The Use of
Survey Research in the
Sociology of Knowledge

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The basic literature of the sociology of knowledge is widely considered useless as a source of guidance for empirical work, especially for research in a quantitative vein. Barber has stated emphatically and correctly: "The predominant present view of the sociology of knowledge is of a separate, 'foreign,' philosophical, ideological, speculative, and nonresearch field" (Barber, 1975: 103). To a large extent, this common impression seems to be fostered by the fact that the major writers in this field have been occupied with both philosophical and sociological questions; often it is difficult to separate the treatment of one from that of the other.

In an attempt to raise the empirical status of the sociology of knowledge, Merton (1949: 200) proposed its consolidation with public opinion research, but his advice has remained largely unheeded (Spinrad, 1976: 242).[1] The chief reason appears to have been Merton's own, very restrictive conception of the traditional pursuits in the sociology of knowledge, a conception that has been highly influential (see Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 12-15; Boskoff, 1969: 310-311; Curtis and Petras, 1970: 29; Spinrad, 1976: 241). While recognizing that both are concerned with the interplay between social structure and commun-

ication, he describes the two fields as sharply divided in their treatments of this topic. He attributes to the sociology of knowledge, in contrast to public opinion research, a central concern with "the intellectual elite," "the intellectual products of experts," and "the esoteric doctrines of the few" (Merton, 1949: 200-201; see also Liebert, 1950: 15). If this were a correct description, it would indeed justify Merton's (1949: 201) inference that a research instrument appropriate to the kinds of problems distinctive of the sociology of knowledge would "differ materially from a research interview intended for a cross-section of the population at large."

Merton's characterization of the sociology of knowledge fits much of the illustrative material used in its literature, but it does not fit a wide range of theoretical problems illustrated by that material. This article intends to show that a variety of basic problems in this field are not limited to the elite level but involve variables on which everybody can get a score, although not necessarily a high score. Even when a concept that is only moderately abstract, such as Mannheim's (1936: 155) "unattached intelligentsia," seems to refer exclusively to an intellectual elite, any hypothesis based on it requires comparisons among people in all walks of life.

Before the use of survey research as a resource for the sociology of knowledge can be expected to increase, however, its relevance to a variety of problems in this area must be demonstrated. To do so, with special attention to the basic literature of the field, was a major objective of the 1980 survey of the Detroit Area Study, a research and training facility of the University of Michigan. In this survey, interviews were obtained from 615 persons who were 18 years of age or older. They had been selected from the population of the metropolitan area of Detroit by means of "multistage area probability sampling" (Kish, 1965: Chs. 9-10) and constitute 78.4% of the target sample.[2]

The Theme and Its Constraints

The theoretical bent of this project is to offer explanations in terms of sociostructural variables. Their use is not distinctive of the sociology of knowledge, however, but occurs in all areas of sociology. The socio-structural variables employed here fall into two categories: social inequality and structural overlap. They will be discussed in conjunction with the hypotheses of this study.

The more distinctive and, for survey research, more problematic aspects of the sociology of knowledge lie in its dependent variables. As it is conceived here, the field is primarily concerned with the impact of sociostructural factors on variable properties of cognitive ideas. The term "cognitive" is employed in contrast to "normative." Ideas stating "what ought to be" are normative; those that state "what is," cognitive.[3] The cognitive framework includes ideas that make a factual claim, to be designated as "beliefs";[4] it includes, furthermore, concepts employed in the formulation of beliefs, the way they are defined, and their level of abstraction. To distinguish among ideas in terms of "is" and "ought" does not have the purpose of claiming that what is being distinguished is also separate; rather, the distinction offers a basis for examining the relation of each to the other and to other phenomena.

