characteristics, situational characteristics, and problem characteristics, they found 82% falling into categories "that lend themselves, directly or by implication, to interpreting the difficulties of Black Americans in terms of personal shortcomings." Since the topic under study—Negroes—reflects a concrete social problem rather than a general psychological process, this preoccupation with personal characteristics has important political and social policy implications. For one thing, it defines the problem in terms of personal pathologies and ignores the role of prior political and technological failures. It further justifies person-change rather than system-change treatment programs, and reinforces the power of those who administer individually focused therapy and social welfare programs. Finally, Caplan and Nelson point out that "person-blame interpretations are in everyone's interests except those subjected to analysis," which perhaps accounts for why researchers who are also victims have been criticizing social science with increasing vehemence.

Knowledge Utilization

Research on knowledge utilization has produced—in addition to a host of schemes for more efficient packaging and dissemination of research findings—a number of serious questions about the assumption that use is always advisable. Critiques of “psychotechnology”—the use of drugs, psychosurgery, and conditioning techniques—have become more frequent over the last decade, as have articles questioning the politics of traditional psychotherapy (Robinson, 1973, Chorover, 1973; Halleck, 1971; Szasz, 1961, 1976; Beit-Hallahmi, 1974). U.S. Appeals Court Judge David Bazelon (1974) put the issue directly to the American Psychiatric Association:

Will the new found techniques be used exclusively as palliatives for problems with social antecedents? Will we focus on “psychocivilizing” the individual? Or will we confront the gross societal conditions which foster such human misery and disability?

Another example concerns the attempt to devise and compile indices to monitor the nation’s social well-being. In the face of widespread enthusiasm for promoting the use of such apparently objective “social indicators” by policy makers, Campbell (1975) proposed the “pessimistic law” that “the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social process it is intended to monitor” (p. 35). As an example, he points to the impact of programs evaluating police departments in some jurisdictions by their “clearance rate,” the proportion of crimes solved to crimes reported. In order to meet pressure by public officials to produce high clearance rates, police have responded by failing to record all citizen complaints, postponing the recording of crimes until they have been solved, and plea-bargaining (convincing criminals caught for a serious crime to confess to several lesser unsolved ones in exchange for reduced punishment).

Campbell cites further examples from a variety of fields, including the emphasis on “body counts” in Vietnam that provided an incentive and rationale for Lieutenant Calley’s actions at My Lai. “His goals had been corrupted by the worship of a quantitative indicator,” Campbell says, “leading both to a reduction in the validity of that indicator . . . and a corruption of the social processes it was designed to reflect” (p. 38).

This body-count mentality helped legitimate the license to kill indiscriminately.

Caplan and Nelson (1973) question the widespread and unquestioned assumption that social policy based on research findings will necessarily be better than that based on values or principles. They point out that the production of knowledge is not objective and value-free, but that it occurs and within an institutional framework that favors research on personal factors and discourages research on social factors:

When authorities offer person-blame explanations for particular social problems and make research funds available, suddenly one's disciplinary outlook, career gains, and socially acceptable behavior all converge for the psychologist. By investigating a social problem in terms given him, a *mutually beneficial exchange relationship* is established: the researcher is rewarded both materially and in terms of prestige (in addition to remaining a "proper member of the group") by using the tools of his trade; while on the other side of the exchange, officialdom stands to have its preferred interpretation buttressed by the respectability of "scientific data" [Caplan and Nelson, 1973: 206].

Ryan (1976) made similar points in describing the subtle process by which reform-minded social scientists end up blaming victims for social problems.

METHOD

In order to explore more fully the provocative findings of Caplan and Nelson, we have conducted a larger investigation of the way social science studies social problems. Taking samples of the literature from the years 1936, 1956, and 1976, we read and coded a total of 698 articles in six social problem areas: alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, delinquency, job satisfaction, rape, and race relations. These articles came from both pure and applied journals that included medical, psychiatric, psychological, sociological, social work, management and industrial relations, anthropology, criminology, law, education, and special-problem journals on topics such as suicidology, race, and alcoholism.⁵

We read every article thoroughly and coded over 80 pieces of information for each. The coding system is too elaborate to present here, except for the variables that will be discussed below: type of journal,

type of article (theoretical, research, program evaluation or report, literature review), independent variables, causal attributions, relevance to theory or practice, and type of theory or practice under consideration.

To profile each article along the continuum of causal factors mentioned earlier, we coded the *independent variables*⁶ (measured in empirical articles or discussed in theoretical ones) into 17 categories ranging from personal characteristics to system characteristics, as shown in Figure 2. The distribution of these variables represents one way of assessing how the problem under investigation is being defined (that is, as a problem of person, milieu, or system factors). This does not reflect the author's final position on the matter, but what goes into the article in terms of variables to be measured or brought up for consideration.

