Current Theoretical and Political Perspectives of Western Sociological Theorists

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While sociological theorists frequently express concern about theoretical fragmentation and the politicization of sociology, little research has been done to demonstrate the actual state of the field. In an earlier study of sociologists in general, Sanderson and Ellis (1992) found a high degree of theoretical fragmentation and a close correspondence between sociologists' political views and their theory preferences. The current study extends this line of analysis to sociological theorists. Data gathered from over half of the members of the American Sociological Association (ASA) Theory Section show sociological theorists to be enormously divided with respect to their preferred theoretical perspectives, their conceptions of the most important social theorists, and their stance on modern theoretical debates and controversies (such as the virtues of postmodernism). As was the case with sociologists in general, political ideology was the strongest correlate of theory choice, and gender was less closely related to theory choice than would be expected. From these data, a picture is painted of the current state of social theory as we approach the next millennium.

The problem of fragmentation within the field of contemporary sociology is cause for concern among sociologists as well as for confusion among students. Following the decline of functionalism as the dominant theoretical perspective in the 1960s, Alvin Gouldner (1970) predicted an impending crisis in Western sociology. Twenty years later, George Ritzer (1990) referred to "separate and warring fiefdoms" as characterizing sociological theory over those two decades. Norbert Wiley (1990) asserts that the discipline lacks a dominating "center," and Jonathan Turner (1990) suggests that individual sociologists simply "do their own thing." Considering the lack of shared intellectual commitments among theorists, as re-

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flected in the diversity of subject matter, philosophical assumptions, theory-building strategies, and methodologies (Turner, 1990), it is little wonder that students of sociology might have difficulty in finding a place to "hang their hat."

For one brief, shining moment, in the two decades that followed World War II, the field coalesced around a common paradigm. Talcott Parsons established *system* as the dominant conceptual frame, and his theory of structural-functionalism took on at least an aura of orthodoxy in the 1950s. Robert Friedrichs (1970) points out that the political climate of this period was conducive to the emergence of a theory that stressed stability and equilibrium. The Eisenhower presidency reflected the conservative political climate, and functionalism meshed with the dominant conservative ethos. John Rhoads (1972) suggests that Parsons's theory initially responded to anxiety produced by World War I, the Soviet Revolution, fascist movements, and the world depression, and that structural-functionalism restored confidence in the traditional social order. Parsons and most other functionalists were really liberals rather than conservatives, but functionalism resonated well with the social climate of the first two postwar decades, and from the standpoint of the supercharged radical atmosphere of the late 1960s and early 1970s Parsons and functionalism appeared conservative. It is no accident that functionalism was intellectually hegemonic during the period when the United States was economically and politically hegemonic (Wallerstein, 1979).

Indeed, there were dissenting theorists during the 1950s, but it was not until the political climate changed that the field experienced a dramatic split. In the 1960s, the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, the Vietnam War protests, and President Johnson's war on poverty shifted the focus from stability to social change. Such revolutionary events could hardly be explained in terms of "system maintenance" and "functional integration" (Friedrichs, 1970). Functionalism, with its strong emphasis on social order, could not relate to social criticism and dissent (Gouldner, 1970).

Neither Robert Merton's addition of the concept of *dysfunction* nor Parsons's placing functionalism within an evolutionary framework could stem the tide of theorists moving away from functionalism and the systems paradigm. In 1959, C. Wright Mills vehemently criticized the conservative implications of functionalism, sparking a broader critique of the social equilibrium aspect of the system paradigm. In 1964, George Homans, a former proponent of functionalism, repudiated that position in his presidential address to the American Sociological Association (Friedrichs, 1970). As all sociologists know, by the early 1970s functionalism seemed all but dead.

The 1960s was a period during which a variety of paradigms emerged as potential successors to functionalism, but no one paradigm clearly defeated the others, and divisiveness reigned. Mounting concern over divisiveness in social theory was evidenced in publications on the development of social theory by Edward Shils (1970), Robert Friedrichs (1970), Alvin Gouldner (1970), and Nicholas Mullins (1973) in the early 1970s, and more recently their concerns have been echoed by such well-known sociologists as S.N. Eisenstadt (1976), Randall Collins (1990), and Donald Levine (1995). Eisenstadt argued that the sociology of the 1970s "could be presented as consisting of completely closed, 'totalistic' paradigms which differed not only in their analytical premises but also in their philosophic, ideological, and political assumptions, minimizing the possibility of scholarly

discourse on problems of common interest" (1976:311; cited in Levine, 1995:284). He goes on to say that it "was the continuing spread of these developments that produced a widespread malaise in sociology, an acceptance of its being in a time of crisis" (1976:312; cited in Levine, 1995:284). Referring to the period of the late 1980s, Randall Collins (1990:311; cited in Levine, 1995:285) sensed that sociology had "lost all coherence as a discipline" and was "breaking up into a conglomerate of specialties, each going its own way and with none too high regard for each other." And Donald Levine (1995:284) has said that "on the surface, sociology of the 1990s has seemed healthy. Research programs multiply; conferences abound; professional groupings form; journals flourish. . . . Yet beneath the surface there lingers muted disquiet. The decade followed a period when sociology, along with the other social sciences, was wracked by debilitating changes."

Despite the apparent concern, however, there have been few empirical attempts to demonstrate the actual state of the field. The most recent is that of Stephen Sanderson and Lee Ellis (1992). Focusing on theoretical divisiveness in particular, Sanderson and Ellis's study, using a national sample of 168 sociologists, clearly demonstrates fragmentation within the field as well as a correlation between sociologists' theoretical allegiances and their political views. Their respondents were asked to identify their primary and secondary theoretical allegiances from a list of thirteen perspectives. Not only were responses on primary and secondary theoretical allegiances widely scattered among the given categories, but 11.7 percent of the respondents wrote in something else in the "other" category. Another 25.3 percent pledged allegiance to eclecticism—which indicated no particular allegiance at all. Sanderson and Ellis further identified what they called "implicit eclectics," which were sociologists who did not identify eclecticism as their theory choice but who nonetheless selected two or more incompatible perspectives. When the implicit eclectics were added to the explicit eclectics, a full 61 percent of the sample was identified as eclectic in one sense or another. Their conclusion suggests another dimension of theoretical fragmentation: Not only are sociologists as a group divided in their theoretical perspectives, but a substantial number of individual sociologists are inconsistent in their thinking, leaping from one theory to another.

To what extent are Sanderson and Ellis's findings regarding sociologists in general applicable to specialists in sociological theory? That is the general question the present study attempts to answer. Does the theoretical fragmentation demonstrated among sociologists in general exist among theorists in particular? What kinds of social background variables will be associated with, perhaps even determinant of, theory choice? What exactly is the "lay of the land" in Western social theory today? These questions are crucial because they concern nothing less than the future of social theory as a viable subdiscipline within sociology, and even with whether social theory or sociology have a future.

Methods

The Sample

Given that the American Sociological Association (ASA) is a widely recognized professional association, the ASA Theory Section provides the best arena for a

survey of sociological theorists. Precedence for interpreting research results on the ASA and its sections as characterizing the field of sociology can be found in Cappell and Guterbock's studies (1986, 1991, 1992), in which they assume that voluntary memberships in ASA specialty sections reflect the structure of the discipline. The ASA Theory Section is conceptualized here as the proximate body of sociological theorists, and thus it is the target population rather than a sample of some broader population. While membership in the Theory Section is only an approximate operational definition of "theorist," it is safe to assume that members either teach or plan to teach theory, or at least have a serious interest in it. For the sake of convenience, section members are referred to as theorists throughout the study. The data presented, however, must be qualified as applying only to the target population (Theory Section members).

In the fall of 1994 a questionnaire was sent to all 725 ASA Theory Section members. This inclusive sample afforded the greatest probability of accumulating data representative of contemporary sociological theorists. The response rate was 52 percent, with 375 usable questionnaires being returned.