In the practical context of data gathering, the normative and cognitive foci present the investigator with challenges of different magnitude. It is a familiar task to inquire about the respondent's value judgments and thereby to probe normative opinions. In writing cognitively oriented questions, however, one has to cope with a special hazard: This kind of question can give respondents the feeling of being tested with respect to mental ability or information. Questions interpreted in this manner are experienced by some as an interesting exercise but by others as a threat. In the latter case, the risk is that respondents may become uncooperative and that the quality of the data will suffer. It is advisable therefore, to avoid flagrant examination items straight out of a test manual, as illustrated by the familiar abstraction question: "Of the five things below, four are alike in a certain way. Which one is not like these four?" (Otis, 1922: 3).

Furthermore, in comparison with surveys focused on substantive issues, the concern with primarily formal aspects of thought is more likely to suggest interview questions whose theoretical significance exceeds their topical appeal. There is a risk that some respondents dismiss such questions as meaningless and "irrelevant." The point is illustrated by the following question, which was deleted for this reason, although its cognitive significance is clear: "If you had to classify the types of weather in terms of temperature on different days, how many categories would you use?"[5]

Moreover, unless the research goal calls for a comparison of levels of information, it is advisable to make the lowest possible demands on information when writing questions aimed at other cognitive variables. If, for example, the purpose is to test for abstraction rather than

information, the investigator should be able to assume that all respondents know the objects to which the question refers, although not every respondent will treat them in an abstract manner. For a survey administered among subjects who constitute a cross-section of an urban, highly heterogeneous population, this requirement is quite restrictive.

In brief, if one attempts to gather data for research in the sociology of knowledge by interviewing people in all social strata, one discovers that the nature of the enterprise puts constraints on the questions one can ask. Does this mean that Merton turns out to have been right after all? The experience gained in this project supports Merton's view in one respect: Interview questions designed for intellectuals are not suited for the population at large. This fact is not decisive, however. It calls for questions that are meaningful to the poorly educated, but such questions are not necessarily meaningless to the well educated.

While, then, the construction of an instrument for gathering cognitive data through survey research does not offer insuperable difficulties, the crucial question is how this kind of instrument can be brought to bear on specific concepts and propositions of the sociology of knowledge, in spite of their purely theoretical and empirically inarticulate character. The Detroit survey was designed to answer this question and thereby to aid in reducing the distance between the ideas of the sociology of knowledge and the operations of survey research. The remaining agenda of this article is, therefore, to discuss the research problems of the survey and to trace them to their sources.

These problems have their main, but not exclusive, basis in the work of Mannheim. The emphasis on Mannheim reflects the conclusion that his contributions to the field are more stimulating for the research-minded reader than are those of other major thinkers. This stimulation is not provided, however, in the form of explicit, readily researchable hypotheses. Neither he nor other pioneers intended to initiate quantitative work, let alone survey research, by means of precise statements of hypothetical regularities, although close approximations occurred sometimes.

Thus, the gap between the formulations of the literature and the requirements of survey research is not always the same, but by and large the process of bridging this gap involves three links: extracting from the literature a number of comparable insights in an attempt to infer from them an underlying and more comprehensive theory; deriving from the

theory one or more hypotheses stated in terms that are close to empirical reality; and operationalizing the variables in these hypotheses by formulating appropriate interview questions. In the following, each of these steps will be employed on at least some occasion, depending on what is needed in the particular instance to move from the original statement to the research instrument.

Effects of Inequality

Beliefs

The least problematic task, both for theorizing and for operationalizing, evolves from the most prominent concept of the sociology of knowledge, that of "ideology," at least when it is used in Mannheim's sense. Mannheim states that ruling groups, in contrast to oppressed groups, can develop a mode of thought so interest-bound to the status quo that they fail to see certain facts that would undermine their sense of domination; that is to say, their beliefs about existing conditions tend to be ideological (Mannheim, 1936: 40).

Depending on one's perspective on measures of inequality, one can translate Mannheim's distinction between ruling and oppressed groups into a variety of scales, including Marxian class categories, socioeconomic status differences, and power differences in work settings (see, respectively, Wright and Perrone, 1977; Form and Huber, 1969; Wolf and Fligstein, 1979). But what kind of belief held by people in upper strata would, or would not, "undermine their sense of domination"? To answer this question, one needs to specify additional conditions.