Another way of assessing problem definition is to examine the *causal attributions* made by authors after they have reported negative findings; summarized positive results; and have had a chance to link the research to other studies, to variables at different levels of analysis, or to larger theoretical systems. The following categories were used to code the variables or chain of variables asserted to be related (either causally or correlationally) to the problem under investigation:

<i>causal attribution:</i>	<i>example:</i>
person/problem	delinquents have low IQs
milieu/problem	delinquents come from broken homes
system/problem	delinquents come from the lower socioeconomic strata.
milieu/person/problem	broken homes cause low self-esteem, which in turn leads to delinquency
system/person/problem	poverty breeds low self-esteem, which in turn leads to delinquency
system/milieu/problem	poverty produces broken homes, which in turn leads to delinquency
system/milieu/person/problem	poverty produces broken homes, which in turn leads to low self-esteem, which in turn leads to delinquency
other	delinquent children cause marital conflict between their parents

A third way of profiling each article derives from the fact that we coded up to three *causal attributions* and could characterize each piece

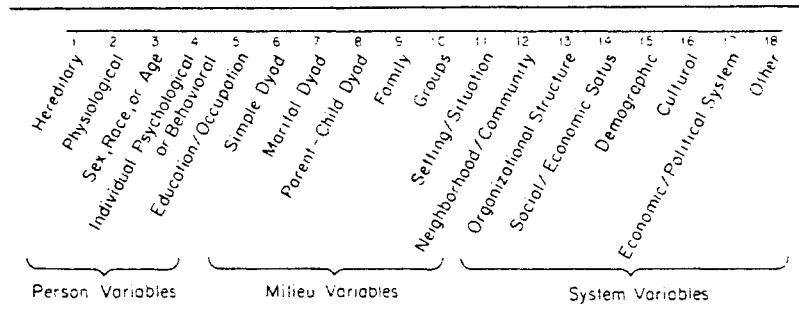


Figure 2: Variables Studied

by the *pattern of attributions*⁷ the authors report. For example, a study of drug abuse might conclude that both oral dependence (a personal characteristic) and drug-oriented peers (a milieu characteristic) lead to addiction. This *pattern of attributions* would thus involve both person problem *and* milieu problem attributions.

Results

The data presented here come from preliminary analyses of the most important article characteristics. We are currently beginning a more complex analysis, the results of which will be reported later in more detail.

The major finding is that, taken together, the investigation of these social problems has focused primarily on personal characteristics. Figures 3 and 4 show the distribution of the 3,354 *independent variables* coded for the total sample. Table 1 shows the percentage of articles that include a *causal attribution* of each type we coded. This suggests not only an emphasis on person-problem relationships, but on the investigation of "simple" relationships between two variables rather than of "complex" relations involving more than two levels of analysis. Of the *attributional patterns* that characterize each article, 58% involve only simple relationships at a single level (person, milieu, or system), 28% involve simple relationships at different levels, 9% involve a single complex relationship, and 7% involve multiple complex relationships or a combination of simple and complex relationships.⁸

Table 2 presents the percentage of articles asserting each major *attributional pattern*. We see from this that 40% of the articles contain at

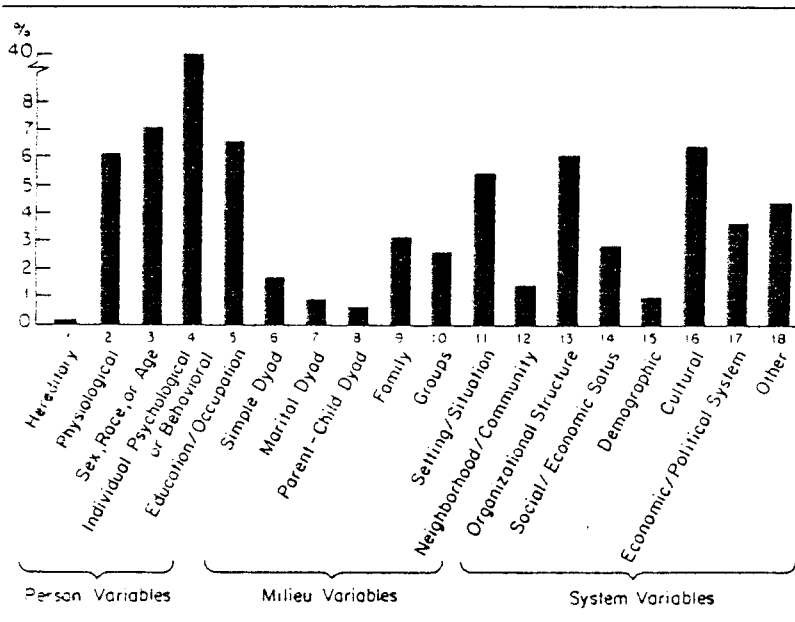


Figure 3: Distribution of Variables Studied—Entire Sample N = 698

least one attribution involving a system-level variable. Thirty-four percent involve a milieu-level attribution and 75% involve a person-level attribution. Thus, the literature does not completely ignore system factors—a point we will return to below—but they certainly do not receive the attention given to personal characteristics.

There is little evidence of change from 1936 to 1976 in the level of independent variables investigated or in the attributions asserted. The percentage of person and system variables studied remained constant—about 60% person and 20% system. Milieu variables increased from 11% in 1936 to 19% in 1956, and then decreased to 15% in 1976. There was a corresponding change in the percentage of articles making milieu/problem attributions (and milieu/person/problem attributions) from 19% in 1936 to 35% in 1956, decreasing to 27% in 1976.