Data on basic demographic characteristics of the sample include age, gender, institutional affiliation, region of residence, and academic status (professors vs. graduate students). We also asked respondents about their political outlook, which became an important independent variable.

While 12 percent of the respondents did not admit to a gender, 67.2 percent reported themselves as male and 20.8 percent as female. This is close to the gender distribution in the Theory Section, which is 69.4 percent male and 27.4 percent female (with 3.2 percent missing).

The age categories follow a career path model to delineate cohorts comparable to those in the Sanderson and Ellis study: those forty-four and under in the first third of their careers, those forty-five to fifty-five in mid-career, and those fifty-six and older in the final years. Age groups represented are also fairly consistent with those of the previous study. In the age category forty-four or younger, 36.0 percent in this sample compares with 43.3 percent in the 1992 study; in the category forty-five to fifty-five, 40.3 percent compares with 36.0 percent; and in the category fifty-six and older, 19.5 percent compares with 20.1 percent.

As in the Sanderson and Ellis study, respondents represent a wide range of institutions. There are 228 (60.8 percent) from universities with Ph.D. granting sociology departments, 77 (20.5 percent) from universities with a B.A. or M.A. granting sociology department, 24 (6.4 percent) from private liberal arts colleges, 8 (2.1 percent) from community colleges, 7 (1.9 percent) from government or applied settings, and 29 (7.7 percent) identifying with a variety of other institutions or having no present affiliation. Most of the respondents are professors (75.7 percent). The sample also includes graduate students (14.1 percent) and sociologists in non-academic settings (9.6 percent). The sample reflects a fairly even regional distribution, with 29.3 percent residing in the East, 18.4 percent in the Midwest, 13.9 percent in the South, 18.4 percent in the West, and 14.9 percent in foreign countries.

Respondents established their political identification by checking one of four categories: conservative, moderate, liberal, or radical. Only 1.6 percent of the theorists classified themselves as conservative and 11.2 percent as moderate. The largest percentage (53.1 percent) are liberals, followed by radicals (27.2 percent),

and 6.9 percent refused to label themselves at all. The inclination to the political left is strikingly similar to that found in the Sanderson and Ellis sample, with 75.4 percent of sociologists in general and 80.3 percent of theorists categorizing themselves as liberal or radical.

The demographic data demonstrate that the sample includes a wide range of social theorists. While the choice to participate or not must be factored into determination that the sample is representative, the generally scattered responses indicate that the survey did not appeal to any one contingency more than to another. There may be some logic to the suggestion that those with the strongest opinions and/or concern about divisiveness might be the most likely to respond. Thus, interpretation of data showing polarized responses should be tempered by recognition of the possibility that people without strong theoretical allegiances might not have bothered to return the questionnaire.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire for this study was distributed to the approximately twenty attendees at the Theory Section business meeting at the 1994 ASA annual meetings in Los Angeles, who endorsed the study, along with Theda Skocpol, at that time chair of the Theory Section. Questions were based on the similar survey of the general membership of the ASA conducted by Sanderson and Ellis. As noted above, respondents were directed to identify their political outlook as either conservative, moderate, liberal, or radical. While it might be argued that political self-identification is a situational variable which necessitates a multidimensional scale to substantiate degrees of liberalism and conservatism, inclusion of such an auxiliary scale would have expanded the questionnaire to the point of jeopardizing the response rate. While Lipset and Ladd (1972) use an extensive liberalism-conservativism scale in their Carnegie Commission study, they also use political self-identification responses alone in part of their argument. This simple measure was used here for the purpose of brevity.

Next, respondents were requested to select their primary theoretical perspective from a list of 16 choices and their secondary perspective, if they had one, from an identical list. An "other" category was included in both lists. The theoretical categories are representative of perspectives most frequently mentioned in current articles, books, debates, and discussions. By the very nature of sociological theory, these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Marxism and conflict theory, for example, are certainly not). While discrete categories are the methodological ideal, the reality is that overlap exists. The problem of creating discrete categories is evident in the ways theories are variously grouped under inconsistent categorical headings in theory textbooks. While it may be argued that a broad range of theoretical selections predisposes a conclusion of diversity, it is likewise true that forcing responses into a few broadly defined discrete categories would mask the diversity that actually exists.

Follow-up questions on the postmodern critique, evolutionary theories, and sociobiology were designed to shed light on questions raised by Sanderson and Ellis's findings. Whereas postmodernism asserts the futility of searching for a comprehensive, objectively valid theoretical perspective, the prevalence of such thinking is especially pertinent to this study. The item on evolutionary theories is

included to address Sanderson and Ellis's suggestion that evolutionism may be thought of as a component of other theories rather than as a separate perspective in and of itself. And, in light of the highly antibiological stance found among sociologists in general, some probing for theorists' inclinations to consider sociobiological concepts is also of interest.

Other exploratory questions focus on the current state of social theory, possibilities of bridging the micro-macro gap, inclinations to link theory and praxis, and involvement in groups advocating social change. Since theorists themselves know better than anyone else what is happening in the field, asking for their personal views on the current state of social theory is most appropriate. The assumption behind the two questions addressing theorists' views on bridging the micro-macro gap is that totally segregated camps impede development of a comprehensive theoretical perspective. The basic question underlying the next two items on linking theory and praxis and on political involvement is whether an association between political and theoretical perspectives is only an academic issue or whether it is likely to be played out in the political arena as well. Whereas the question of involvement in groups advocating social change is very general, the main intent is to develop a broadly focused picture of political activity, which could serve as a basis for further more finely tuned exploration.

The final item asks respondents to designate their primary and secondary (if applicable) substantive focus from a list of twenty-eight choices (plus "other").

Data Analysis

Number and percentage tables demonstrate which theories predominate and the range of theoretical perspectives. Combining the percentages for primary and secondary perspective in each theory category and sorting the results in descending order provides a general picture of the most and least preferred theoretical perspectives.

Cross-tabulations using chi-square tests, and with a predetermined .05 level of statistical significance, were run on primary and secondary theoretical preferences separately with each of the independent variables: age, gender, institutional affiliation, region of residence, political stance, and academic status.

Treating political stance as an independent variable is consistent with the literature on theoretical and political views, which tends to be caged in terms of concerns that political views affect the development of social theory. Gouldner's thesis is that sociology is organized by political ideology as much as or more than by other internally generated cognitive orientations (Cappell and Guterbock, 1986). Using political stance as an independent variable in their study, Sanderson and Ellis suggest political views begin to develop early in life and are likely to be well established before a sociologist comes to the point of developing a theoretical allegiance. Supporting the assumption that political views predate theoretical allegiances, Lipset and Ladd (1972) suggest that many students and young faculty enter the field seeking ways to enhance their political objectives.

Further cross-tabulations explore relationships between each of the independent variables and views on postmodernism, evolutionary theories, sociobiology, the current state of social theory, and possibilities of bridging the macro-micro

gap, as well as on inclinations to link theory to praxis and to be involved in groups advocating social change.

Data concerning choice of most important contemporary theorist and areas of substantive focus were collected in an attempt to shed more light on the nature of differences among theorists. The responses for these last two items were so dispersed and included too many written-in responses to allow any logical collapsing of categories, thus precluding any demonstration of associations with the independent variables. These data are presented in frequency tables.