Given a society in which the extent of popular satisfaction with the status quo is a factor in its maintenance, a secure sense of domination would seem to require the belief that existing conditions are as people want them to be, or that they have consequences that people desire. Hence, one would expect that the frequency of such beliefs will vary directly with the extent that respondents are advantaged by the status quo, that is, with their position in the stratification system.[6] In answers to specific interview questions there should be a corresponding distribution of subjects who agree, for example, that the power structure of the United States is pluralistic rather than monolithic (Form and Huber, 1969) and that income differences are functional for the whole country.

Definitions

In his basic statement on definitions, Mannheim (1936: 273) asserts that one and the same term means very different things when used by differently situated persons.[7] This statement suggests a relation between situations and meanings, but it does not say what meaning is related to what situation. It sets the stage for theorizing, but it itself is too loose to be a theory.

In further comments Mannheim is concerned with a single concept, that of "freedom," and with differences in its definition by people who differ in social positions and political aims. His chief point is that for the bourgeoisie the question of freedom is one of political rather than social rights, since an emphasis on the latter would draw attention to the dependence of freedom on property and class position (Mannheim, 1936: 278). While its concern with a single concept limits the significance of this statement, it invites more general inferences of a theoretical nature.

In the first place, "freedom" falls into the larger category of "virtue terms," that is, terms eliciting positive value responses. Hence, to affirm the existence of freedom reflects positively, and to deny it reflects negatively, on the social system. Second, because it is that kind of concept, groups favoring the maintenance of existing conditions will tend to define it in a manner that permits them to claim that the concept refers to an integral feature of the status quo. Groups opposed to the status quo, on the other hand, will tend to define the same concept in a manner that provides them with an argument for social change. Mannheim's assumption appears to be that the capitalist system has given rise to a larger measure of freedom in political than in social or economic respects, so that a definition in political terms should be more attractive to the dominant and conservative stratum than to the disadvantaged. Generally speaking, therefore, one would expect a positive relation between the relative status of the respondent and the extent to which concepts with societal value connotations are defined in terms of conditions thought to exist, rather than in terms of unmet goals.

In the Detroit study, this hypothesis is applied to two concepts: freedom and democracy. One question asks whether there is more "freedom" in a country where everybody has a high standard of living but people are discouraged from criticizing the government, or in a country with much poverty and starvation but where everybody is able

to criticize the government. Another item asks whether a country is more "democratic" if it provides equality of opportunity for all, or if its government is elected by the people. On the assumption that, in comparison with the other alternatives stated in these questions, freedom of criticism and popular elections will seem more nearly characteristic of the status quo in this country, it is expected that these alternatives will attract more respondents in upper than in lower strata.

Effects of Structural Overlap

The concept of structural overlap has its origin in Simmel's (1955) "Kreuzung sozialer Kreise." Its generality is somewhat greater, however, for Simmel's concept is limited to groups (literally, "circles") as overlapping units, whereas "structural overlap" refers not only to groups but also to other structural units of a population, including its strata.

In Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, the concept of structural overlap is both latent and pervasive. It underlies and gives coherence to various formulations of more limited scope. These are couched in terms such as "social circulation" (Mannheim, 1936: 8); a "sociological cross-section" (p. 155); groups "merging into one another" (p. 279); and "processes of group contact and interpenetration" (p. 302).

In a structurally differentiated population, structural overlap exists to the extent that different structural units coincide in their membership, or that a third unit contains members of two others, or that members move from one unit to another. Although written in a more limited context, the following comment by Mannheim (1936: 8) applies to every kind of structural overlap and states a major implication for the sociology of knowledge: "Forms of thought and experience, which had hitherto developed independently, enter into one and the same consciousness."