The percentage of articles making person/problem attributions drops from 65% in 1936 to 63% in 1956 and 55% in 1976. The percentage making *only* person/problem attributions decreases from 45% to 42% and to 39% over that period. The percentage including some system-level attribution did not show a corresponding increase, however,

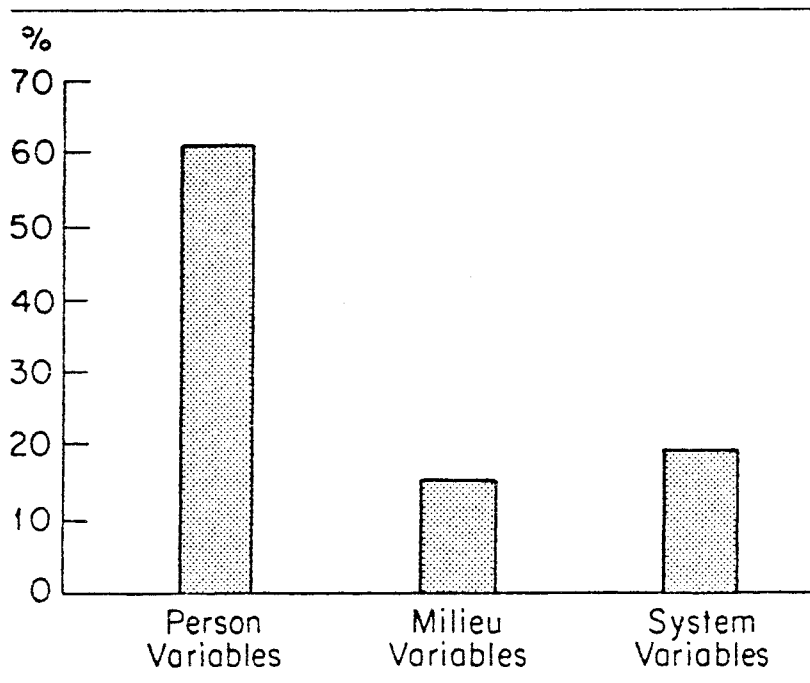


Figure 4: Total Sample

declining from 40% in 1936 to 33% in 1956 and 35% in 1976. More detailed analysis of the data will be needed to flesh out this pattern.

When examined by problem area, the data reveal striking differences. Table 3 shows, for each area, the percentage of articles falling into the various *attributional patterns*. Figures 5A-5F profile the percentage of person, milieu, and system *independent variables* studied in each area.⁹

Substance abuse and suicide show the strongest person-centered orientation. Delinquency and job satisfaction also have large person-centered orientations, with the delinquency literature showing some interest in milieu and system variables (mostly family, peer group, neighborhood, and school system). Job satisfaction shows considerably more interest in milieu factors—mostly working conditions—and some concern with the system factor of organizational structure. In addition to a large focus on personal characteristics, the rape literature also contains twice as much investigation of system factors—especially cultural and sociopolitical—than any of the other four so far described.

TABLE 1
Causal Attributions in the Literature Surveyed

Causal Attribution	Percentage of Articles
Person/Problem	58.7
Milieu/Problem	21.6
System/Problem	27.8
Milieu/Person/Problem	6.6
System/Person/Problem	5.2
System/Milieu/Problem	1.3
System/Milieu/Person/Problem	1.1
Other	6.3

NOTE: The total exceeds 100% because each of the 698 articles could receive more than one code.

TABLE 2
Attributional Patterns in the Literature Surveyed

Attributional Pattern	Percentage of Articles
Person/Problem	41.1
Milieu/Problem	6.1
System/Problem	14.6
Milieu/Person/Problem	14.4
System/Person/Problem	10.7
System/Milieu/Problem	4.5
System/Milieu/Person/Problem	8.6

NOTE: These figures are based on an N of 625 articles. Articles coded "Other" with respect to causal attribution have been excluded. See Note 6 for a description of the *attributional pattern* variable.

Race relations stands by itself in its system-orientation, with every system variable receiving more attention than in any other area.

Articles which might be characterized as "theoretical"—conceptual discussions and literature reviews—differ in emphasis from empirical work—research articles and reports or evaluations of programs. The theoretical pieces discuss more system and fewer person variables than do empirical articles, with 62% of the program report or evaluation articles concluding with only person attributions (probably reflecting

TABLE 3
 Attributional Patterns for Each Problem Area

Attributional Pattern	Problem Area (percentage of articles)						
	Substance Abuse	Suicide	Delinquency	Job Satisfaction	Rape	Race Relations	
Person/Problem	59.3	52.3	35.6	27.9	51.2	9.6	
Milieu/Problem	3.7	.9	8.9	20.6	0	6.1	
System/Problem	6.3	9.0	9.9	7.4	24.4	38.3	
Milieu/Person/Problem	11.6	16.2	26.7	19.1	2.4	7.8	
System/Person/Problem	10.1	9.9	5.9	10.3	14.6	15.7	
System/Milieu/Problem	1.1	1.8	6.9	5.9	2.4	10.4	
System/Milieu/Person/Problem	7.9	9.9	5.9	8.8	4.9	12.2	

NOTE: These figures are based on an N of 625 articles. Articles coded "Other" with respect to causal attribution have been excluded. See Note 6 for a description of the *attributional pattern* variable.

