How Ideology Has Hindered Sociological Insight

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Abstract

American sociology has consistently leaned toward the political Left. This ideological skew hinders sociological insight in three ways. First, the scope of research projects is constrained: sociologists are discouraged from touching on taboo topics and ideologically unpalatable facts. Second, the data used in sociological research have been limited. Sociologists neglect data that portray conservatives positively and liberals negatively. Data are also truncated to hide facts that subvert a liberal narrative. Third, the empathic understanding of non-liberal ideologies is inhibited. Sociologists sometimes develop the erroneous belief that they understand alternative ideologies, and they fail to explore non-liberal ways of framing sociological knowledge. Some counterarguments may be raised against these theses, and I address such counterarguments.

Keywords

sociology of knowledge, sociology of ideas, American sociology, ideology, methodology

Sociology is a discipline that has historically leaned toward liberalism and progressivism, and it continues to do so today. In the United States, all academic departments tend to contain more Democrats than Republicans, but this skew is most pronounced in sociology (Cardiff and Klein 2005). According to some historians, this imbalance occurred in the 1960s when liberals took over academic sociology (Calhoun and VanAntwerpen 2007), but others have pointed to the even older link between sociology and social work in the United States (Lengermann and Niebrugge 2007). At least one historian of sociological knowledge has claimed that American sociology was, during its foundational era, entirely practiced by non-academic social activists (Turner 2013). In this respect, American sociology was not that different from European sociology, whose nominal founder Auguste Comte simultaneously created a social-science discipline and advocated a social doctrine.

This leftward tilt has now been institutionalized: prominent sociologists including a president of the American Sociological Association have advocated for public sociology, a form of sociological research focusing on activist solutions to social problems and concerns in the public sphere (Burawoy 2002; Gans 2002). Admittedly, a few sociologists have turned away from a problem-centered approach, and exhorted their colleagues to practice sociology in a spirit of camaraderie and joy (Jeffries 2014).[1] Others have published research on positive topics, including altruism and flourishing (Jeffries 2014; Smith 2015). Yet the discipline as a whole has retained a pessimistic leftward tilt, which compresses the range of acceptable scholarship, and constrains sociological insight.

Problems pertaining to ideological skew can be classified into at least two types: First, there is the discrimination experienced by sociologists who are outside the ideological mainstream. Sociologists who are ideological outliers and sociologists who proffer a non-

ideological sociology have noted that their status makes them feel marginalized within the professional community itself (Deflem 2005; Yancey 2011; Smith 2014). One social psychologist recently used the format of Peggy McIntosh's (1990) essay on White Privilege to catalog the ways liberals were privileged in his academic experience: liberals do not have to worry about their political candidates being mocked, they do not have to worry about tainting their graduate students' reputations, they do not have to worry about whether a manuscript rejection represents an ideological decision instead of a scientific judgment, and so on (Jussim 2012a).

Second, there are the problems in the narrowness of sociological research. This problem demands more attention because such narrowness becomes reflected in the sociological literature, much of which becomes canonical for future generations of sociologists. Absent such attention, there are downstream consequences for the progress of sociological science. This topic has been partially addressed before (Haidt 2011; Yancey 2011), but I cast the spotlight on some overlooked issues.

Because my focus is American sociology, the ideologies in my scope are liberalism, conservatism, and libertarianism. My narrow use of "ideology" stems from the pragmatic scope of this essay, and not from inattention to scholarship. Although no perfect definition of ideology exists, an ideology typically represents an institutionalized vigilance for transgressions of certain values. Often, ideologues are also vigilant to opportunities for moral progress, but taboos retain primacy. Feminism is an ideology vigilant to unjust treatment of women, environmentalism is an ideology vigilant to ecological harm, fascism is an ideology vigilant to disruptions of "proper" political and economic hierarchy, and so on.

Liberalism is dominant in sociology, so I focus on its attendant problems. Conservatism and libertarianism, though distinct, are not differentiated here, but in an ideal world sociology would draw scholars from both conservative and libertarian traditions. Readers should note "conservatism" here denotes the eponymous American political movement. All groups have some conservative aspects, inasmuch as they believe that some things are worth preserving.