In a study concerned with individual respondents, structural overlap must be treated as an object of experience in personal situations. The Detroit study singles out three major ways in which structural overlap can occur in the direct experience of the individual: through participation in different structural units at different times, as indicated by vertical mobility; through status inconsistency, that is, a personal status constellation in which different strata coincide (Jackson and Curtis, 1968); and through intimate interaction among persons who represent

different units. The interaction approach can be pursued by comparing the social background, including socioeconomic characteristics, of respondents with that of their close friends (Laumann, 1973: Ch. 5) and that of their spouses.

Abstraction

Simmel not only laid the foundation for the concept of structural overlap, but also claimed an analogy between the emergence of this social form and the development of an intellectual level on which "a higher concept binds together the elements which a great number of very different perceptual complexes have in common" (Simmel, 1955: 125-126), strongly implying the possibility of a causal relation. Simmel's statement anticipates a less cautious formulation by Mannheim, who calls it his "theory of the social genesis of abstraction" (Mannheim, 1936: 302). According to this theory, the social basis of abstraction lies in the amalgamation of social groups. There is no reason, however, why the same effect could not be claimed also for structural units other than groups, and why it should require total amalgamation. Hence, the hypothesis is stated here in terms of structural overlap, a broader and less extreme conception.

The rationale for this hypothesis depends on how "abstraction" is defined. Although he was influenced by Marx in other respects, there is no indication that Mannheim meant to adopt Marx's polemical use of the concept, that is, as a label for an ideological disregard of basic components of social reality. The context suggests, rather, that to make abstractions in Mannheim's sense is to recognize shared properties of different objects, but without overlooking their differences and thus overgeneralizing. Abstraction always involves a distinction between those properties that are shared by various objects and those that are not. Viewed in the light of this criterion, abstraction is flanked by concreteness on one side and by stereotypes on the other, and has to be distinguished from both.

The hypothesis linking abstraction to structural overlap rests largely on a certain parallelism, if not isomorphism, between both. The distinction between shared and discrepant properties characterizes not only the process of abstraction but also the social experience produced by structural overlap. If, for example, structural units A and B overlap with C, all persons in the area of overlap share their C connection with one another but differ in their A and B connections; all As share their A

connection, but only those in the area of overlap are also Cs. Thus, in groups marked by structural overlap, shared and discrepant affiliations are intermingled and yet distinct.

Durkheim and Mauss (1963: 32, 82), as well as Scheler (1960: 58), have argued that group properties tend to function as thought models— that the patterns of group structure that people experience are reflected in their thought patterns. When applied to structural overlap, this theory suggests that the experienced convergence, but not fusion, of shared and of discrepant affiliations will foster a tendency to distinguish between shared and discrepant properties—that is, to make abstractions —not only in the context of that structural experience itself but also in other situations. The same tendency should find support in the fact that structural overlap produces occasions for comparing behavior patterns that serve the same function—for example, to express anger or to display status—but that also differ in certain properties because the observed actors represent different groups or strata.

As was shown, the concept of abstraction has two dimensions: the nonconcrete and the nonstereotypic. In the Detroit study, open-ended questions were used to distinguish between concrete and nonconcrete responses. Subjects were asked, for example, whether schools and hospitals were entirely different or had something in common and, in the latter case, what they had in common. Answers pointing to a clearly shared feature were treated as nonconcrete. Further questions asked for similar comparisons between good students and good athletes in high school and between people in a wealthy and a poor neighborhood.

Since these questions were written in such a way that to recognize a shared feature (nonconcrete) required that the difference between, and homogeneity within, two categories be minimized (nonstereotypic), it is likely that both dimensions of abstraction are tapped simultaneously. For a direct check on stereotyping, additional items of the "they are all alike" kind can be added. In that case, only the combination of nonconcrete and nonstereotypic responses constitutes "abstraction."

Cognitive Legitimation

The concept of cognitive legitimation was used initially by Parsons in his analysis of beliefs. Although, in the Kantian tradition, Parsons denies the possibility of logical deductions from beliefs to values or in reverse, he also stresses their interdependence (Parsons, 1951: 350, 379). Thus, beliefs are not only influenced by values but sometimes also

support them, or the actor's value orientation, by giving them a seemingly factual basis. Parsons (1951: 351) refers to this function of certain beliefs as "cognitive legitimation." While he recognizes that not all beliefs provide cognitive legitimation, he does not inquire about the conditions under which this function is likely to occur.