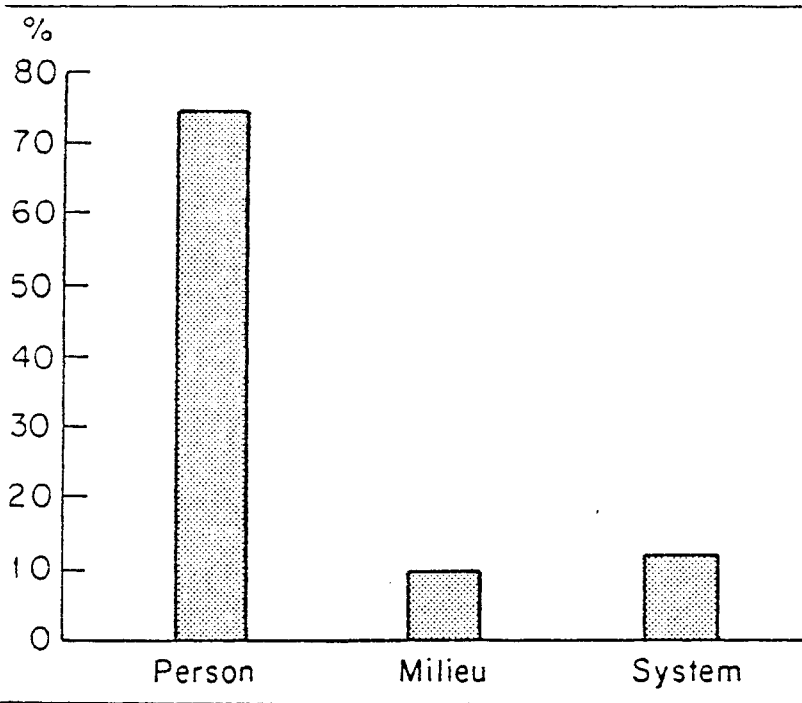


Figure 5A: Substance Abuse

the prevalence of person-change treatment strategies). This compares with 38% of the research articles, 27% of the conceptual pieces, and 19% of the literature reviews with person attributions only. These article-type differences do not appear to account for the system-orientation of the race relations area, however, since this area has the highest ratio of empirical studies to theoretical pieces (7 to 3) of any area except job satisfaction (8 to 2).

There are also significant differences among journals, with considerably more system focus in articles from sociology journals than in those from psychology journals. Articles from medical and psychiatric journals have the strongest person orientation. Material on race relations does come more frequently from sociology journals (74%) than that on delinquency (49%), job satisfaction (37%), rape (30%), suicide (6%), or substance abuse (4%).

Articles that made explicit links to theoretical issues did not differ in their person-versus-system orientation from those making links to

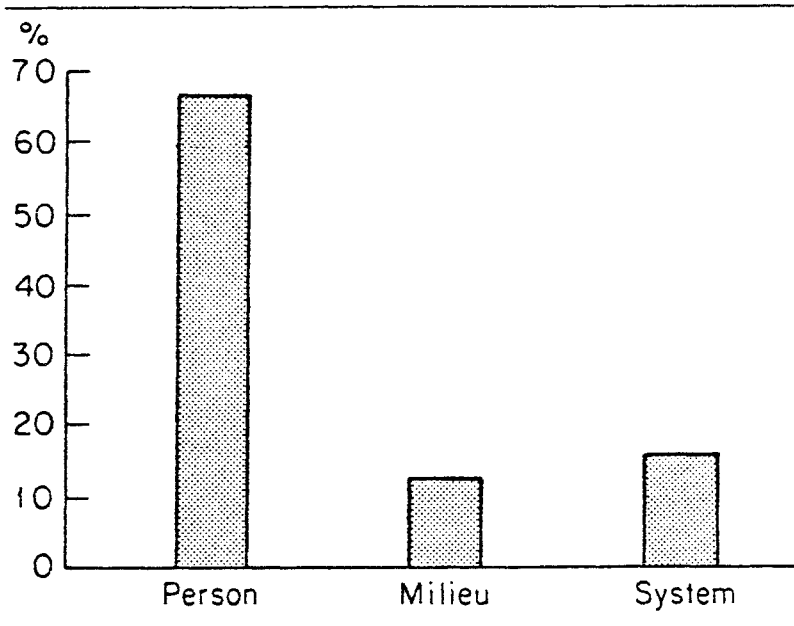


Figure 5B: Suicide.

practical matters. We coded three levels of theory that articles might claim relevance to: paradigm-like Grand Theory (psychoanalysis, cognitive theory, behaviorism, Parsonian functionalism, Marxism, structuralism), specific but well-articulated Middle Range Theory (such as Herzberg's two-factor theory of job satisfaction, Durkheim's theory of anomie and suicide), and Nontheoretical Hypotheses (single hypotheses, such as that interracial contact decreases prejudice or that delinquency is related to low intelligence).

Of those articles asserting relevance to theory, only 22% involved Grand Theory and 82% of these referred to psychoanalysis. Fourteen percent referred to Middle Range theories, and 70% to Nontheoretical Hypotheses.¹⁰ The literature on these social problems thus appears remarkably atheoretical and, with the exception of psychoanalysis, lacks connections with theories that attempt to conceptualize either human life or society as whole entities.