EXPLANATION, FALSIFICATION, AND THE NEED FOR IDEOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

The goals of science are explanation, control, and prediction (Strevens 2006). Explanation has primacy among these three goals because people learn how to control and predict phenomena by relying on explanation. To explain a phenomenon, one needs to thoroughly chart the mechanisms that mediate between causes and effects (Salmon 1984). An explanation fails if it posits magical action, or action from a distance, because such causation fails to elucidate the mechanism between the cause and effect (Salmon 1984; see also Hedström and Swedberg 1996). A *complete* explanation must be precise and valid, enabling one to extrapolate what happens when any switch in the mechanism is tripped. An observer should know how, when, and where to find the corresponding evidence.

As a result of this connection between theory completeness on one hand and precision and validity on the other, one can put theories to the test by finding instances where a theory's predictions are imprecise or invalid. Such instances falsify the theory (Popper 1963). Falsification is difficult, because people often test hypotheses by replicating existing results instead of applying strong tests of disconfirmation (Koslowski 2013; Mynatt, Doherty, and Tweney 1978). As a result, people are likely to find consonant evidence.

Countering this tendency demands that one bring together researchers from diverse backgrounds, which increases the chances of finding a researcher who already knows of a

falsifying instance. The problem with homogenous teams is their members fall prey to a confirmation bias: They typically seek, interpret and recall evidence in ways that bolster their current stance (Oswald and Grosjean 2004). In scholarly work, three types of narrowness ensue: limitations on scope, limitations on evidence, and limitations on empathic understanding.

I. LIMITATIONS ON THE SCOPE OF RESEARCH PROJECTS

Because ideologies develop around shared concerns, ideologically similar people have similar morals and similar taboos (Fiske and Tetlock 1997; Tetlock et al. 2000). For instance, among American conservatives, it is taboo to suggest that taxes should be raised for any reason. To wit, a recent entire slate of Republican candidates was given the hypothetical scenario where each dollar in tax increases was matched by ten dollars in spending cuts, and they uniformly opposed the idea of a tax increase, a move that is indicative of a taboo (see Haidt and Movius 2012). Likewise, among very liberal Americans, it is taboo to use statistical base rates when the rights of a protected group are at risk (Tetlock et al. 2000). This means that liberals forbid accurate stereotyping if an undesirable attribute gets attached to a canonically victimized target. For instance, liberals support the idea that people should incur higher premiums for home insurance in neighborhoods where homes are likely to be damaged by fires or other disasters, and lower premiums in neighborhoods where homes are relatively safe. In such scenarios, the home insurance rate is based on the base rate of risk in the surrounding neighborhood. However, if the base rate of risk is correlated with the presence of protected minority groups, such that the high-risk neighborhoods are predominantly African-American, liberals reverse their stance, morally condemning the idea of attending to neighborhood risk (Fiske and Tetlock 1997). They seek moral cleansing if they discover they have accidentally implemented such a policy.

Among the taboos in the social sciences are the ideas that "victims" are sometimes blameworthy, that sexes and races biologically differ from one another, that social beliefs are inborn rather than constructed, and that stereotypes sometimes match average group attributes (Haidt 2011; see also Felson 2001; Jussim 2012b; Pinker 2002). (By "stereotype," I mean any belief about a person based on social-group membership, and I do not limit its usage to inaccurate and invidious beliefs.) What holders of these taboos share is a concern with self-determination and individual dignity (cf. Smith 2014). A person's biological nature and conferred social status are construed as oppressive chains from which the individual should be liberated. Such chains are an affront to the dignity of the individual and his or her right to self-determination. This is indeed a laudable moral platform, since people do benefit from *perceived* autonomy (Ryan and Deci 2000). Nevertheless, a sociological claim may increase perceived autonomy and still be factually untrue.

Although self-determination and an independent construal of self predominate in the West, they are more strongly found in Western liberals than Western conservatives (Talhelm et al. 2015). In addition, Western liberals are particularly concerned with the welfare of protected groups (Graham et al. 2013). As a result, liberals are wary of research that seems to deny self-determination to members of protected groups. Consider the politicization of stereotyping, which is now a mainstay of social research. Stereotype research arose from a concern with prejudice against immigrants (e.g., Allport 1954). However, as it expanded to encompass beliefs about all groups, stereotypes were treated as undesirable and assumed to be factually wrong. This was the case even though one could, for instance, empirically check whether a stereotype about income differences between groups X and Y matches the actual median income difference between those

groups (e.g., Martin and Nezlek 2014). The assumption of stereotype inaccuracy is appealing when individual self-determination is sacrosanct.