The structural overlap variable suggests a possible direction for such an investigation. The hypothesis proposed here is that the frequency of cognitive legitimation increases with structural overlap. This hypothesis draws plausibility from two different sets of intervening variables. Each of these will be discussed separately.

(1) Because persons located in an area of structural overlap combine membership in different social units, they are exposed to social influences with a potential for mutual contradiction. Therefore, the experience of structural overlap is likely to be a source of value inconsistencies for the individual.

Inconsistencies between value judgments by the same person should be conducive to the cognitive legitimation of at least one of them. This part of the hypothesis has its basis in Gunnar Myrdal's examination of what he called "an American dilemma." Myrdal (1964: 106-108, 582-586, 1027-1034) thought that the inconsistency between the values of American democracy and of white supremacy fostered beliefs that could be used in attempts to justify racist value judgments. For the present hypothesis, the key point is that the pressure for the legitimation of one value judgment was thought to have come from its clash with other value judgments by the same individuals.

In the Detroit study, people were asked, in nonconsecutive questions, whether they were in favor of legalized abortion and of prayer in public schools. After each of these questions they were asked: "Is there any particular reason why you think this way?" On the assumption that to declare oneself in favor of abortions as well as of school prayers is more likely to appear inconsistent than any other pair of possible responses, this combination should be most conducive to cognitive legitimation, as expressed in answers to either or both of the follow-up questions.

To qualify as cognitive legitimation, a response has to meet the following criteria. As a form of "legitimation," it must present a point that can be used as an argument in persuading others, as distinguished from a mere affirmation, elaboration, or explanation of the value judgment itself. To be "cognitive," the statement must make a factual assertion, susceptible to empirical tests.[8]

(2) A second line of reasoning behind the same hypothesis introduces a different set of intervening variables. The point of departure is Scheler's use of the Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft continuum as an explanatory device in the sociology of knowledge. Scheler (1960: 33-34) considers membership in groups with strong Gemeinschaft characteristics conducive to certain modes of thought, one of which is dogmatism. This view suggests an additional connection—aside from that mediated by the inconsistency variable—between structural overlap and cognitive legitimation. It can be inferred from the hypothesized relation between Gemeinschaft and dogmatism, because structural overlap can be treated as an aspect of the Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft continuum, while dogmatism is likely to have consequences for cognitive legitimation.

The concept of Gemeinschaft is usually defined in terms of attitudinal properties, but it is probable that these depend to a large extent on the internal structure of the group, particularly on the extent of homogeneity in its composition. A low degree of overlap with other units strengthens homogeneity in group membership. Hence, a low degree of structural overlap should contribute to the effect that Scheler attributes to the Gemeinschaft setting; that is, it should stimulate dogmatism.[9]

If dogmatism has an effect on cognitive legitimation, the reason is likely to be that their relation is mediated by a third variable, namely, how much confidence a person has that others will agree with him. Dogmatism entails faith in the validity of one's own judgment; the stronger this faith, the less disagreement by others a person should expect. The study approaches this matter by asking each respondent to estimate the percentage of people in the Detroit area who agree with his or her own value judgments on prayer in public schools and on legalized abortion. The hypothesis is that these estimates will vary directly with dogmatism.

The final link in this chain of variables runs from estimates of agreement to cognitive legitimation. If it is assumed that cognitive legitimation tends to occur when there is an apparent need for a supporting argument, and if the respondent believes that his or her value judgment on a certain issue is generally shared, it would follow that to elaborate on this value judgment with additional argumentation should seem an unnecessary effort and, therefore, should be a rare response. One should expect, therefore, that the frequency of cognitive legitimation will vary inversely with the percentage of people estimated to be in agreement with one's own value judgment.