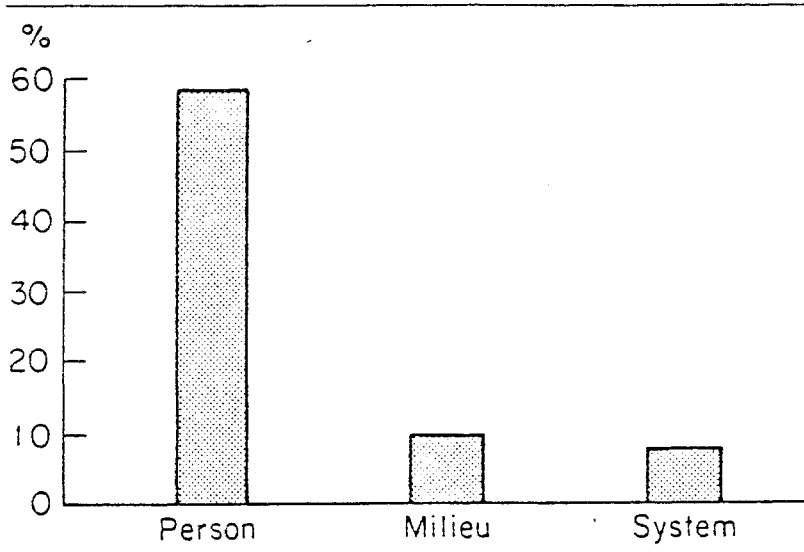


Figure 5C: Delinquency

Discussion

Our sampling of journal articles gives a different view of the history of these fields than would be found in a review article, a research proposal, or a term paper. The latter view history as it is made by kings and queens or great ideas. Our sample includes the conditions of the masses—the 98% of the literature that otherwise would be ignored. The portrait that emerges is far from exciting, pathbreaking, or heroic. Social science ought to be the most comprehensive and integrative when it deals with social problems, where its results can have profound “real world” effects. Instead, it consists largely of the investigation of simple, atheoretical hypotheses at single levels of analysis. In addition, the concentration of inquiry at the personal characteristic end of the continuum does not just create a benign imbalance; it mystifies the whole social world, concealing larger social institutions behind intrapsychic obfuscations.

The literature on substance abuse, suicide, delinquency, and, to some extent, rape focuses primarily on personal characteristics and in this regard appears to have changed little since 1936. As we read articles in these areas, we noticed a shift in language from morality to psychiatry

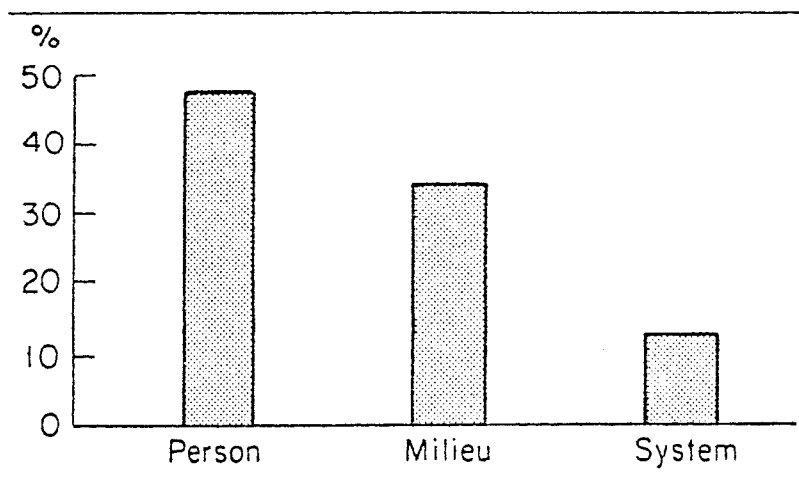


Figure 5D: Job Satisfaction

and from punishment to rehabilitation. This certainly should be viewed as real progress, but it is doubtful how enthusiastically such progress would be praised by the adolescent girl who was not sent to a reformatory as punishment for her "immorality" (like her grandmother may have been), but to a residential treatment center to receive therapy for her sexual "acting-out" and "inability to delay gratification." Furthermore, this linguistic progress is not matched by greater interest in the causal role of system-level factors.

Research on job satisfaction has moved from person to milieu variables, mainly between 1956 and 1976. In many of the 1936 articles, job satisfaction appears as a component of satisfactory adjustment to work. This research seems to have rested on the assumption that personality variables were the key to adjustment and on the hope that trait assessment would enable managers to select employees with the greatest potential to produce. The impact of milieu studies like those of Mayo and Roethlisberger, combined with the failure of assessment techniques to live up to their promise, shifted attention to working conditions, supervision, and other milieu factors under management control. Thus, we find job satisfaction research today approaching the ideal often held up for social science in general: systematic investigation of person/situation interactions.

Research on rape stands out because it contains relatively frequent discussion of system factors. Few American researchers had interest in

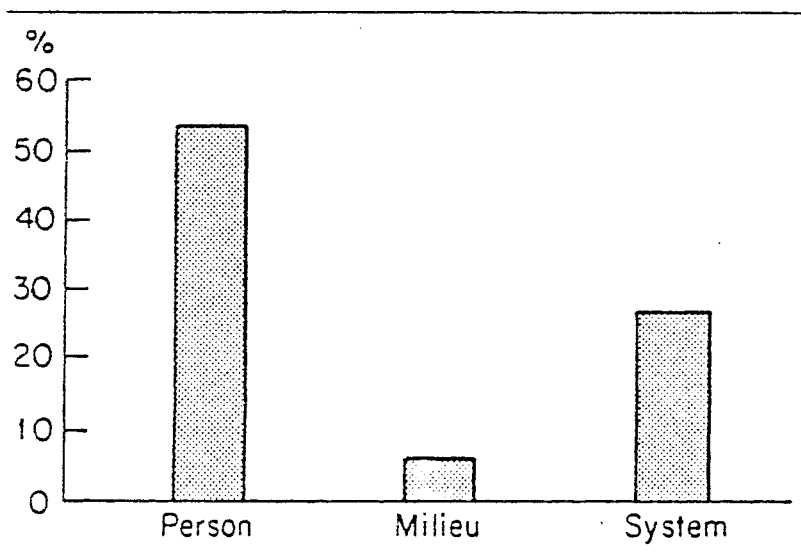


Figure 5E: Rape

rape in 1936, and we selected every article indexed between 1933 and 1939 in order to get even a modest sample of 11. We passed over at least five times that many in foreign languages—many of them discussions or follow-up studies of castration therapy¹¹—and several medical articles on methods of determining a victim's virginity. Our 1936 sample tended to treat rape as one of many sex offenses and to take a cross-cultural look at how sex norms and the definitions of sex crimes vary. In 1956, this system perspective disappeared, only to return in 1976 with a feminist critique of "victim-blaming" research and of the cultural values that support the male's prerogative as sexual aggressor.