Findings

The Extent of Fragmentation

The data on theorists' primary and secondary theoretical perspectives are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Primary and Secondary Theoretical Perspectives

Theoretical Perspective	Primary		Secondary		Combined	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Weberianism	54	14.4	41	10.9	95	25.3
Other	57	15.2	22	5.9	79	21.1
Critical Theory	39	10.4	24	6.4	63	16.8
Eclecticism	37	9.9	24	6.4	61	16.3
Symbolic Interactionism	31	8.3	29	7.7	60	16.0
Conflict Theory	20	5.3	33	8.8	53	14.1
Marxism	19	5.1	30	8.0	49	13.1
Functionalism/ Neofunctionalism	25	6.7	22	5.9	47	12.6
Poststructuralism/ Postmodernism	18	4.8	24	6.4	42	11.2
Feminist Theory	20	5.3	14	3.7	34	9.0
Phenomenology	17	4.5	14	3.7	31	8.2
Exchange/Rational Choice	14	3.7	12	3.2	26	6.9
Network Theory	6	1.6	13	3.5	19	5.1
Ethnomethodology	8	2.1	8	2.1	16	4.2
Social Evolutionism	3	0.8	6	1.6	9	2.4
Sociobiology	3	0.8	4	1.1	7	1.9
Structuralism (Lévi-Straussian)	3	0.8	2	0.5	5	1.3
Missing	1	0.3	53	14.1	54	14.4
Totals	375	100.0	375	99.9	750	

Note: Percentages are combined to provide a numerical rating. The total exceeds 100 percent.

The data on primary perspectives clearly show that there is little or no consensus. The most widely held perspective is Weberianism, with an allegiance of only 14.4 percent of the sample. Other more widely held perspectives are critical theory (10.4 percent), eclecticism (9.9 percent), and symbolic interactionism (8.3 percent). Functionalism/neofunctionalism (6.7 percent), feminist theory (5.3 percent), conflict theory (5.3 percent), and Marxism (5.1 percent) are the only others receiving support from over 5 percent of the sample. Given that the highest percentage of theorists (15.2 percent) chose the "other" category, the sixteen choices offered were obviously insufficient to capture the full range of theoretical allegiance. The widely scattered responses, along with the varied "other" written-in responses and the strong showing for eclecticism, confirm quite strongly the basic assumption of extensive theoretical fragmentation.

Responses for secondary theoretical perspective likewise show that less than 15 percent of the sample adhere to any one perspective. Weberianism is again the top choice (10.9 percent), followed this time by conflict theory (8.8 percent), Marxism (8.0 percent), and symbolic interactionism (7.7 percent). Poststructuralism/postmodernism (6.4 percent) is slightly more popular as a secondary than as a primary perspective, falling in the same range as critical theory (6.4 percent), eclecticism (6.4 percent), and functionalism/neofunctionalism (5.9 percent). As with primary theoretical choice, social evolutionism (1.6 percent), sociobiology (1.1 percent), and structuralism (0.5 percent) fall at the bottom as least preferred perspectives.

Fewer chose the "other" category (5.9 percent) for the secondary perspective, and 14.1 percent indicated only one perspective by leaving the secondary perspective blank. Lack of a secondary perspective, however, does not necessarily indicate full allegiance to a primary theory. Those who chose eclecticism as a primary perspective may have found the second question redundant, since they had already indicated comfort with a variety of perspectives.

Table 1 also presents the combined primary and secondary perspectives. If any theory can be said to predominate, it is Weberianism (25.3 percent). Critical theory (16.8 percent) and symbolic interactionism (16.0 percent) are close to the top. Poststructuralism/postmodernism and feminist theory, neither of which were given as choices in the Sanderson and Ellis study, both show a fairly substantial following (11.2 percent and 9.0 percent, respectively). At the bottom are social evolutionism (2.4 percent), sociobiology (1.9 percent), and structuralism (1.3 percent). The relatively high percentages for "other" (21.1 percent) and eclecticism (16.3 percent) once again support the notion of extensive fragmentation.

Using Collins's (1985) delineation of a "microinteractionist" tradition, which would include symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology, the sample inclines more toward the macro than the micro level. Symbolic interactionism maintains a relatively substantial following (8.3 percent primary, 16.0 percent primary and secondary). Phenomenology has a smaller following (4.5 percent primary, 8.2 percent primary and secondary), and ethnomethodology falls toward the bottom of the theoretical preferences (2.1 percent primary, 4.2 percent primary and secondary).

At first glance, these data shed little light on arguments centering on divisions between Parsonian and Marxian perspectives. However, when conflict theory and Marxism are collapsed, the combined category emerges at the top (27.2

percent primary and secondary). Functionalism/neofunctionalism trails well behind (12.6 percent primary and secondary). When Weberianism is combined with conflict theory and Marxism, based on Collins's (1985) contention that Weber continued the Marxian approach and established modern conflict sociology, a majority of theorists (52.5 percent) can be said to follow the conflict tradition. Of course, not all Weberians see either Weber or themselves as conflict theorists, and thus this statistic is undoubtedly inflated, although by just how much is a wide-open question.

Responses to follow-up opinion questions offer deeper insight into some of the more controversial theoretical perspectives. While poststructuralism/postmodernism attracts only 4.8 percent of theorists as a primary perspective and 6.4 percent as secondary, a majority of the respondents (56.0 percent) believe that the postmodern critique either has great force or may have something useful to contribute to the field. Only 13.3 percent believe postmodernism is misguided and a threat to social theory.

Likewise, the data on opinions of social evolutionism qualify its poor showing as a primary or secondary allegiance (combined 2.4 percent). Nevertheless, a full 50.4 percent of the sample assert that evolutionary theories are sound in principle, although nearly all of these agree that evolutionary theories still need considerable modification and improvement. A substantial minority (38.4 percent) of respondents maintains that such theories are seriously flawed and should be abandoned. These findings corroborate Sanderson and Ellis's suggestion that evolutionism is often considered a component of other perspectives rather than as a separate perspective in its own right, and therefore that it is likely to be a more popular concept than a simple rating of theoretical preferences would indicate.

Views of sociobiology are similarly split. Although sociobiology is an unpopular primary (0.8 percent) and secondary (1.1 percent) theoretical perspective, a majority of theorists (51.7 percent) admit that it has at least a modest contribution to make to the field. However, only a small number of these believe that it has a major contribution to make. Only 11.5 percent consider it to be a dangerous form of social theory that should be strongly opposed by sociologists. The theorists' responses suggest some qualification of Sanderson and Ellis's findings that sociologists are highly antibiological in outlook.

Given the diversity of theoretical perspectives and the markedly split opinions, it is not surprising that theorists are also divided in their views on the current state of the field. On the positive side, 45.3 percent of the sample view diversity as healthy and another 14.9 percent agree the field is experiencing difficulties but is likely to pull out of the doldrums in the near future. Viewing the future of social theory as very uncertain, 29.9 percent of the respondents feel that the field is in the midst of a severe theoretical crisis. While it can be said that theorists lean toward a positive view of the current state of the field, it is clear that there is no strong consensus.

Theorists' views on the possibility of developing a theory that bridges the micro-macro gap do approach consensus, with 75.7 percent answering in the affirmative. Only 17.6 percent of the respondents negated the possibility, and 6.7 percent expressed no opinion. This finding bodes well for those who would seek a unified, comprehensive perspective, at least with regard to micro and macro approaches.