Consider what happens when members of an interdependent, *collectivist* group are positively stereotyped. In a recent study, social psychologists examined whether blatant positive stereotypes are deemed offensive in both independent and interdependent cultural groups (Siy and Cheryan 2013). As the researchers hypothesized, the inclusion of positive stereotypes in a written passage caused Asian-Americans to rate it more negatively than they otherwise would have rated it. However, the inclusion of the positive stereotype did not trigger an identical reaction among Asians in East Asia. Their average rating was lower but not significantly different from their baseline rating. As this study shows, one reason stereotypes offend people is not that they contain some inherently moral badness, but rather that they threaten self-determination.

Stereotypes are also considered problematic because of stereotype threat and self-fulfilling prophecies, even though the strength of these effects has been exaggerated (Jussim 2012b). In addition, it is conventionally immoral to spout falsehoods, so if generalizations about groups are accurate (on average), one has to the weigh the tradeoff between unfairness and dishonesty.

Because of these problems, stereotype accuracy has been considered a taboo topic, and only a small number of researchers have investigated if stereotypes are accurate (e.g., Jussim 2012b). Much of this research has shown that stereotypes are indeed accurate (on average), particularly in direction. These findings contradict the assertion by some scholars that stereotypes *primarily* arise from intergroup envy or scorn (e.g., Fiske 2010). Rather, they develop from valid observations of the social world. Far from being the foolish mistake-makers

that social psychologists have made them out to be (Baumeister 2010), humans are mostly perceptive observers. Were it not for the taboo against accuracy research, this scientific discovery might have occurred earlier.

The taboo on stereotypes is part of an encompassing taboo that discourages challenges to free human will. Sociologists tend to ignore or criticize social research that brings in human evolution (Cole 2001), genes (Shiao et al. 2012), geography (Langlois 2008) and memes (Black 2000), preferring to continually recycle a meso-level set of factors: solidarity, intergroup rivalry, racism, sexism, and classism. Understandably, some of this avoidance is well deserved—early sociobiological research was questionable (see Laland and Brown 2011). However, sociologists overestimate the variance that their traditional factors explain (Cole 2001; Roberts et al. 2007). The political resistance to non-traditional factors seems to derive from the motivation to center attention on individuals and groups, and confer autonomy upon them.

There is one exception: A sociologist is allowed to demonstrate that people are moved by large causal forces, if that sociologist also shows that these causal forces are socially constructed, and can be nullified to obtain a fair outcome. In some cases, the Herculean effort required to *actually* nullify these forces suggests a Utopian vision rather than a practical one, but nevertheless, the central point stands. Thus, Bourdieu (1977) focuses on how individuals are implicitly manipulated by social forces, and associates these forces with inequality and violence. He also suggests that these social forces arise from arbitrary social constructions, and he encourages their unveiling. In addition to setting the stage for social activism, Bourdieu provisions individuals with some control. Social cognition research has re-examined Bourdieu's axioms about the effect of social circles on individuals, reaching the conclusion that Bourdieu *overestimates* individual efficacy (Vaughan 2002).

The sociology of inequality may also have been stunted by the marginalization of morally unpalatable causes. Newer research on epigenetics, which focuses on how genes change during a single lifespan, reveals that famines sometimes become encoded into peripheral genetic code, such that children and grandchildren of the affected people display a subconscious biological awareness of impending stress (Carey 2012). For instance, researchers have examined the downstream effect of the Dutch Hunger Winter, a period during the Second World War in which the Nazi fuel and food blockage of the Netherlands caused a famine in which tens of thousands perished. Pregnant women who were in the first trimester during the Hunger Winter gave birth to children who became obese as adults; and when these children gave birth to another generation, the grandchildren tended to be overweight too (Veenendaal et al. 2013). A similar trans-generational phenomenon has been documented in the male line among residents of Överkalix in Northern Sweden, a region that experienced food shortages in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Pembrey et al. 2005). These epigenetic studies show how inequality can arise from the joint action of very large causal forces, like a world war, and very small causal mechanisms like peripheral coding on genes. Individual attributes, such as race, class, and gender, may explain some of the variance as well, and they may interact with the epigenetic factor, but they cannot be solely used to elucidate these cross-generational phenomena. It should be noted that epigenetic research has primarily revealed nutritional effects thus far, and I refer to epigenetics to illustrate a point, but I discourage over-generalizations (see Albert 2010).