The literature on race relations is even more striking in its system orientation. To some extent, our choice of research on "race relations" rather than on "Negroes" eliminated a body of research we know from Caplan and Nelson's study to be person-centered (including studies of race and IQ and a voluminous literature on physiological differences between races). But our sample did include articles indexed under "race," "prejudice," "attitudes," "ethnic identity," "racial discrimination," and the new heading "racism."

Our reading of these articles gave us the sense that they were remarkably different from the other five areas in their relatively competent

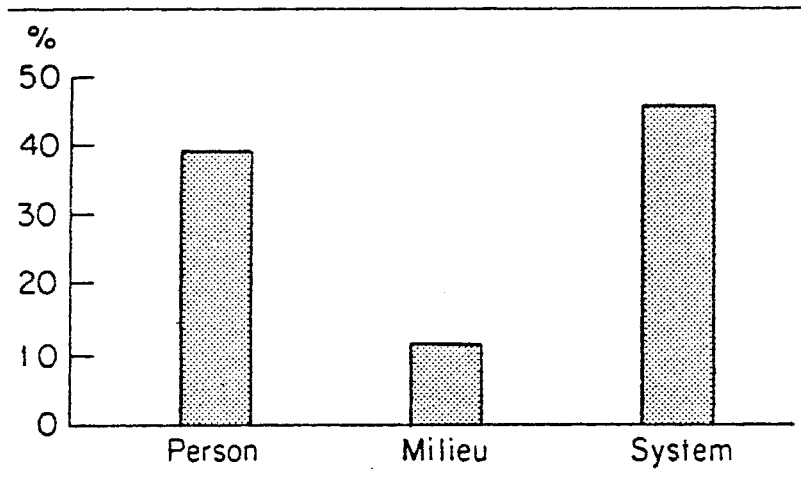


Figure 5F: Race Relations

investigation and integration of social-structural characteristics. Sociology, anthropology, political science, and economics have developed sophisticated models and methods for investigating system-level characteristics, but it is only in the race relations literature that we begin to see them brought into play.

Though we found little difference in the *level* of variables and relationships investigated in race relations between 1936 and 1976, our reading disclosed a change in terminology more marked than in any other area. In 1976 we find research not on "Negroes," but on "Blacks"; less on "prejudice" and more on "white racism"; less on "discrimination" and more on "institutional racism"; less on "integration" and more on "Black militancy." While research on delinquency, substance abuse, and suicide was being redefined in the language of the psychiatric profession, we find research on rape and race relations being redefined in the language of feminism and the Black movement.

Thus, the two areas with the most balanced treatment of person, milieu, and system factors—rape and race relations—are also areas in which there are organized social movements and organized, politicized constituency groups within the research community.¹² In this vein, we recently noticed a colloquium announcement on the results of a delinquency program evaluation subtitled: "A field experiment with rotten kids." Humorous, perhaps, but inconceivable had the topic been rape

or race relations. The fact that women and Blacks occupy offices adjacent to white male researchers guarantees that they be studied with at least a minimum of respect and sensitivity to the implications of data and theory.

Another example of the power of the studied can be seen in the response to *The Authoritarian Personality*. Here was an empirically based assertion that a pathological personality syndrome lay behind the prejudiced attitudes of white males. Rarely in the history of social science has a piece of research—and its accompanying hypothesis—been put to such relentless methodological scrutiny. And by the time the original instruments had been psychometrically renovated, the field had moved on to less-traveled paths. Similar hypotheses about “addictive” personalities, “suicidal” personality syndromes, and “antisocial” personality types have never been subjected to that kind of critique and, judging from our samples, they still attract serious interest. Alcoholics, delinquents, and people with suicidal tendencies (note the reification of behavior patterns into personal identities) have no social movements or constituencies to protest the way others study them or to conduct inquiries into their own problems.¹³

This suggests that the social sciences are closely intertwined with “extrascientific” factors and, further, that where those who suffer from social problems have power to influence how they are studied, social science is better off for it. But why is the research on delinquency, substance abuse, and suicide so person-focused? The answer that will quickly pop into many minds is that these are simply “psychological issues,” while race relations is inherently a “sociological issue.” In addition to begging the question, the obviousness of this answer only reflects the extent to which we accept the prevailing definitions of these problems. To take an analogy from sports, imagine a foreigner watching American football for the first time and asking, “Why are there three men in the backfield?” We would answer by explaining the rules and strategies that make football the game it is. If he asked, “Why does Terry Bradshaw play in the backfield rather than Joe Greene?” however, we would answer in terms of the physical and personal characteristics of the two athletes.

Much of the research we examined on race relations seeks to answer the first type of system-focused question: “Why is there so much racism in our society?” The literature on delinquency, substance abuse, and suicide, however, appears to endorse psychology’s scientific goal of prediction and control and seeks to answer the second type of person-

focused question: "Why is person X rather than person Y at risk?" As one delinquency researcher told us, "We don't blame poverty for delinquency as much as we used to, because we recognize that the vast majority of people reared in poverty don't turn to delinquency and crime." If research begins with an acceptance of the stress, strains, and hazards of our social institutions and then asks the second type of question—"Who succumbs?"—the only possible answers are in terms of individual differences, precisely the subject matter of psychological science. Yet, there are no inherent reasons why we could not study race relations from such a person-centered perspective: Given segregation, *who* becomes prejudiced? Given rural poverty, *who* migrates north? Given the Klan, *who* registers to vote anyway?