Like theorists' views in most other areas, however, views on linking theory and

praxis are distinctly divided. In general, theorists are inclined to connect theory to praxis, with 34.7 percent of the sample making some effort and 40.0 percent of the respondents seeing linkage as a very important aspect of their work. Those who view theory mainly as an academic pursuit meritorious in itself comprise 20.5 percent of the sample. The underlying assumption that linking theory to praxis implies social or political activism is not directly supported by the data on involvement in groups advocating social change. The largest portion of the sample (40.0 percent) indicated no group involvement. Those involved in one, two, three, or four or more groups ranged from 8.8 to 18.7 percent. Of course, involvement in a number of activist groups does not necessarily indicate intensity of political or social activity, nor does it tell anything about scholarly attempts to link theory to praxis. Without comparative data on theorists in other fields or the

TABLE 2

Theorists' Substantive Foci

Substantive Focus	Primary		Secondary		Combined	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Other	67	17.9	40	10.7	107	28.6
Comparative/Historical	43	11.5	20	5.3	63	16.8
Sociology of Art/Culture	23	6.1	25	6.7	48	12.8
Sociology of Knowledge	26	6.9	16	4.3	42	11.2
Social Psychology	23	6.1	16	4.3	39	10.4
Complex Organizations	17	4.5	15	4.0	32	8.5
Economy and Society	22	5.9	8	2.1	30	8.0
Sociology of Gender	11	2.9	18	4.8	29	7.7
Stratification/Mobility	15	4.0	14	3.7	29	7.7
Social Change	12	3.2	16	4.3	28	7.5
Sociology of Science	9	2.4	18	4.8	27	7.2
Religion	14	3.7	13	3.5	27	7.2
Collective Behavior/Social Movements	11	2.9	10	2.7	21	5.6
Race and Ethnicity	9	2.4	9	2.4	18	4.8
Medical Sociology	9	2.4	8	2.2	17	4.6
Crime and/or Deviance	10	2.7	5	1.3	15	4.0
Marriage and Family	9	2.4	4	1.1	13	3.5
Education	6	1.6	6	1.6	12	3.2
Law and Society	8	2.1	4	1.1	12	3.2
Sociology of Emotions	3	0.8	7	1.9	10	2.7
Sociology of Work	2	0.5	8	2.1	10	2.6
Urban Sociology	5	1.3	4	1.1	9	2.4
Occupations/Professions	4	1.1	4	1.1	8	2.2
Development	1	0.3	6	1.6	7	1.9
Community	3	0.8	4	1.1	7	1.9
Sociology of Language	3	0.8	4	1.1	7	1.9
Sociology of Aging	5	1.3	1	0.3	6	1.6
Industrial Sociology	1	0.3	4	1.1	5	1.4
Leisure/Sports/Recreation	2	0.5	2	0.5	4	1.0
No opinion	2	0.5	66	17.6	68	18.1
Totals	375	99.8	375	100.4	750	

population in general, these data alone lead to no conclusion on the claimed politicization of sociology. The most that can be said is that theorists vary in their involvement in advocacy for social change.

If one views diversity as healthy, the range of substantive specializations among theorists indicates the field is robust (Table 2). In addition to widely scattered responses to the 28 areas listed, 28.6 percent chose "other" for either their primary or secondary focus. Specific categories most highly represented among theorists are comparative/historical sociology (16.8 percent), sociology of art/culture (12.8 percent), sociology of knowledge (11.2 percent), and social psychology (10.4 percent). The broad spectrum of responses precludes analysis of their relationship to theoretical preference and points toward further research on how substantive focus might play into theoretical divisiveness. Depending on

TABLE 3

Rating of Most Important Theorists

Theorist	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	Total Score
Jurgen Habermas	47	41	23	246
Pierre Bourdieu	34	33	32	200
Anthony Giddens	34	28	32	190
Erving Goffman	28	36	28	184
Other	29	25	31	168
Talcott Parsons	34	20	10	152
Michel Foucault	18	33	22	142
Robert Merton	22	11	16	104
Randall Collins	17	13	19	96
James Coleman	15	13	9	80
Dorothy Smith	11	13	16	75
Alfred Schutz	8	14	10	62
Harold Garfinkel	8	7	12	50
Peter Blau	5	12	10	49
Immanuel Wallerstein	3	11	18	49
Jeffrey Alexander	7	6	10	43
Herbert Blumer	8	7	5	43
George Homans	9	4	3	38
Harrison White	2	7	13	33
Any Living Follower of Marx	8	2	2	30
Theda Skocpol	3	3	6	21
Jacques Derrida	3	4	3	20
Gerhard Lenski	1	4	5	16
Claude Levi-Strauss	3	0	1	10
Pierre van den Berghe	1	1	3	8
Janet Chafetz	1	1	2	7
No opinion	16	26	34	

Note: Total score equals the sum of the first choice multiplied by 3, the second choice multiplied by 2, and the third choice multiplied by 1.

one's point of view, diverse specialization may be interpreted as richness of subject matter or splintering of the field.

Asking the respondents to select the three most important theorists in contemporary sociology (Table 3) elicited a barrage of comments written in the margins, criticizing our audacity in singling out the twenty-four theorists given as choices and questioning the meaning of the word "important." Several respondents pointed out that "important" could be interpreted either as making the most significant contribution to the field or as a personal preference—and that these may not necessarily be the same. Thus, the results must be read with the understanding that some respondents felt forced into making choices they did not enjoy. (It would seem that fragmentation is further indicated when theorists stray from the perspectives of those whom they view as leaders in the field.)

The rating is based on scores of 3 points for first choice, 2 for second, and 1 for third. The theorists are ranked according to their total scores, which range from 7 to 246. The only theorist to receive more than 200 points is Jürgen Habermas, with a total score of 246. Since he is a critical theorist, his ranking is consistent with the relatively strong allegiance to critical theory demonstrated in Table 1. Erving Goffman's relatively high ranking (184 points) is also reflective of the high allegiance to symbolic interactionism. Conversely, Pierre van den Berghe's low rank (8 points) is consistent with theorists' generally negative views of sociobiology.

Such consistency does not, however, hold up for the entire table. Talcott Parsons (152 points) and Robert Merton (104 points), both functionalists, rank higher than Randall Collins (96 points), who identifies with the more widely acclaimed theoretical perspectives, Weberianism and conflict theory. Likewise, Michel Foucault (142 points), a poststructuralist, received a higher score than Collins. On the other hand, Jacques Derrida (20 points), also a poststructuralist, ranked considerably lower than Collins—as well as lower than phenomenologist Alfred Schutz (62 points) and ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel (50 points). Obviously, perception of a theorist's importance involves more than his or her association with a particular theoretical perspective.

While speculation on the reasoning behind choices of important theorists is beyond the scope of this study, it is apparent that American theorists are paying a great deal of attention to the Europeans—Habermas, Bourdieu, Giddens, and Foucault in particular. These findings support Gouldner's and Mullins's predictions that developments in European social theory will affect traditional American theory. They also support the hypothesis of fragmentation. The top five theorists are associated with five different perspectives—critical theory, poststructuralism, structuration theory, symbolic interactionism, and functionalism.

The Nature of Fragmentation

The next phase of our analysis involves exploring the relationship between theoretical allegiance and the six independent variables. Primary and secondary theoretical allegiances were cross-tabulated separately with each variable. Since inclusion of all theoretical categories precluded meaningful analysis, cross-tabulations were run on only the most widely represented theoretical perspectives: conflict theory/Marxism (combined), Weberianism, critical theory, symbolic interactionism, and functionalism/neofunctionalism. Eclecticism, the third high-

est category, was dropped, because of its ambiguity; an eclectic might work with any, many, or all theoretical perspectives.

The cross-tabulations between age and primary and secondary theoretical perspectives both show a statistically significant relationship at the .05 level ($\mathbf{X}^2$ = 20.709, df = 8, sig. = .00796 for age and primary perspective; $\mathbf{X}^2$ = 21.072, df = 8, sig. = .00696 for age and secondary preference). More theorists age fifty-six and over chose functionalism/neofunctionalism than any other theory (29.4 percent primary and 30.0 percent secondary). In stark contrast, functionalism has the fewest followers among those age forty-five to fifty-five (6.6 percent primary and 6.8 percent secondary) as well as among those forty-four and younger (12.7 percent primary and 8.5 percent secondary).

The youngest age group leans toward critical theory as a primary perspective (31.0 percent) and conflict theory/Marxism as a secondary allegiance (30.5 percent). The middle-age group inclines toward Weberianism as a primary perspective (30.3 percent) and conflict theory/Marxism as a secondary perspective (44.6 percent). While the older group shows some preference for conflict theory/Marxism (17.6 percent primary and 25.0 percent secondary), they show meager support for critical theory (5.9 percent primary and 7.5 percent secondary).