Clearly, it is discomfiting for individualists to accept that they are simultaneously controlled by microscopic alleles, megalithic geographic factors, and interactions between the two. Despite scientific evidence that falsifies self-determination, a belief in the self may be morally necessary to preserve responsible behavior, and scientific evidence cannot adjudicate

such moral questions in their entirety. However, we now have evidence of being controlled by forces that sociologists habitually ignore, and one might wonder if we would have found these phenomena earlier if sociologists had been open to these levels of analysis sooner.

II. LIMITATIONS ON DATA USED IN RESEARCH PROJECTS

In my experience, liberals often justify their superiority by noting that liberals have consistently been on the correct side of political struggles. There are numerous cases in the *living* memory of most adults where liberals supported a position that we now deem moral—the civil rights struggle and the feminist movement come to mind. Yet these examples come to mind because they occurred recently. In fact, many participants in these movements are still alive and politically active.

The distant past reveals at least two cases of conservatives being on the right side of an issue. The first case is the eugenics movement, which was ideologically part of the late-19th and early-20th-century progressive movement (Freeden 1979). The members of this movement, which included the statisticians Francis Galton and his student Carl Pearson, believed that most individual differences resulted from genetic variance, and they sought to modify the population in order to remove undesirable traits from lineages. Given their presumption of genetic potency, they concluded that environmental interventions had a paltry impact, and that genetic interventions were in order. Given their apparent potential to reduce inequality, eugenics was supported by progressives during this era. Because eugenics later became associated with Nazism, its early history was forgotten.

The second case is opposition to Communism. Although Communism is now universally acknowledged as an inhumane, totalitarian system, Western intellectuals supported Stalin even after his crimes against humanity were revealed (Folsom 1994; Kutulas 1990, 1995). Because

liberals and progressives eventually became anti-Stalinist, Joseph McCarthy now looms as the biggest American problem of the Stalinist era, and progressive dissociate American progressivism from a political movement that was as deadly as Nazism. Contemporary liberals are obviously not blameworthy for historical events, but the neglect of progressive Stalinism creates a sanitized narrative, where only conservative projects seem problematic (Hollander 2013; see also Brandt et al. 2014).

There are also cases where the incorrect predictions of prominent conservatives are held to the light, whereas the incorrect predictions made by prominent Leftists are hidden. For instance, most sociologists likely remember U.S. Vice President Richard Cheney's prediction that American soldiers would be treated as liberators in Iraq, or the prediction of several economists that austerity policies would benefit Europe. These predictions have received much ridicule on the Left. However, people on the Left are unlikely to know about Marx's prediction that Communist dictators would resemble managers of workers' co-operative societies, who refrained from abusing their authority (Marx 1986:297). Admittedly, this prediction is found in Marx's notes on Bakunin, not one of Marx's best-known writings. Nevertheless, despite the voluminous literature on Marx, this prediction is missing in all of Marx's major biographies (e.g., Berlin 1978; McLellan 2006; Sperber 2013; Wheen 1999). This is not to say that sociological critiques of Marx are absent, which would be fantastically uninformed, but rather that Marx still receives unusually high regard relative to conservatives who have made failed predictions. Given these oversights in retrospective and prospective manners, it is apparent that inconvenient evidence can be collectively forgotten.

A similar problem occurs when data are truncated to bolster a liberal paradigm. The "White privilege" paradigm is an instructive case. The term "White privilege" refers to the fact

that life is cumulatively easier for Whites than African-Americans in the U.S. For instance, whites can more easily fraternize with members of the same race, they can more easily find attractive and affordable housing, they can evade suspicion from store clerks, and they can be assured that a police officer who pulls them over is not engaging in racial profiling (McIntosh 1990). These observations come from Peggy McIntosh's (1990) essay on White privilege, a mainstay in sociology reading lists. [2] The essay has attained canonical status, and the term "White privilege" has entered the sociological vocabulary (Harman 2010; Silva and Forman 2000; Solomona et al. 2005). Its usage is much less common in Europe, but American sociologists take an inquisitorial stance against those who find fault with the construct (Solomona et al. 2005).

Undoubtedly, McIntosh's observations merit attention—there are certain privileges associated with being in the majority. Nevertheless, there are two significant problems with McIntosh's article and the ensuing construct. First, by neglecting non-Black minorities and referring to *White* privilege, McIntosh suggests that Whites are advantaged relative to all other groups. Second, by forgoing any caveats, McIntosh implies that Whites have it better on *every* sociological dimension. These two problems may serve the interests of antiracists engaged in "partisan sociology" (Niemonen 2010) but most sociologists should be troubled.