In any social problem area—including delinquency, substance abuse, and suicide—the methods of scientific inquiry can be used to answer either type of question. Job satisfaction provides a concrete example in its shift from "Who adjusts?" to "What working conditions promote satisfaction?" There is no *scientific* reason why there could not be a further shift to system-level questions such as: "How much do employee ownership and democratic control influence personal development?" We also currently see rape research shifting from "Who acts out violence against women?" and "Who precipitate attacks on themselves?" to "What cultural patterns support male aggressiveness?" The reasons that some questions are asked and others are not lie outside of the conduct of inquiry in the real world of politics and power.

We are currently exploring the role of politics by tracing the impact of external factors in the development of each area as a "social problem." We are also conducting interviews with leading researchers and practitioners in each area to ascertain their views on the past, present, and likely future of their field. Both lines of inquiry point to the process of professionalization¹⁴ as the key to the ideological shaping of science.

In the scientists' own milieu, the academic reward system clears paths of least resistance to simplistic studies of narrowly defined questions—the kind of research with rapid publication payoffs. Locked into competitive career patterns, researchers endanger their prestige if they "dirty their hands" in social reality and risk becoming mired in its complexities. But the academic milieu deserves only part of the blame, for it too is enmeshed in a complex exchange relationship with a whole range of powerful social institutions. Social scientists produce knowledge and provide professional services to a market of consumers consisting of corporations and various levels of government. Historically, this

relationship is fairly recent, beginning with the field of economics during the Depression and expanding at an immense rate through all of the social sciences since World War II. And this relationship appears to work as all economic arrangements are supposed to work: the consumers buy what they need and leave the rest on the shelves.

But, as we see in the examples of rape and race relations, the big consumers do not have an all-powerful hegemony over the definition of social problems and the character of research. The research community is far from merely a handmaiden for corporate and governmental administrators. We noted a consistent concern with liberal reform running through the literature in every area. If person-centered questions are asked too often, they are at least asked with a sense of concern for those under study. If organizational psychologists accept the legitimacy of management-control too readily, at least they use their professional positions to argue for the humanization of working conditions.

Our reading also showed a thin but consistent strain of deeper criticism in all of the areas. It appears to take a social movement, however—or at least the presence of a constituency group of social problem “victims” within the research community—to push social science toward its ideal. As an example, the National Organization of Women’s Task Force on Rape led to a lobbying effort in Congress to establish a National Center for the Prevention and Control of Rape in the National Institute of Mental Health. This center, staffed predominantly by women researchers, primarily funds studies of legal and social factors relating to rape and demonstration projects for aiding victims.

Predictions

Keeping this in mind, we can extrapolate from our 1936, 1956, and 1976 data to forecast the shape of social science twenty years from now. On the whole, there is little reason to expect much change by 1996. Journals will still carry articles on the IQs of delinquents, the Rorschachs of alcoholics, and the details of bizarre suicides. The internal criticisms and calls for multidisciplinary cooperation that have echoed through the literature for at least 40 years, will continue unabated and with the same lack of impact. As one elder statesman of social psychology phrased it, “The dogs may bark, but the caravan rolls on.” By and large, social

science will remain wedded to the priorities of real-world organizations that will be with us for some time.

In particular areas, however, change will occur. As racial inequality fails to evaporate but Black and Chicano researchers are better represented in the social sciences, the system orientation of race relations research will likely remain and perhaps increase in complexity. Every area involving women—from marriage to motherhood to sex roles to achievement—will certainly look different twenty years from now. With women researchers rethinking issues defined primarily by men, these differences may be dramatic. If the gay movement and gay communities remain viable, our view of sexuality also may be considerably altered. We could see a shift from personal characteristics to cultural stereotypes as the origin of emotional disturbance among nonheterosexuals.

As the baby-boom cohort ages—inside as well as outside academia—we could expect the current expansion of gerontology to continue and perhaps turn from biology to economics, culture, and politics if urged by such constituency groups as the Grey Panthers. And, finally, if labor unions were to take a serious interest in worker satisfaction and forge links with the research community, we might see a shift in emphasis from milieu to system-level variables in this area.

But the most disturbing result from our data—which confirms our subjective impression—is the simplistic, fragmented, nontheoretical nature of at least that part of the social science enterprise we examined. Looking back over his own 50 years in psychology, as well as comparing the 1927 volume of *Psychological Abstracts* with the 1974 volume, McKinney observed:

One change has been the lessened attention to “grand” theory, which dealt with the whole organism in the earlier years. As the discipline became more specialized, miniature theory, associated with processes within the organism, became more popular [McKinney, 1976: 840].

Koch (1978), forecasting psychology’s future, similarly noted that

when the details of the 100-year history of psychology are consulted, the patent tendency is toward theoretical and substantive fractionation (and increasing insularity among the “specialities”), not integration [1978: 637].

Here we must support the kind of criticism lodged by Habermas (1973) and Gouldner (1970): Social science seems to have endorsed a kind of rationality that fragments and isolates—a kind of rationality appropriate to technical problem-solving but not to developing holistic conceptions of social life that could become topics for public debate on social policy issues. Just as Mills found social pathology texts to be mere compilations treating each problem as if it existed in its own world, 30 years later we find virtually no discussion of how these social problems might be related to one another. Even common sense does better on this score, since all it takes is a drive through a large inner city to recognize that drug abuse, delinquency, and a variety of other “problems” are responses to the same social conditions. It becomes clear that in these environments there are system-level factors such as unemployment and discrimination that keep some whole groups in a problematic relationship to the rest of society.