The trend away from functionalism and toward conflict theory that is apparent in the middle age group is not so clear in the younger group. The respondents in the middle group were likely to be students in the 1960s, and their theoretical perspectives reflect the descriptions of what was happening in the field written by Friedrichs and Gouldner in the 1970s. In the 1990s, younger theorists show a slight reversion to functionalism as well as a stronger inclination toward critical theory. These findings confuse the issue of a paradigmatic shift, but they do demonstrate that divisiveness continues.

In contrast to age, gender fails to be associated with either primary (sig. = .57448) or secondary (sig. = .95580) theoretical perspectives. Weberianism is the top primary choice for both men (25.4 percent) and women (36.1 percent), followed by conflict theory/Marxism (men 22.3 percent, women 19.4 percent). Consistently, the top two theoretical perspectives are switched in regard to secondary perspective. Here, conflict theory/Marxism shows the highest following (men 37.5 percent, women 33.3 percent) and Weberianism is the second highest (men 21.9 percent, women 22.2 percent). Functionalism shows the lowest following (of the most highly chosen perspectives) among both men (primary 15.4 percent, secondary 13.3 percent) and women (primary 8.3 percent, secondary 11.1 percent). While it is interesting that fewer women than men in the sample adhere to functionalism, the trends toward Weberianism and conflict theory/Marxism and away from functionalism are characteristic of both genders.

However, this analysis does not paint the whole picture, since the necessity of focusing on the top five theory choices eliminated a substantial number of women who adhere to feminist theory. While the addition of feminist theory as a discrete category was not statistically feasible, we ran a second analysis with feminists included in the conflict category, based on the assumption that most feminist theories incorporate a strong conflict dimension. When feminists are included in the analysis, gender is related to primary theoretical perspective (sig. = .02235), but the relationship does not hold for secondary theoretical perspective (sig. = .80258). In terms of primary theoretical perspective, with feminist theory included

in the analysis, some 45 percent of women chose conflict theory/Marxism/feminism, compared to only about 23 percent of men who chose this category. In terms of the new analysis, then, gender does make a difference.

Institutional affiliation fails to be associated with primary (sig. = .74401) or secondary (sig. = .27354) theoretical perspective. Regardless of whether respondents are affiliated with a university granting a Ph.D. in sociology, a university granting a B.A. or M.A. in sociology, or with a liberal arts or community college, they incline toward Weberianism as a primary theoretical allegiance and conflict theory or Marxism as a secondary perspective. There is slightly more support for functionalism among those affiliated with universities, but again, the trend toward Weberianism and conflict theory and away from functionalism is reflected in each group.

Region of residence does relate to primary theoretical perspective ($\mathbf{X}^2$ = 26.291, df = 16, sig. = .05007) but not to secondary perspective (sig. = .59589). Inconsistencies between the two tables signal warnings against drawing any conclusions about the relationship. For example, in terms of primary perspective conflict theorists/Marxists are least likely to reside in the South (27.6 percent), while in terms of secondary perspective they are the *most* likely to reside there (46.7 percent). Likewise, with respect to primary perspective most Weberians live in the East (32.7 percent) and fewest live in the Midwest (21.6 percent), but in terms of secondary perspective the reverse is the case—most reside in the Midwest (28.6 percent), fewest in the East (17.4 percent). Thus, a low showing as a primary perspective in one region does not necessarily mean that perspective is unpopular there, for it may be the leading secondary perspective in the region.

Academic status—whether the respondent was a faculty member or graduate student—turned out to be unrelated to either primary (sig. = .73163) or secondary theoretical perspective (sig. = .16685). There was, however, some tendency for graduate students to be more likely than faculty to identify with critical theory, and, in terms of secondary theoretical perspective, for graduate students to be less likely to be conflict theorists and more likely to be functionalists. However, on the whole academic status and theory choice were not related at a statistically significant level.

In short, institutional affiliation, region of residence, and academic status are not significantly related to theoretical perspective. Whether we are looking at a university or community college, on either coast or in between, or at faculty members or graduate students, we cannot reliably predict what a sociologist's theoretical perspective will be.

Political stance is very strongly related to both primary ($\mathbf{X}^2$ = 36.803, df = 8, sig. = .00001) and secondary ($\mathbf{X}^2$ = 29.085, df = 8, sig. = .00031) theoretical perspective. Radicals lean toward conflict theory/Marxism (primary 38.3 percent, secondary 52.9 percent) and critical theory (primary 31.7 percent, secondary 17.6 percent). Only two (3.3 percent) of the radicals prefer functionalism as a primary perspective, and only one (2.0 percent) designates it as a secondary allegiance. Liberals incline toward Weberianism (primary 34.8 percent, secondary 26.1 percent) and still show some preference for functionalism (primary 12.4 percent, secondary 13.0 percent). Conservatives and moderates in the sample show equal preference for functionalism and Weberianism (primary 30.4 percent, secondary 30.4 percent).

Functionalism shows the clearest trend of support from the political right and

lack of support from the left, while critical theory shows greatest allegiance from the political left and least from the right. These findings lend credence to Gouldner's (1970) argument that functionalism tends to affirm the status quo and, therefore, appeals to political conservatives. They also point up the logic that critical theory will appeal to the political left.

Cross-tabulations of the six independent variables with each of the seven theory questions shore up the argument that political inclinations are closely intertwined with the development of the discipline. Political stance is associated with responses to all but one of the seven questions. Furthermore, where age is associated with responses, it is logical to speculate that different age groups may reflect variations in the political climate at the time these groups were in the process of formulating their theoretical allegiances.

Age, academic status, and political stance are the best predictors of a theorist's view of the postmodern critique. There is a clear trend for younger theorists to regard the postmodern critique more positively than do older theorists ($\mathbf{X}^2$ = 16.925, df = 6, sig. = .00956). Similarly, graduate students view the postmodern critique more positively than do faculty members (sig. = .01088). Nearly 28 percent of the graduate students view the postmodern critique quite positively, compared to only 12.3 percent of the faculty members. And only 6.4 percent of the graduate students see postmodernism as a threat, compared to 17.2 percent of the faculty members. It is also clear that the more a theorist leans toward the political left, the greater is his or her likelihood of favoring the postmodern challenge ($\mathbf{X}^2$ = 21.589, df = 6, sig. = .00144). Of the radicals, 26.5 percent think that postmodernism has great force and only 9.2 percent see it as seriously misguided. By contrast, among the conservatives and moderates, only 7.3 percent think it has great force, whereas 17.1 percent see it as seriously misguided.

While the findings on gender are not quite statistically significant (sig. = .07360), the cross-tabulation does show that more women in the sample take a middle ground, whereas more men take a strongly negative stance. Cross-tabulations of views on the postmodern critique by institutional affiliation (sig. = .63892) and region of residence (sig. = .77111) indicate no relationship.

Political stance is also the best predictor of views on evolutionary theories ($\mathbf{X}^2$ = 17.156, df = 4, sig. =.00180). A full 75.6 percent of the conservative/moderate category believe that evolutionary theories are sound in principle, as compared to 59.0 percent of the liberals and 42.7 percent of the radicals. A majority (57.3 percent) of the radicals agree that these theories are seriously flawed and should be abandoned, as compared to 41.0 percent of the liberals and only 24.4 percent of the conservatives and moderates.

