The Legacy of a Minnesota Education: 
Looking Critically at the Profession and Discipline of Sociology

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During the early 1960s (for me, 1959-1965), one could hardly argue that the Minnesota Department of Sociology reflected a point of view, or even that it had a coherent graduate program. The faculty offered a fertile variety of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches to sociology. Substantively, we were blessed with strengths in social psychology, institutions, work and organizations, the family and criminology. The ideas of Caplow, Martindale, Stone, Rose and Vold provided a strong intellectual counterpoint to major trends in the discipline. We knew what we were not: Functionalists! The department's disdain for the discipline's dominant point of view was so thorough, that it was positively dysfunctional. My first teaching assignment as a young assistant professor at the University of Missouri was to teach a seminar entitled, "The Social System." Having never read Parson's work--Don Martindale thought it wasn't essential--I barely kept ahead of my students.

Reflecting on my 35 years in the discipline--as a professor of sociology, an editor of several sociology journals, a chairperson, and currently as director of the International Center at MU--I am struck by how my graduate work at Minnesota has influenced me. The most pronounced influence was the critical posture of the faculty toward the discipline and profession. Well before Critical Theory emerged, we were immersed in the work of critiquing the dominant ideas represented in the functionalist paradigm. Martindale's version of Weberian analysis was the core of our theoretical training in the required theory courses. But all of the graduate students had read and absorbed C.Wright Mills, even though Martindale dismissed his work.

For me, the essence of a critical analysis of the discipline and profession came from two sources: George Vold and Ed Gross. I worked closely with Professor Vold (I can't imagine, even
now, calling him "George") during his last few years in the department. His reputation as an internationally recognized criminologist was legendary. However, his greater legacy to the discipline was his work on Conflict theory. His text, *Criminology*, was the distillation of the contributions of distinguished conflict theorists such as Ratzenhofer and Gumplowicz. What made Vold's contributions unique was his presentation of the intellectual traditions of conflict theory outside of Marx. Vold provided our first exposure to the work of Georg Simmel.

Most of my training as a social psychologist at Minnesota was in the symbolic interactionist tradition of Mead and Cooley--primarily from Arnold Rose, but also from Greg Stone. Also, in old Ford Hall, sociology shared space with an exciting group of young cognitive dissonance theorists, including Elliott Aronson and Dana Bramel. Nevertheless, I believe that the Conflict tradition represented by Vold has had the most effect on my work.

The other major influence on my professional development and subsequent career was Ed Gross. Although I never took one of his seminars on social organization--I considered myself a "social psychologist"--I worked as Ed's research assistant on a project that eventually would become my dissertation. Ed wanted to prepare an annotated bibliography on the professions. As I jotted notes on studies of the professions, we discussed the great disparity in the number of studies of different professions. The medical professions were greatly over-represented in occupational studies, while equally prominent professions such as law rarely were studied. I recall many discussions with Ed about the reasons for this varying interest in studying different professions. Finally Ed said, "Study it! It would be a good dissertation topic."

Ed supervised my dissertation, "The Funding of Sociological Research" (1965). I could not have asked for a more thoughtful and patient advisor. The dissertation launched my career. A new specialty, the sociology of science, was in its earliest stages of development. Warren Hagstrom's book, *The Scientific Community*, was published in 1965, but unfortunately too late to inform my dissertation. Nevertheless, Ed Gross's thoughtful questions about the *profession* of sociology were prescient. Talcott Parsons had just initiated a new journal, *The American
Sociologist. The contrast between the approaches of Ed Gross and Talcott Parsons toward the profession and discipline of sociology were profound. Whereas Parsons wanted to promote greater professionalism among his colleagues, Ed Gross was asking questions about sociology that a good sociologist would ask of any other profession. What kinds of careers do sociologists have? And most important, for my subsequent work, what are the influences on sociologists that lead them to study certain topics and not others?

When I began circulating papers based on my dissertation, I found my niche in the esoteric sub-specialty of the sociology of sociology. Talcott Parsons published one of my papers in The American Sociologist, although I suspect he didn't much agree with my point of view. Nevertheless, my focus on issues of the profession linked me up with "invisible colleges" in the sociology of science--an international, multi-disciplinary group of scholars from different theoretical traditions--and the sociology of sociology, where colleagues like Allen Grimshaw (Indiana) and Warren Hagstrom (Wisconsin) provided encouragement and support.