Consider McIntosh's claim about housing affordability—"If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live" (1990:97). This statement correctly implies that whites are better off than Blacks, but incorrectly implies that Whites are better off than everyone else. Asians outrank Whites in median income: the median White-Asian difference in household income is $10,000 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2012). If one counts Jews as a distinct ethnic group, and also

breaks down Asians into regional subcategories, Whites fare worse. The top–down ranking becomes Jewish, Indian, Filipino, Japanese, White, Vietnamese, Korean, Hispanic, and Black (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2008; Pew Research Center 2013). The fact that Whites are not first, that they lag a full $10,000 behind Asians, and that this gap has existed for at least 30 years constitutes, in Weberian terms, an "inconvenient fact" for proponents of the White privilege paradigm (Sakamoto, Goyette, and Kim 2009; Sakamoto, Takei, and Woo 2012). Furthermore, the average American seems unaware that Asians surpass whites in income, and those who rate whites as highly privileged make the most egregious underestimation of Asian income (Martin and Nezlek 2014).

Other examples of inconvenient facts abound. Blacks (and Asians) have better mental health than Whites, an effect labeled the Black–White paradox (Keyes 2009). Hispanics have better physical health and lower mortality than Whites, an effect known as the Hispanic paradox (Markides and Eschbach 2005). And Asians have a higher average education level than Whites (Sakamoto et al. 2009), an effect which is as yet unnamed. The use of "paradox" rather than "falsification" for these effects is telling, given that a robust theory should have no paradoxes.

In other cases, no clear ranking can be made. Although Asians have the highest median household income, Whites have the highest median net worth (Kochhar, Taylor, and Fry 2011). Black men are perceived as both highly attractive and highly dangerous (Lewis 2011; Sadler et al. 2012). And Blacks have the highest risk of being a victim of a hate crime, but Blacks also commit hate crimes at the highest per capita rate (Chorba 2001; Rubenstein 2003). Meanwhile, Jews and Asians and are almost exclusively victims rather than perpetrators of hate crimes (Chorba 2001; Rubenstein 2003), which seems to put them at bottom of a racial hierarchy, but

their education and income put them at the top of the racial hierarchy. Selective elimination of data constitutes data censoring—the relevant primary data are readily available.

III. LIMITED EMPATHIC UNDERSTANDING OF OTHER IDEOLOGIES

What makes the anthropocentric sciences unique is that the attempt to study humans is both helped and hindered by the fact that scholars are overly familiar with human experience. We are helped by the human ability to be empathic. We are hindered by the fact that our empathy often derives from heuristics rather than real evidence. One way to overcome this hindrance is by forgoing heuristic thinking, and becoming acquainted with people whose beliefs and attitudes are distant from our own. Conversely, misunderstandings worsen when we indulge in epistemic egocentrism, the "tendency to evaluate others as though they shared our privileged information and concerns" (Nagel, Juan, and Mar 2013:3). Psychological evidence shows that children outgrow the tendency to be grossly egocentric in this fashion, but people still exhibit an egocentric bias as adults. For instance, we may know that a newcomer is ignorant of a relevant fact that we know, but we still expect that newcomer to *behave* in a manner consistent with that ignorance (Birch 2005; Birch and Bloom 2007; Royzman, Cassidy, and Baron 2003).[3]

Thus, our empathy (or *verstehen* potential) is somewhat limited. Imagine a set containing all possible beliefs. Each of us holds a subset of those beliefs, and when two subsets overlap, empathy can arise. However, I will likely make two paradoxical assumptions when I interact with you: I will assume that what is unique to my belief subset is also known by you, and will assume that what is unique to your subset is known by me. Fortunately, we can minimize this error by eliciting evidence, a task that is important for sociologists who seek empathetic understanding. Yet sociologists who know this to be true, and who rightly try to understand, say, unfamiliar religious beliefs, often overlook deeply held ideological beliefs.