Although the relationship between age and view of evolutionary theories does not reach significance, it does approach it (sig. = .07358). The data do show that more older (66.7 percent) than younger (47.5 percent) respondents in the sample agree that evolutionary theories are sound in principle. Conversely, more younger theorists (52.5 percent than older ones (33.3 percent) responded that such theories should be abandoned. But since statistical significance is not achieved, we cannot have confidence in these results. The data also reveal no associations between views on evolutionary theories and gender (sig. = .39280), institutional affiliation (sig. = .39841), region of residence (sig. = .34424), or academic status (sig. = .67333). One of the few instances in which gender turns out to be a

significant predictor is in its relationship to views on sociobiology ($\mathbf{X}^2$ = 28.626, df = 3, sig. = .00000). A full 59.6 percent of the men responded that sociobiology has either a major or modest contribution to make to the field, as compared to 33.8 percent of the women. Only 8.2 percent of the men view sociobiology as a dangerous form of social theory, but 28.4 percent of the women regard it as such. These findings clearly indicate that women are more inclined to disregard biological factors in formulating theoretical explanations.

Political stance is also associated with views on sociobiology ($\mathbf{X}^2$ = 15.931, df = 6, sig. = .01413). Most conservatives and moderates (70.8 percent) responded that sociobiology has either a major or modest contribution to make; most radicals (55.4 percent) responded negatively. Only 4.2 percent of the conservatives and moderates view sociobiology as a dangerous form of social theory, as compared to 9.5 percent of the liberals and 19.8 percent of the radicals. Clearly, those on the left of the political spectrum tend to view sociobiology in a more negative light than those closer to the political right. Since such politically sensitive issues as racial and gender equality are championed by the left, these results are not at all surprising.

It *is* a bit surprising that age does not prove to be significantly related to views on sociobiology (sig. = .25592), the logical assumption being that the civil rights and feminist movements would have had a greater effect on those who were formulating their theoretical perspectives during and after the 1960s.

Views of sociobiology are not statistically linked with institutional affiliation (sig. = .06426), region of residence (sig. = .74690), or academic status (sig. = .56298). Although the relationship between institutional affiliation and sociobiological views approaches significance, the greatest percentage in each type of institution agree that sociobiology has only a modest contribution to make.

Consistent relationships between theorists' political outlooks and their theoretical choices support the notion of politicization of the field and lead to the question of what theorists think of the current state of social theory. Are theorists' political outlooks associated with how they evaluate a politicized discipline? Indeed they are ($\mathbf{X}^2$ = 12.422, df = 4, sig. = .01448). More radicals (62.4 percent) view theoretical diversity as healthy than do liberals (47.5 percent) or conservatives and moderates (41.9 percent). Radicals are more polarized in their opinions, with only 6.5 percent taking the middle ground between a bright future and a severe theoretical crisis, as compared with 21.3 percent of the liberals and 20.9 percent of the conservatives and moderates choosing the middle ground. Conservatives and moderates are more inclined to view the field as in the midst of crisis.

Age is unrelated to a theorist's views on the state of the field (sig. = .62040). Gender, however, is related to a theorist's views on the current state of social theory ($\mathbf{X}^2$ = 8.845, df = 2, sig. = .01201). Almost twice as many women (66.2 percent) as men (35.7 percent) see diversity as healthy; and more men (35.7 percent) than women (22.1 percent) perceive a theoretical crisis. One might speculate that as more women break into the ranks of social theorists, they bring different views and, quite naturally, see the resulting diversity as a positive development.

Academic status is also related to how a social theorist views the current state of social theory (sig. = .02992). Some 58 percent of graduate students see the current state of social theory as healthy, compared to approximately 47.5 percent

of faculty. Conversely, 35.8 percent of faculty see social theory as in a state of crisis, compared to only 16.7 percent of graduate students.

Neither institutional affiliation (sig. = .47874) nor region of residence (sig. = .65645) is significantly related to how a respondent views the current state of social theory. The probability of finding a social theorist who is pleased with or distressed by the current state of the field does not differ significantly from one institution or one region to another.

Since the micro-macro division among theorists preceded the political upheaval of the 1960s, it is no surprise that it is the one issue that is not related to political outlook (sig. = .64364). In fact, not one of the independent variables is related to views on possibilities for bridging the micro-macro gap.

Perhaps more revealing than these results are theorists' comments on the question of bridging the micro-macro gap, such as, "The distinction itself is misguided," "It's a false problem," "The gap is a scientific artifact," "That is what I do," "I have done it," "It's been done—the question preserves the gap," "A sterile issue," and "Who cares?" These and similar comments suggest that many theorists do not consider the micro-macro dichotomy to be a particularly important dimension of divisiveness.

The issue of linking theory and praxis brings the focus back to political stance, which is one of only two variables showing a statistically significant relationship ($\mathbf{X}^2$ = 10.190, df = 4, sig. = .03734). The responses do not reveal a continuum from left to right or vice versa; rather, liberals are less likely than either radicals or conservatives/moderates to view linking theory to praxis as a very important aspect of their work. Likewise, liberals are more inclined to view theory as mainly an academic pursuit (25.5 percent compared to 20 percent of conservatives and moderates and 13.4 percent of radicals). Radicals are most inclined to link theory and praxis (54.6 percent say linking theory to praxis is very important to them, compared to 42.4 percent of conservatives and moderates and 36.5 percent of liberals). In sum, the key finding is that those on each end of the political spectrum are more inclined to link theory to practical issues than are those in the middle. Thus, if theoretical perspectives influence social policy, the influence is likely to stem from the extremes rather than from the middle (keeping in mind that in the case of social theorists the "middle" slants to the political left).

Academic status is also related to the question of linking theory to praxis (sig. = .00030). Of the faculty, 25.1 percent said they made no attempt to link theory and praxis, but only 7.7 percent of the graduate students made this claim. At the other end of the spectrum, 63.5 percent of graduate students thought linking theory and praxis was very important, compared to only 35.1 percent of faculty.

None of the other variables prove to be associated with views on linking theory to praxis, and only region of residence approaches significance (sig. = .06303), the outstanding difference being between theorists residing in foreign countries and those living in various regions of the United States. Only the foreign country category shows a majority (55.6 percent) who view linking theory and praxis as a very important part of their work.

The question of involvement in groups advocating social change takes the linkage of theory and praxis a step further. As expected, the relationship between political stance and group involvement proves to be significant ($\mathbf{X}^2$ = 31.816, df = 4, sig. = .00000). The cross-tabulation shows a clear trend from conservatives and moderates being least involved (59.6 percent belong to no group) to radicals

being most involved (only 21.0 percent belong to no group). The difference is not nearly as large between conservatives/moderates and liberals as between liberals and radicals. As previously demonstrated, radicals tend to be conflict theorists, Marxists, or critical theorists, and they tend to link theory to praxis. It is not particularly startling to discover that radicals also tend to be the most politically engaged.

Gender is also an important factor in advocacy for social change ($\mathbf{X}^2 = 9.114$, df = 2, sig. = .01049). Women are more likely to be involved in one or two groups (28.9 percent as compared to 18.1 percent of the men) as well as involved in three or more groups (42.1 percent as compared to 34.0 percent of the men). Almost half of the men (47. 9 percent), in contrast to 28.9 percent of the women, show no group involvement.

Age is not associated with involvement in groups advocating social change (sig. = .57471), nor is institutional affiliation (sig. = .43015), region of residence (sig. = .39779), or academic status (sig. = .64246).

Comparison with Sociologists in General

Sanderson and Ellis's research serves as a basis for comparing theoretical divisiveness among sociological theorists with that of sociologists in general. Points of comparison center on their findings that: (1) a demonstrated wide range of perspectives suggest that contemporary sociology is highly fragmented theoretically; (2) political outlook is the best predictor of theoretical perspective, followed fairly closely by age; (3) institutional affiliation is a weak predictor of theoretical outlook; and (4) gender is unrelated to theory choice.