When I was invited to become editor of the The American Sociologist (1980-1982), I already had a point of view and some editorial experience. I was influenced primarily by Ed Gross's approach to asking questions about the profession that can be answered through empirical studies. Recall that Parsons was more inclined toward theorizing about the profession than studying it empirically. Also, as a result of the mentoring of my good colleague at Missouri, Robert Habenstein, I had served as editor of The Sociological Quarterly from 1972 to 1978.

Editing The American Sociologist was a great experience. I had the good fortune of interacting with many of the movers and shakers in the profession, but I also had some professional distance from them, since a degree from the University of Minnesota didn’t convey a disposition toward any particular theoretical or methodological orientation. In that sense, a degree from Minnesota meant that one was “open” to different approaches.

Although I have published articles on the profession (mostly on the impact of funding on research) and in the area of criminology and delinquency, I believe my most significant
professional contributions have been through editing journals in sociology and in science studies. From 1978 through 1994 I served as one of four US collaborating editors of the international and interdisciplinary journal, *Social Studies of Science*. In this role, my Minnesota education provided me with, 1) an appreciation for the diverse theoretical and methodological traditions in sociology and other fields; and 2) a sense of the importance of having rigorous standards for writing and presenting one's scholarship. As an editor, trying to clean up the prose of authors, I often recalled the remarks of George Vold, who, after reading my first seminar paper, said, "McCartney, I hope you don't think this is acceptable work. It's not. Write it again!" I did, earning an "A" in the effort. Later, as an editor, I sometimes passed this advice on to authors, but perhaps in a softer tone than my mentor, Dr. Vold.

In the past decade, my interests have shifted more toward international studies and international education. I have become involved in Asian Studies, particularly the study of government policy toward higher education in Korea. The influence of Minnesota sociology on my recent career seems less apparent--there were no internationalists in the department in the 1960s--but the influence is there nevertheless. Ironically, some of the cutting edge work in international curriculum development now is taking place at Minnesota in the College of Education.

In addition to pursuing substantive interests in East Asia (higher education policy), I have spent much of the past decade becoming a resource person for international curriculum development at MU. I have been deeply involved in a project (Global Scholars) that sends 25-30 MU faculty members abroad each summer to pursue curriculum development projects that will facilitate the internationalization of their courses. The project has received the Andrew Heiskell Award from the International Institute of Education (IIE).

My latest professional venture is as an international education administrator. For the past two years, I have been Interim Director of the International Center at the University of Missouri, Columbia. This position has introduced me to some of the exciting developments in
the internationalization of American universities. My training as a sociologist has served me well. I am delighted to find that some of the more prominent international education administrators in the U.S. are sociologists. At a recent national conference of international administrators, I listened to a panel of Vice Provosts of International Affairs—all of whom were sociologists—do a Weberian analysis of higher education administration in the U.S. very insightful, and comforting to have intellectual cover for the daily mess that I encounter as an administrator! My early exposure to Weber at Minnesota—through Don Martindale and John Sirjamaki—provided an intellectual platform for my understanding of bureaucracy that has served me in the classroom and in administrative practice.

One of the finest outcomes of my Minnesota education is having the opportunity to spend the last 19 years at the University of Missouri with my fellow graduate student from Minnesota, Peter M. Hall. If ever I were to lose my Minnesota bearings, Peter would right my course. His well-honed interactionist perspective on organizations has served as a fine counterpoint to my more clumsy efforts to work with conflict theory and organizational analysis.

When I was making a decision about where to pursue my doctorate, my options were Minnesota and Wisconsin. I can’t recall all of the reasons why Wisconsin seemed intimidating and Minnesota did not, but I definitely made the right choice. The breadth of perspectives (a cliché, perhaps, but accurate nonetheless) at Minnesota was refreshing. I have loved my career as a sociologist, and forever appreciate the personal mentoring I received from professors and fellow graduate students during the early 1960s in old Ford Hall.

I should also note that I have published articles based on my dissertation research since graduating, I’m currently co-editing a book length compilation on welfare reform and immigrant communities in North America, and for my future theoretical and research work I’ll be looking at exploring hybridity, national identity, and the immigrant experience (based on papers that I am preparing for conferences that will be held here in Toronto).