



Forthcoming special issue *Comparative Sociology*

Bias and Comparative Study

In the remarkable ethnography *Slim's Table* (Chicago, 1992:149) Mitchell Duneier famously states: "Sociology cannot survive the burdens of political correctness." Every survey poll done of the contemporary academy, and in particular of sociology departments, reveals unambiguously that the partisan or ideological tilt is decidedly leftist. Does Left bias or ideology skew, distort, or otherwise misdirect the questions being asked in comparative study? Does it affect the answers being found? As (possible) examples:

- As editor I routinely see manuscript submissions in which sociologists literally see "hegemony" everywhere – never identifying what non-hegemonic behavior possibly can mean on the ground or how it might be identified. If non-hegemonic behavior literally cannot be envisaged, then what exactly is the term hegemony supposed to convey in advanced societies today – whether from Gramsci or Foucault? Related, I also see manuscript submissions in which sociologists refer to "capitalists" and attribute to them all sorts of omniscience and perspicacity (to say nothing of evil intent and dirty hands). This is akin to how the lowliest commoners viewed the aristocracy at the zenith of the *ancien régime*. The problem is that sociologists are not peasants or striving urban artisans: they are supposed to be social scientists and thus see through the fog of quotidian social constructions. Who exactly are "the capitalists" today that putatively dominate and direct the details of the complex economies of any advanced industrial society? Why are they *never* named?
- Sociologists typically portray minorities as facing structural and institutional obstacles exclusively, in accounting for educational gaps, employment imbalances, incarceration and recidivism rates, and other quantitative variables. Any deficiencies stemming first and foremost from minorities' own cultural understandings, social-psychological beliefs or interpersonal dynamics are thereby neglected or downplayed, whereas sociologists routinely note all such deficiencies in all other demographic groups (whether middle class or other). Thus, the extraordinarily high incarceration rates of African-American males (and females), compared to general population indices, is attributed, for instance, to police profiling, or poverty, or other external factors – despite *decades* of official victim reports which uniformly indicate African-Americans in fact commit a disproportionate percentage of violent crime. Is it not

remarkable, sociologically, to find entire demographic groups which are pristine, utterly lacking in cultural, social-psychological and interpersonal deficiencies? In itself, does this not merit sociological inquiry, simply for its unusualness?

- For decades statistics in the United States have shown that over forty percent of spousal abuse is committed by the female against the male, and it is just as violent, crushing. But where are the sociological studies of female spousal abuse? Are the same figures to be found across Europe, or in parts of Europe? If so, where is the literature there? If not, why the difference from the U.S.? In any event, where is *this* comparative literature?
- When sociologists address any and all sorts of issues today – whether ethnicity and immigration, interest group and party politics, science and technology policy, or others – they routinely disparage “neo-liberalism” *in passing*, or, worse, “Thatcherism.” No analysis is needed, let alone any acknowledgement or citation of alternative views. Everything is short-hand, kneejerk; as editor, I see this all the time – it is not rare but rather typical. Correlatively, the welfare state, mentioned equally in passing as other issues are discussed, is portrayed casually as some sort of unalloyed positive for the human condition. It is literally never referred to in passing as, possibly, encouraging dependence or otherwise adversely affecting individual and group initiative, self-control, responsibility and, yes, the *pursuit* of happiness. This is equally short-hand, knee-jerk. Not God, but Nietzsche (and Freud) has died: the skeptical and inquisitive mind in sociology.
- Given the rise of radical Islam, are the cultural – including religious – responses of Western societies really being fairly studied and assessed? Or is political pluralism being confused with Western substantive norms acceding more or less unilaterally to claims and demands from the “other”? There are demographic time-bombs ticking all across Europe, but where is the sociological analysis of this? Who or what deemed this unworthy of sociological inquiry – and why? More generally, what are the sources of credible and acceptable Western cultural and substantive-normative *resistance* to what Herbert Marcuse once called (in an entirely different context) “repressive tolerance?” Are these reactions being fairly identified, described and studied in the literature, or neglected – or cavalierly disparaged? As editor, I also see the latter rather routinely, again typically incorporated into papers in passing.

Papers are sought which explore these sorts of issues and others. Certainly, papers are equally welcome which challenge the entire premise of this special topic. Anyone wishing to argue that sociology is currently value-neutral or Rightest is encouraged to submit their analysis. In any event, this topic is not available for polemics, hyperbole or unsubstantiated assertions from any quarter: it is open to disinterested, reasoned analyses, studies, theories, quantitative data, and discussions which either support or challenge the premise.

Posted January 2010. Equally welcome as contributions to this special topic are ethnographies, cross-national case studies, quantitative studies, and theoretical or

conceptual analyses. Submissions remain open until August 2010; send them to compsoc@tamu.edu with an e-mail message expressing interest in this special issue.