In general, the wide range of theoretical perspectives among theorists corroborates Sanderson and Ellis's affirmation that sociology is a highly fragmented field. Preferred theoretical perspectives of theorists and of sociologists in general are summarized, by combining percentages for primary and secondary preferences for each, in Table 4. While the immediate observation is that theorists' preferences are even more broadly scattered than those of sociologists in general, differences in the instruments must be taken into account. Fewer choices in the Sanderson and Ellis study resulted in higher percentages within categories. Critical theory, poststructuralism/postmodernism, network theory, and feminist theory were not included in the earlier survey. Phenomenology and ethnomethodology were combined, while each is a separate item in the present study.

A particularly striking difference between the two samples is the higher percentage of theorists who adhere to Weberianism (25.3 percent as compared to 11.1 percent of sociologists in general). However, if one accepts Collins's (1985) premise that Weberianism is a type of conflict theory, Weberians and conflict theorists may both be seen as working within the conflict tradition. From this point of view, the samples are remarkably similar. The combined percentages for Weberianism and conflict theory equal 39.4 percent for theorists and 39.5 percent for sociologists in general. If Marxism is added to each of these, the numbers are 52.5 percent and 51.8 percent, respectively.

Far from being the predominant theoretical perspective, functionalism has a following of 12.4 percent among theorists and 18.5 percent among general sociologists. While it is the fourth most preferred theory of general sociologists, it has

TABLE 4

Combined Primary and Secondary Theoretical Perspectives of Theorists and Sociologists in General

	Theorists		Sociologists	
Theoretical Perspective	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Weberianism	95	25.3	18	11.1
Other	79	21.1	19	11.7
Critical Theory	63	16.8	NA	NA
Eclecticism	61	16.3	42	25.9
Symbolic Interactionism	60	16.0	41	25.3
Conflict Theory	53	14.1	46	28.4
Marxism	49	13.1	20	12.3
Phenomenology/Ethnomethodology	47	12.4	15	9.3
Functionalism/Neofunctionalism	47	12.6	30	18.5
Poststructuralism/Postmodernism	42	11.2	NA	NA
Feminist Theory	34	9.0	NA	NA
Exchange/Rational Choice	26	6.9	11	6.8
Network Theory	19	5.1	NA	NA
Social Evolutionism	9	2.4	2	1.2
Sociobiology	7	1.9	4	2.5
Structuralism (Lévi-Straussian)	5	1.3	28	17.3
Totals	696		276	

Note: Primary and secondary theoretical perspective percentages are combined to provide a numerical rating. The totals do not equal 100 percent.

slipped to seventh for theorists (tied with phenomenology/ethnomethodology). Thus, the shift from functionalism to conflict theory is even more apparent among theorists.

Also notable is the higher percentage of explicit eclectics among sociologists in general (25.9 percent as compared to 16.3 percent of the theorists). However, the number of so-called implicit eclectics is about the same in each study. Sanderson and Ellis operationally defined implicit eclectics as those who did not check the box for eclecticism but who nonetheless subscribed to two or more largely incompatible perspectives. In the Sanderson and Ellis study implicit eclectics constituted some 35 percent of all respondents, and in the present study the percent-

age is almost the same: 35.7 percent. Thus, a majority of sociologists in general (60.9 percent) and sociological theorists (52.0 percent) take an eclectic position in one way or another. Eclecticism is obviously a popular—actually, the most popular—position in sociology.

While poststructuralism/postmodernism was not a choice given to general sociologists, a fairly substantial number (11.2 percent) of the theorists chose it as a primary or secondary perspective. Furthermore, answers to the follow-up question on the postmodern critique indicated that over half (56 percent) of the theorists believe that this perspective has something useful to contribute. Although none of Sanderson and Ellis's respondents took advantage of the opportunity to write poststructuralism or postmoderism in the "other" category, present findings indicate that theorists are paying a lot of attention to the postmodern critique (even though only a small minority of them claim it as a primary or secondary perspective).

Follow-up questions to theorists also offer deeper insight into views on social evolutionism and sociobiology, both of which fall at the bottom of each theoretical preference table. Although evolutionism was chosen as a primary or secondary perspective by only 1.2 percent of general sociologists and 2.4 percent of the theorists, a full 50.4 percent of the theorists agreed that evolutionary theories are sound in principle. Likewise, although sociobiology was preferred by only 2.5 percent of general sociologists and 1.9 percent of theorists, 51.7 percent of the theorists affirmed that sociobiology has either a modest (43.2 percent) or major (8.5 percent) contribution to make to the field. Thus, these views are certainly not to be entirely negated, and it is likely that they may be incorporated into other theories.

Of the theories not given as choices in the Sanderson and Ellis study, critical theory is particularly popular among theorists (16.8 percent primary and secondary), and poststructuralism/postmodernism (11.2 percent primary and secondary) and feminist theory (9.0 percent primary and secondary) show a following. The presence of these perspectives on the theoretical scene adds to the fragmented nature of the field.

Respondents in both samples incline toward macrolevel rather than microlevel theories, although symbolic interactionism is well represented in each (theorists, 16.0 percent combined primary and secondary; general sociologists, 25.3 percent primary and secondary). When phenomenology and ethnomethodology are combined for theorists (12.4 percent primary and secondary), the percentage is higher than for general sociologists (9.3 percent primary and secondary). However, when these numbers are combined with those for symbolic interactionism, general sociologists lean a little more toward microlevel perspectives (34.6 percent) than do theorists (28.4 percent).

A comparison of the samples in terms of predictors of theoretical perspective is limited to the four variables used in Sanderson and Ellis's research: age, gender, institutional affiliation, and political outlook. Generally, associations between these independent variables and theoretical perspectives are quite similar in the two studies.

Political outlook is the best predictor of primary theoretical perspective for both theorists and sociologists in general. It is also strongly associated with secondary perspectives of theorists and general sociologists. Both studies demon-

strate that most radicals are conflict theorists or Marxists and, conversely, that few conservatives or moderates prefer these perspectives. There is a slight divergence in that conservatives/moderates in the former study inclined more toward functionalism than anything else, while conservative and moderate theorists lean equally toward functionalism and Weberianism.

Likewise, age is a fairly good indicator of theoretical perspective in both studies. In both studies, older respondents were more likely to be functionalists than anything else. General sociologists in the youngest and middle-age groups inclined toward conflict theory/Marxism and definitely away from functionalism. As for theorists, the youngest leaned toward critical theory as a primary perspective and conflict theory or Marxism as a secondary approach; and the middle-age range inclined toward Weberianism as a primary allegiance and conflict theory or Marxism as a secondary perspective. Functionalism had the lowest following in both age groups. The trend away from functionalism demonstrated in the Sanderson and Ellis study is clearly reflected in the results on theorists, but exactly where theorists are going is a little less clear.

The results of both studies are also generally consistent in that theoretical perspectives are entirely independent of institutional affiliation. The findings on gender are similarly consistent in terms of theoretical perspective but, here again, feminist theory, the most gender related theoretical category, is not included in Sanderson and Ellis's analysis. The omission of feminist theory precludes any definitive conclusion. Still, the results are of interest insofar as they depict no association *aside* from feminist theory. Contrary to Sanderson and Ellis's finding that women in their sample inclined toward symbolic interactionism more than any other theory, the findings on theorists indicate that women are for the most part similar to men, inclining toward Weberianism as a primary allegiance and toward conflict theory or Marxism as a secondary perspective. (However, recall that if feminist theory is added to conflict theory/Marxism, women then choose this rather than Weberianism as a primary perspective.)

The data on theorists' views of sociobiology also indicate that gender is related to theoretical thinking. In contrast to Sanderson and Ellis's findings that female sociologists are no more antibiological in their thinking than men, the findings on theorists clearly show that more women than men tend to view sociobiology in a negative light. Of less consequence in terms of theoretical perspective, gender also shows a statistically significant relationship to views on the current state of social theory as well as to involvement in advocacy for social change.