Social life *does* form a totality, and we must see it as a totality if we are to choose social policies wisely. The problem with social science is not simply that it breaks the whole into parts—all good science does that. The problem is that it ignores the totality and thus breaks it down in ways that cannot be reintegrated. If researchers set out looking for differences in questionnaire or trait-scale data (which comprises most of our sample) on the customary set of demographic variables, they will find themselves at a loss to integrate their findings into a coherent picture of the whole. They must choose between contributing to Nontheoretical Hypotheses or becoming the worst kind of armchair anthropologists.

As Sartre has pointed out, trying to reach the whole by compiling more and more facts is like trying to get to one by adding integers to the right of .99. Here lies the most serious failure of social science qua science: its preoccupation with breaking social phenomena down into collections of facts that cannot be reintegrated into a model of society. Except where politicized constituency groups push social science to study their positions in society as a whole, we see little reason to expect much improvement.

Notes

1. Our use of the Freudian unconscious here is merely by way of example. This end of the continuum could be represented by "reinforcement history," "physiological substratum," or any other process deep in the person.

2. Napoli (1975) points out that clinical psychology was considered largely as "women's work" until it became psychotherapy, whereupon the percentage of women in the field dropped sharply.

3. See Caplan and Nelson (1973).

4. Personal correspondence.

5. We excluded only dissertations, books, articles in foreign languages, those with purely medical content, and those on race relations outside of the United States. Our rape sample is small because there has been relatively little published on it in English. We had to take all of the articles indexed between 1933 and 1939 and between 1955 and 1957 to create the small sample we have. The substance abuse sample is larger than the others both because this is the largest area in the indexes and because we needed to select enough of both alcohol and drug-related studies to make more detailed comparisons between them.

6. When the author explicitly treated race, sex, or age as indices of belonging to a cultural group, we coded them as "culture" variables. When education or occupation was explicitly treated as defining positions in a social structure, we coded it as an "SES" variable. Similarly, when community was used as an indicator of a cultural area (such as North versus South), we coded it as a "culture" variable. For each article, we coded up to ten such independent variables. In many cases the variables we coded as "independent variables" were not technically so, in that they were not studied in relation to a dependent variable. Articles reporting, for example, the attitudes of a single group or the suicide rate among a single group do not actually examine a relationship between two variables.

7. In our analyses, we used seven categories of *attributional patterns* which differ from the seven categories of *causal attributions*. The *attributional pattern* variable combines complex relationships (such as system/milieu/person/problem) with multiple simple relationships involving the same levels (i.e., system/problem, milieu/problem, and person/problems). For example, the attributional pattern "milieu/person" includes all articles involving milieu and person levels, but no system attributions. It thus includes articles with a single milieu/person/problem attribution, and those with both person/problem and milieu/person attributions. Similarly, the "system-person" category contains articles with a single system/person/problem attribution and those with both person/problem and system/problem attributions.

8. These data are based on a version of the *attributional pattern* variable that groups articles according to these four types.

9. One-way analysis of variance shows the area differences to be significant at the $p < .0001$ level for all three variables.

10. These figures total over 100% because each article could receive up to three theory codes. Most, however, only asserted relevance to a single theory.

11. The following abstract was actually quite typical of those years:

5170. Schuppe.— Warum vermehrte Sittlichkeitsdelikte? (Why have sex crimes increased?) *Krim. Monatsh.*, 1934, 8, 139-140. The author discusses only attacks on children. While serious crimes have decreased about one-half under the Third Reich, arrests for sexual crimes have almost doubled. Schuppe considers that the

increase is more apparent than real. Under the Marxist regime, punishment of all criminals was exceedingly lax. The revolution has had a very favorable moral effect. The new law concerning habitual criminals not only punishes sex delinquents severely, but above all works prophylactically by making them harmless through sterilization. The public knows this and also realizes more keenly the necessity of protecting children. The campaign is only begun. As soon as sterilization can be carried out ruthlessly, sex crimes will decrease.—M. E. Morse (Baltimore).

12. While there may not have been many Blacks in the prestigious universities in 1936, there do appear to have been a sizable number in the Black universities who tied their research to the attainment of equality. The *Journal of Negro Education*, *The Black Scholar*, and the *Journal of Black Studies* have provided a forum for the research of Black intellectuals. The creation of new journals oriented to the research concerns of constituency groups represents one way they make an impact on the field. *Signs* and *Feminist Studies* provide a forum for feminist-oriented research, and *The Journal of Homosexuality* and the *Homosexuality Counseling Journal* serve a similar function for less traditional research on gays.

13. Alcoholism research did, however, gain considerable impetus in the 1930s from the debate over temperance and prohibition. The largest organized group of alcoholics, Alcoholics Anonymous, has consistently supported the medical-model disease conception as part of their concern with curing individuals. The popularity of other drugs—notably marijuana—has led to constituency groups advocating its legalization. We have not yet compared research on alcohol with that on drug abuse, and it is unclear what impact this may have on marijuana research. It is unlikely, however, that anyone would reap career gain today by writing the kind of "Reefer Madness" pieces we found in our 1936 sample—especially with colleagues who, so to speak, have been experienced.

14. In particular, see Haskell (1977) and Napoli (1975).

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