Hence, the entire chain of relations can be stated as follows: The more structural overlap, the less dogmatism; the less dogmatism, the lower the estimate of agreement with one's own value judgment; and the lower this estimate, the more cognitive legitimation.

Commitment

Parsons's basic assumption that values are interdependent with beliefs underlies his concern not only with cognitive legitimation as such but also with its relation to commitment. He treats commitment as another point of articulation for values and beliefs, that is, as a positive value judgment about a belief. Its effect is that empirical standards of validity do not determine what is believed (Parsons, 1951: 354). Commitment is resistance to cognitive change (Kiesler, 1968: 453) and finds expression in the rejection of contrary evidence. Parsons's implicit hypothesis is that if a belief provides cognitive legitimation for a value, commitment to the belief is thereby increased.[10]

To examine the relation between cognitive legitimation and commitment requires one or more sets of interview questions, consisting of a value judgment item, a belief item, and a follow-up item to determine the extent of commitment to the belief. In one such set, for example, the already familiar question on abortion is used as a value judgment item; in addition, respondents are asked whether they think that government funding of abortions leads to more teenage pregnancies (belief), and whether their answers to this question would remain the same if contrary evidence were presented by a reputable research agency (commitment). Since the belief that government funding contributes to pregnancies gives more support to value judgments against than for abortion, one should expect more commitment to that belief among respondents who oppose abortion and more commitment to the contrary belief among those who favor abortion.

The Intervention of Relationism

It is not accidental that Mannheim stands both at the beginning and at the end of this article. On the one hand, he stresses the influence of social factors on ideas. With this thematic view, he opens the door to a search for regularities in the relationship between social and cognitive phenomena, an area of investigation central to the sociology of

knowledge. On the other hand, in true dialectic fashion, he also attributes to the social system the capacity for coming into contradiction with itself by giving rise to factors that counteract other social factors. To conclude with problems arising from this phase of Mannheim's work makes it possible to examine not only the social conditioning of ideas but also the social conditions that foster their independence.

Mannheim considers the social conditioning of ideas most effective when people are unaware of it. He expresses this point in an observation that seems as astute in the 1980s as it did in the 1920s: "Those persons who talk most about human freedom are those who are actually most blindly subject to social determination" (Mannheim, 1936: 48). In other words, it is not impossible for ideas to become relatively independent of controlling influences, but this requires insight into the nature of these influences. Apparently following Freud, whose "unconscious" becomes Mannheim's "collective unconscious," he seems to argue that awareness of the forces that control us helps in reducing their control (Mannheim, 1936: 5, 47-48, 189-190). The specific insight to which Mannheim ascribes this function constitutes the main point of what he calls "relationism" (Mannheim, 1936: 78-87, 282-283) and will be designated here by that term.[11] It recognizes that one's own way of seeing things lacks absolute validity because, quite generally, what people believe to be true is relative to, and conditioned by, their place in society.

As to the basis of relationism, Mannheim's short list of contributing factors (Mannheim, 1936: 282) provides at least a few anchor points for a hypothesis in terms of structural overlap. The rationale for this hypothesis consists of two assumptions: (1) Structural overlap facilitates the observation that in certain instances people in one structural unit do not hold the same beliefs as those in another; and (2) repeated observations of such differences are conducive to the view that there is a general relation between the structural location of people and their beliefs (relationism).

All in all, if this hypothesis is combined with Mannheim's thought on the effect of relationism, the following hypothetical relationship is formed among the three variables concerned: Relationism increases with structural overlap, and the relative independence of beliefs increases with relationism. Two of the variables included in this hypothesis—relationism and independence—require further discussion in operational respects.

In the Detroit survey, the relationism variable is approached in two ways. One question is couched in general terms and asks whether the

way a person thinks depends only on him or her or is determined by such factors as group membership and income. The other type of question is more concrete. It follows the respondent's expression of what is likely to be a status-based opinion[12] and asks whether the respondent would hold the same opinion if his or her economic position were different, be it that of an owner of a large company or that of an assembly-line worker. A respondent who would change his or her opinion is at least a minimal relationist; one who would change it in a sociologically predicted direction is even more of a relationist.