Consider a study by Thomas Frank (2004) of voting behavior and political affiliation in Kansas, entitled "What's the Matter with Kansas?" The title comes from his finding that Kansans typically vote *against* their economic interest. This assertion is probably sound (but see Bartels 2006; Frank 2008). Yet to assume that *something is the matter* with Kansas, Frank makes this additional assumption: economic interests should be primary driver of voting behavior. Frank elevates economic interests because that is the criterion that makes sense *to him*. Beliefs about religion and culture may outweigh economic concerns for many, so this egocentric assumption is unjustified. In the field of political and moral psychology, scholars have found that liberals and conservatives misunderstand each other. In one study, participants were asked to complete a moral questionnaire, and then were asked how people of the opposite ideological persuasion would answer. From these ratings, the investigators could compute the subjective moral distance between a participant's ideology and the (apparent) opposing ideology (Graham, Nosek, and Haidt 2012). The moral dimensions measured in this study were harm, fairness, group loyalty, authority, and purity. Loyalty is one of the factors that conservatives as opposed to liberals value highly, and liberals seem aware of this. Thus, in this study conservatives rated liberals as low on this factor, while liberals rated conservatives high on this factor. However, in both cases the ratings of the "other" overshot the accurate values: liberals believed that conservatives were *obsessed* with authority, while conservatives believed that liberals *disdained* authority. These results betray a certain kind of egocentrism. If a liberal uses himself or herself as a reference point, thus framing morality egocentrically, he or she will assume a conservative holds moral positions that are diametrically opposite his or her own, thus rating conservatives as far more different than they actually are. Indeed, this problem was more pronounced among liberals: some

liberals considered conservatives to be people who actually preferred harming people over caring for them.

This assumptive understanding without true understanding is also found in the sociological and social psychological literature. Several scholars have chosen to define conservatives as people who have a preference for the status quo and a willingness to tolerate inequality (e.g., Benforado and Hanson 2012). However, conservatives may not think in terms of the status quo, and the purported evidence that conservatives *directly* prefer the status quo may be specious. Conservatives have great respect for authority, and their respect for the status quo likely derives from their respect for the social norms that prior generations have created, not respect for the status quo itself. Their ostensible preference for the status quo is an epiphenomenon, egocentrically described as the opposite of what liberals prefer, which is a change in the status quo. Similarly, there is little evidence that conservatives are indifferent to inequality, but rather that they prefer goods and services be withheld from people who haven't earned them (Haidt 2013). One must engage in mind reading to infer that they are *troubled* by inequality and then *tolerate* it.

This choice of vocabulary—"status quo" and "tolerate"—can also be interpreted as a liberally biased framing. To frame a discourse is to order verbal elements, choose a particular vocabulary, and employ certain metaphors when one talks about something. When people examine information and reach subsequent conclusions, it is often the case that they are not only persuaded by the information but also by the framing of the information. For instance, there are two ways to frame the cure to an epidemic that will kill 600 people (Tversky and Kahneman 1981). First, one could say that if program A is adopted, 200 people will saved, and if program B is adopted there is a 1/3rd chance that 600 people will be saved and 2/3rd chance that no one will

be saved. Second, one could say that if program A is adopted, 400 people will die, and if program B is adopted there is a 1/3rd chance that no one will die, and a 2/3rd chance that all 600 will die. Both of these framings describe the same information, but the first frame elicits support for program A while the second frame elicits support for program B. The first scenario associates program A with a definite gain, while the second associated program A with a definite loss. Framing can sometimes be undone with elaboration of information that was elided (Magen, Dweck, and Gross 2008).

Framing also entails using concrete metaphors to denote abstractions. In fact, much of our so-called abstract thinking is grounded in metaphors that we idiomatically learn. For example, we metaphorically treat ourselves as containers, and speak of being *filled* with joy when we feel joyful, *emptying* our sorrow when we express all our sorrow, and *contain our* emotions when we remain silent about them (Lakoff and Johnson 2008).

Framing is endemic to sociological language. Sociologists speak of constraints, as though people were physically fenced in; they speak of social controls, as though some entity manipulated people; and they speak of social structure, as though people could be located inside a physical edifice. These linguistic devices are useful, but being metaphors, they also have limitations—primarily, they suggest that we have a precise, deterministic understanding of social phenomena, even though our understanding is currently vague and probabilistic. In addition, these metaphors are emotionally loaded. Constraints are opposed to freedom, and freedom is good. Social control is opposed to autonomy, and autonomy is good. Social structure is opposed to self-determination, and self-determination is good. Constraints and social control immediately evoke negative emotions, because both liberals and conservatives desire their opposites.

Referring solely to *existing* social arrangements as constraints or social-control mechanisms, however, leads to a liberal bias.

