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APPENDIX II

SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE: DEFINING THE FIELD

Elizabeth Clark and Jan M. Fritz

Sociological practice has been part of American sociology since the beginning of the field in the late 1800s. The first American Sociological Society meetings were attended by university teachers as well as sociologists with a variety of jobs in practice settings (Rhoades, 1981). Most of the early sociologists, whatever their affiliations, were interested in social progress and in finding ways to put their knowledge to use within the society (Diner, 1980:199; Barnes, 1948).

Despite its roots, formed sometime after World War II, the main thrust of the field of sociology began to shift away from application and intervention to theory and statistical testing (Franklin, 1979). There were a number of influences involved. Both Mauksch (1983:2) and Gollin have noted that one important reason for the shift was the desire to be accepted as a science. According to Gollin (1983:443):

The search for scientific legitimacy led many sociologists in the early decades of the society to want to put as much distance as possible between its historical roots in social reform and its aspirations to status as an academic discipline.

While the emphasis turned toward science, the field has always included scientists who were interested in application.

The "practical sociology" of the early 1990s (Barnes 1948:741) is now referred to as "sociological practice." This general label includes two areas, clinical sociology and applied sociology.

Clinical sociology. Fritz (1985) details the history of clinical sociology by examining the work of individuals who combined "a scientific approach to social life with an involvement in intervention work." She states (1985:14):

The first linking of the words "clinical" and "sociology" in an important journal occurred in 1931. Louis Wirth's (1897-1952) article "Clinical Sociology" appeared in *The American Journal of Sociology*, the most prestigious sociology journal of its day. Wirth, writing about sociologists working in child guidance clinics, made a strong case for

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the role "sociologists can and did play in the study, diagnosis and treatment of personality disorders because of their expertise about the varying effects of socio-cultural influences on behavior."

Glass and Fritz (1982:3) also note that Wirth thought the roles of practitioners and researchers were "equally valid and envisioned that both researchers and practitioners would benefit from the emergence of clinical sociology."

In 1944, the term clinical sociology became more firmly established when Alfred McClung Lee's definition appeared in H. P. Fairchild's *Dictionary of Sociology*. Following Wirth's usage and Lee's definition, the term has been used to refer to sociological intervention in a variety of settings. It is the application of a sociological perspective to the analysis and design of intervention for positive social change at any level of social organization. Clinical sociology is not meant to indicate primarily medical applications (the word "clinical" originally meant "bedside"), nor only a "micro" setting such as individual counseling or small group work. Instead, it is essential to recognize the numerous roles that the clinical sociologist can fulfill, and to recognize that the role of the clinical sociologist can be at one or more levels from the individual to the inter-societal. In fact, the translation of social theory, concepts, and methods into practice requires the ability not only to recognize various levels, but to move between the levels for analysis and intervention (Freedman, 1984).

Clinical sociologists have specialty areas—such as the community organizations, health and illness, forensics, aging, and comparative social systems—and work in many capacities. They are, for example, community developers, organizational development specialists, sociotherapists, conflict interventionists, social policy implementors, and administrators. In their work they use qualitative and/or quantitative research skills for assessment and evaluation. The field is humanistic and interdisciplinary. Important publications about the history and scope of the field include those by Glass (1979), Glassner and Freedman (1979), Straus (1979; 1985) and Fritz (1982; 1985; 1989; 1990).

Applied Sociology. The applied sociologist is a research specialist who produces information that is useful in resolving problems in government, industry, and other practice settings. According to Olsen and DeMartini (1981), applied sociologists generally use one or more of the following methods: problem exploration, policy analysis, needs assessment, program evaluation, and social impact assessment.

The term "applied sociology" was used frequently at the turn of the century. In 1906, Lester Franklin Ward, the first president of the American Sociology Society, published a book entitled *Applied Sociology* in which he distinguished between "pure" and "applied" sociology (1906:5-6):

Just as pure sociology aims to answer the questions what, who, and how, so applied sociology aims to answer the questions what for. The former deals with facts, causes, and principles, the latter with the object, end, or program. The one treats the subject-matter of sociology, the other its use. However theoretical pure sociology may be in some of its aspects, applied sociology is essentially practical. It appeals directly to interest. It has to do with social ideals, with ethical considerations, and with what ought to be.

Other early publications in the area of applied sociology include Herbert Shenton's 1927 book, *The Practical Application of Sociology: A Study of the Scope and Purpose of Applied Sociology*, and the *Journal of Applied Sociology*. The journal was published under this name from 1921 until 1927. After that year is appeared as *Sociology and Social Research*.

Contemporary works in applied sociology include the *Handbook of Applied Sociology* (Olsen and Micklin, 1981) and *Applied Sociology* (Freeman and Rossi, 1983). The *Journal of Applied Sociology*, edited by Joyce Iutovich and Harold Cox, has appeared yearly since 1984.

Sociological Practice. The goal of this journal, *Sociological Practice*, is to extend the existing literature by thoroughly covering selected topics in clinical and applied sociology. Each volume of *Sociological Practice* will address one theme. Volume eight is about community development and other community applications of sociology. The next issues will focus on dispute processing, health sociology, gerontology, and sociotherapy and counseling.

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