Discussion

The two most important findings of this study are that social theory, as a subdiscipline of sociology, is highly fragmented, and that political ideology makes a great deal of difference with respect to theoretical allegiance. In terms of the former, our research confirms Turner's (1990) suggestion that fragmentation goes beyond the split between "theorists' theory" and "researchers' theory" to expanding schisms within theory itself. The extensive fragmentation found in the ASA Theory Section suggests further research on divisiveness along more specific lines—for example, divisions among those broadly labeled as conflict theorists or among those lumped together here as functionalists/neofunctionalists or as

poststructuralists/postmodernists. Our suspicion is that divisiveness continues into these more specific dimensions of social theory.

Whether theoretical fragmentation is cause for despairing or rejoicing is a matter of judgment, and the theorists in our sample represent both points of view. Nearly half of our theorists think that theoretical diversity is healthy, but almost a third believe that the current level of fragmentation signals a crisis. Turning back to Gouldner's concept of domain assumptions, it may be that new domain assumptions have come into play since the early 1970s; specifically, the popular general assumption that diversity is healthy "resonates" with Friedrichs's suggestion that pluralism is appropriate to the social sciences. Those who assume that such theoretical diversity is a good thing usually are content with an eclectic outlook, often going so far as to argue strenuously that eclecticism is the only sensible view in a world of diversity. And, as we have seen, many of our theorists are indeed eclectics. In a related manner, in his important book *Visions of the Sociological Tradition* Donald Levine (1995) has argued for what he refers to as a *dialogic* approach as a means of dealing with theoretical diversity. This involves learning to "respect the position of the other while presenting the position that comes from one's own center. It means to pursue a project in continuing communication with those who inhabit the same universe, whether or not they support different projects and positions. When practitioners do this, disciplines replace wasteful polemics with creative inquiry" (Levine, 1995:325). While it might be objected that this is just another type of eclecticism, Levine insists it is not. "The dialogical approach is not wantonly eclectic," he says, "for it propounds a distinctive way of constructing narratives. It is certainly not casually permissive, for it can insist on criteria of validity, criteria of significance, and criteria of quality of performance" (1995:328).

But what of those theorists who think that the current level of diversity is not healthy, that it is a sign that social theory is without proper direction or even in a state of crisis? Our own view is that a certain amount of diversity is a healthy thing, and a kind of stultification can set in when there is a theoretical orthodoxy that has no genuine rivals. Diversity is needed as a stimulus to debate and continued creative work. However, there can be too much diversity, so much that consensus seems to be a far-off if not impossible goal, and social theory may well have reached this point. How can one respond to this level of diversity if one is uncomfortable with an eclectic position? A decade ago Sanderson (1987) criticized eclecticism and argued that there were three basic alternatives to it: strong (but open-minded) commitment to a single theoretical perspective and a desire to push it as far as it can go; simultaneously accepting one perspective while pursuing another, with the ultimate aim being to choose between them at some future point when more evidence has been accumulated; and recognizing value in several perspectives but attempting to create a genuine synthesis out of them by blending them into something new. Indeed, Sanderson (1998) has now put his argument into practice by creating a new synthetic perspective.

In their incisive little book *The Impossible Science*, Stephen Turner and Jonathan Turner (1990) show that sociology has throughout most of its history been a highly fragmented and contentious discipline, and it has been divided along more than just theoretical lines. There have been major debates as to whether sociology should be a science and, if so, what kind of science, and there have

been deep disagreements among sociologists concerning the very purpose of the field. Some have thought that sociology should be a reform-minded discipline or nothing at all, whereas others have taken a more intellectual view of the field. The current theoretical fragmentation is simply another level of fragmentation that is imposed on an already-existing widespread dissensus. Turner and Turner suggest that the functionalist orthodoxy of the 1960s was the only time in sociology's history where any substantial degree of consensus was achieved.

Turner and Turner are not optimistic that much consensus can ever be achieved within sociology. They make a good case that the very structure of sociology as a field that has always tried to incorporate a wide range of perspectives precludes a high level of consensus ever being reached. As they say, sociology is "the impossible science." Donald Levine, in noting the increasing blurring of the boundaries between the social sciences, has suggested that much of the most interesting social-scientific work being done today involves what he calls *subdisciplinary specialties, transdisciplinary forays,* and *supradisciplinary synthesis.* Perhaps the most promising future lies in scholars attempting to achieve consensus in these ways rather than in conventional disciplinary ways. For example, sociobiologically oriented sociologists have much more in common with so-called evolutionary psychologists and with sociobiologically oriented anthropologists than they do with other sociologists, and perhaps this is where bridges should be built. Likewise, postmodern sociologists have much more in common with literary critics and with many philosophers than they do with other sociologists. Perhaps sociology is cracking apart and will come to be rebuilt along very different lines.

But there is an even larger issue, for current fragmentation within sociology is hardly limited to that field alone. Levine (1995) has drawn on the work of scholars in other social sciences to show that in the last quarter-century these fields have also succumbed to tremendous fragmentation. And one suspects that this is only the tip of the iceberg. Perhaps the disarray within the social sciences is indicative of a broader intellectual crisis, and this in turn may well be linked to a much more general crisis of Western civilization as a whole, perhaps of the type that Pitirim Sorokin (1944, 1957) wrote about years ago. Postmodernism, in fact, may be one of the major symptoms of this broader intellectual and cultural crisis.

Finally, we need to address our other major finding, the extraordinary importance of political ideology to a sociologist's theoretical views. Political ideology was far and away the best predictor of theory choice among theorists, just as it had been for sociologists in general in the Sanderson and Ellis (1992) study. Because our data are cross-sectional rather than chronological or longitudinal, they cannot tell us which comes first. Does political ideology lead to theory choice, or does theory choice lead to choice of political ideology? Or do they somehow mutually determine each other? Although the data themselves do not speak to this issue, we strongly suspect that political ideology comes first and theory choice follows. We say this for the simple reason that political ideology is a product of long socialization experiences in childhood and adolescence and is laid down gradually. Theory choice, though, can only emerge in very late adolescence or early adulthood after one has been exposed to sociology as an academic discipline. And, moreover, it may take many years of sociological exposure for a budding sociologist to establish his or her theoretical outlook. It thus

seems more likely that theories are chosen in terms of their resonance with political viewpoints rather than the reverse.

One question that might be raised about our data on the importance of political ideology concerns the fact that our respondents exhibited much less variation in political outlook than would the general population. Most of our sociological theorists—indeed, some 80 percent—were liberals or radicals. If there is modest variation in political ideology, and if political ideology is an excellent predictor of theory choice, then why is there such diversity in theory preferences? Our answer would be, quite simply, that theory preference is obviously determined by other factors, not only by some of the other independent variables considered in our study, but also by factors gone unformulated and unmeasured. The most important factors determining theory choice should be the soundness of argument and the nature of the evidence. If sociology has any pretensions at all to being a science, then these factors must loom large. Moreover, in an ideal world the role of political ideology would be essentially zero. That it is something quite different from that is both worthy of note and, for many, cause for alarm.

One sociologist who is alarmed is Irving Louis Horowitz. In his book *The Decomposition of Sociology* (1993), Horowitz argues that sociology has become an overwhelmingly politicized discipline and, as a result, is on the verge of disintegration. Our findings obviously strongly support Horowitz's conclusion that sociology has become, to a large extent, "a series of demands for correct politics" (1993:17), "a repository of discontent, a gathering of individuals who have special agendas, from gay and lesbian rights to liberation theology" (1993:12). Horowitz probably goes overboard in his critique, which at times becomes extremely strident, but his basic point remains, and his view that the increasing politicization of sociology signals its ultimate disintegration can be ignored only at serious risk. Is the politics of sociology one of the most important reasons why it may always remain "the impossible science?"

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