Would another type of framing be possible? What if we described society as comprehensible (constrained) rather than overwhelming (unconstrained), as shaped (structured) rather than formless (unstructured), as predictable (with social control) rather than volatile (without social control), and as ordered (hierarchical) rather than anarchic (equal)? Such a metaphorical schema is just as pragmatic as the schema we currently use. Yet this schema is unlikely to gain traction, because it highlights the functional rather than the dysfunctional.

The choice of "status quo" as the term to denote social problems is also self-flattering. There are many elements of the status quo that American liberals support: the Bill of Rights, the democratic elections held to elect governing bodies, the provision of public libraries and schools, and the subsidized healthcare provided to the poor and elderly. When the term "status quo" appears, it only denotes elements of the status quo that trouble the author. Yet anyone can name some elements of the status quo they find problematic. Does this mean everyone is against the status quo? It seems more likely that saying one is against the "status quo" is a form of self-labeling that frames oneself as positive agent of change. Not surprisingly, members of the right-wing Tea Party also claim to be against the status quo (NBC News 2010)

COUNTERARGUMENTS AND RESPONSES

Many arguments could be raised in favor of the argument that conservatives would hinder the progress of sociological science. First, one might argue that liberals on average have abilities and temperaments that are suited for scientific insight and progress. For instance, one could point out that liberals are more intelligent than conservatives. Indeed, some evidence has accumulated in the past decade showing this average IQ difference (Hodson and Busseri 2012;

see also Kanazawa 2010). However, these studies merely show a *mean* difference. Given variability about the mean, these studies do not indicate that there are no qualified conservatives.

A similar argument is that liberals score higher than conservatives on openness to experience, a personality trait ascribed to people who show curiosity about their environment (Carney et al. 2008). Such an orientation toward the external world naturally fits the scientific disposition. This argument not only fails for the statistical reason noted above, but also because the correlation between openness to experience and liberalism is fairly weak.

Instead of focusing on psychological traits, one could focus on psychological biases to make another counterargument, namely, that cognitive biases are not strong enough to distort sociological scholarship. Although social psychologists have made a cottage industry out of bias spotting, a number of critics have noted that cognitive biases tend to be weak (Jussim 2012b; see also Krueger and Funder 2004). However, two issues I have discussed—data censoring and marginalization of taboo topics—have less to do with biased inferences than the absence of information altogether.

Opponents may also ponder if non-ideological discourse is possible. As Mannheim (1936) noted, thoughts do not sprout independently but rather grow from ideological soil. Thus, one can claim that every scholar is an ideologue, a political move that portrays scholars as lacking epistemic humility and cognitive complexity (see Merton 1973; Weber 1946). Alternatively, one can abjure loyalty to a single ideology just as one can abjure loyalty to a single sociological theory. Such a catholic approach was proposed by Sorokin (1965:836), who noted a problem with the over-extension of any single sociological theory (italics Sorokin's):

> [The] disadvantage, fallacy, and danger [of sociological theories] consists in *imperialistic extension* of the main propositions of each analytical or fact-finding theory over different realities or over the total sociocultural reality and in *a lack of integration, reconciliation and mutual complementation* of the heterogeneous and discordant analytical and fact-finding theories into one integral theory that gives a sound knowledge of not one but of all the basic aspects of the total sociocultural universe, and thus a fuller knowledge of the whole sociocultural reality.

Sorokin referred to his approach as integral approach. A similar integral approach is possible in the realm of American political ideology (e.g., Haidt 2013:319–366).

Opponents could claim that political conservatism is an immoral or amoral ideology, that conservative principles cannot be reconciled with the goals of social improvement, and that many conservatives base their arguments on fictitious data. These accusations are certainly true to some extent, but immorality often lies in the eyes of the beholder. Moreover, conservatives and liberals share the goals of minimizing harm, maximizing care, and increasing fairness (Graham et al. 2013); and liberals have also been caught with fictitious or selective data (e.g., Sommers 1994). One might also argue that excessive political diversity can lead to the kind of acrimony that impedes scientific progress. This objection would hold weight, but for the example of all the disciplines that have both more ideological diversity and more solidarity than sociology.

Christian Smith (2003:82) has summarized the "liberal progress narrative" that permeates the academic Left:

> Once upon a time, the vast majority of human persons suffered in societies that were unjust, unhealthy, repressive and oppressive.... But the noble human aspiration for autonomy, equality, and prosperity struggled mightily against the forces of misery and oppression, and eventually succeeded.... [Yet] there is much work to be done to dismantle the powerful vestiges of inequality, exploitation, and repression.

Even though this narrative contains claims that may be truer than the claims underlying the conservative narrative, these claims are both selective and simplistic. To sustain a political movement, simple narratives are desirable because one cannot expect ordinary citizens to understand sociological subtleties. This is not because they lack intelligence, but because they lack interest. However, sociology is too sophisticated for such a narrative. Fidelity to any narrative entails a lack of skepticism—final conclusions have already been reached. This attitude is fatal to science.

CONCLUSION

A former president of the International Sociological Association argued that scholarly disciplines combine three phenomena: a shared understanding of the intellectual boundaries of the field, an institutional structure that defines roles, and a cultural community that defines values and norms (Wallerstein 1999). One of sociology's shared norms is that social conflict is always present. Perhaps this has engendered a problem-focused view in sociology, one that inhibits a conservative appreciation of arenas where conflict is minimal.

This problem-focused view leads sociological studies to flow into social activism, a merger which is problematic unless all participants share the same prospective moral ideals. This problem seems to have been resolved, albeit unintentionally, by the homogenization of the

discipline. To undo this problem, one avenue for future sociologists to take is to abjure public sociology, thus removing morals from sociology. Indeed, some sociologists have made a persuasive case against public sociology for this reason (Deflem 2005). I would argue for another more inclusive option, namely, to make sociology public by ensuring that people from every major ideology are represented in sociological work. Such diversity cannot be achieved immediately, but sociologists can certainly begin by creating policies to attract ideological outsiders to the field. Such policies would not only connect a larger segment of the public to the science of sociology, but they would also attenuate ideological bias and accelerate sociological science.

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Endnotes

[1] In the field of personality psychology, reinforcement sensitivity theory posits that three systems underlie human emotions. The behavioral activation system (BAS) handles appetitive reactions, the fight–flight–freeze system (FFFS) handles aversive reactions, and the behavioral inhibition system (BIS) handles ambiguity. The experiences mostly closely associated with the respective systems are fear, joy, and anxiety. One reason that some people have different emotional dispositions is that they have different levels of baseline activation in these systems. Happy people have relatively greater activity in their behavioral activation systems, although their other systems are activated when appropriate. Depressed people have relatively little activity in their behavioral activation system. Sufferers of anxiety disorders have relatively high activity in their behavioral inhibition system. In my experience, academic disciplines contain similar systems with a unique profile in each discipline. Political science, economics, and history are happy. Psychology once suffered from anxiety, but it recovered. Sociology has been suffering from a prolonged episode of anxiety, and labors under the illusion that the ending of anxiety is synonymous with the beginning of joy.

[2] For examples of such syllabi, see:

www.asanet.org/images/members/docs/pdf/teaching/RESection5Jorgenson.pdf

sites.clas.ufl.edu/soccrim/files/SYG-2000-2894-syllabus-Schnable.pdf

www.deanza.edu/distance/syllabi/soc1_12m.pdf

howdy.tamu.edu/Inside/HR2504/PDFs/SYL_201331_13215.pdf

www2.humboldt.edu/sociology/syllabi/Soc%20F2013/Soc%20316%20-%20Gender%20Society%20-%20L%20Cortez-Regan%20-%20Fall%202013.pdf

sociology.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/syllabi/2011Fall/SOCY4131-Harrison.pdf

tilt.colostate.edu/files/eportfolios/7/File32-Mar-16-2008-11-59-59-AM.pdf

soc.utah.edu/courses/Syllabi/Spring%202012/Martinez_3041.001_Rock&Roll_Spring%202012.pdf

[3] Epistemic egocentrism can often be found in moral philosophy, where philosophers expect people to behave as though they are cognizant of unknowns. Consider this illogical claim by the moral philosopher Peter Singer (2013): "The man or woman who wears a $30,000 watch or buys similar luxury goods, like a $12,000 handbag . . . is saying; "I am either extraordinarily ignorant, or just plain selfish. If I were not ignorant, I would know that children are dying from diarrhea or malaria, because they lack safe drinking water, or mosquito nets, and obviously what I have spent on this watch or handbag would have been enough to help several of them survive; but I care so little about them that I would rather spend my money on something that I wear for ostentation alone."