Relationism is hypothesized to contribute to what was called the "independence" of beliefs. This aspect is relative in two respects. One of these is signified by the question, "How independent?" The other is indicated by, "Independence from what?" In the first sense, independence is a matter of degree. In the second, independence is relative to other factors; these may differ in the degree to which a given belief varies with, or is independent of, any one of them.

It would be consistent with both of these relativity dimensions to measure the independence of a belief, from one variable at a time, by means of an inverted correlation coefficient. Since, in correlation terms, it is hypothesized that relationism lowers the correlation between the distribution of a belief and other variables, the hypothesis requires variables that stand in a close relation to certain beliefs, as long as relationism does not intervene. This criterion favors the choice of stratification variables (income, occupation, and so on) in relation to ideological beliefs. Hence, given a significant correlation between a stratification variable and the distribution of a belief, the Mannheimian hypothesis would predict a higher correlation in the absence of relationism than in its presence.

Syntheses of Conflicting Beliefs

The dialectic element in Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, the search for tendencies and countertendencies in the same system, finds its most prominent expression in his treatment of the "unattached intelligentsia" (Mannheim, 1936: 155-161), a distinctly controversial concept (Stark, 1958: 300-306; Remmling, 1975: 69-71; Holzner and Marx, 1979: 52).

Basically, insofar as Mannheim's statements about the intelligentsia constitute a theory, it is not a theory of the intelligentsia but of structural

overlap.[13] Overlap among the units of vertical structure is the dynamic factor, the main independent variable.[14] The role attributed to the intelligentsia is merely that of an arena of structural overlap, at least under modern conditions (Mannheim, 1936: 156), but there is nothing to suggest a lack of structural overlap outside that arena.[15] Hence, although the research problem has its origin in the concept of an unattached intelligentsia, the key variable is not "being a member of the intelligentsia," but "being unattached."

To understand this variable and its function, one needs to go back to Mannheim's basic claim that strata with conflicting interests tend to generate conflicting ideas. Under conditions of structural overlap, some persons will have close ties with each of the conflicting strata and will be intimately exposed to their respective beliefs and values. "The individual, then, more or less takes a part in the mass of mutually conflicting tendencies" (Mannheim, 1936: 157). This characterizes one of two forms—the more dynamic one—of being "unattached" in Mannheim's sense.

In spite of what it seems to be saying, then, the term does not denote a social vacuum but a combination of affiliations that create opposite pressures and counteract each other, although without canceling each other out. Mannheim expects, in these circumstances, the formation of more comprehensive beliefs that partly incorporate both conflicting beliefs. He refers to this "broad, dynamic mediation *(dynamische Vermittlung)* of conflicting points of view" (Mannheim, 1936: 161) in various ways, among which the term "synthesis" occurs repeatedly (pp. 147, 154, 157, and 161, for example).

In opinion surveys, occasions for answers of a synthesizing kind are provided by items containing two conflicting assertions, to which the respondent is asked to react by stating his or her own view on the same issue. The response qualifies as a synthesis either if the two assertions are seen as extremes on an implicit scale and preference is given to a middle range on that scale, or if each assertion is seen as correct under limiting conditions.[16]

Mannheim's explanation of syntheses as products of "unattached" persons is more complex than indicated so far, because that term has more than one meaning for him. He contrasts the unattached, in a second sense, with "those who participate more directly in the economic process" (Mannheim, 1936: 155)—"the worker and the entrepreneur" (1936: 157). This form of being unattached, then, is nonparticipation,

either as worker or as entrepreneur, in a business enterprise operated for private profit. For research purposes, however, it seems advisable to replace the concept of nonparticipation with the more gradational one of "distance" from the private business sector. On the basis of work information obtained in the Detroit study, respondents are classified as (1) employed or self-employed in private business, (2) employed or self-employed in private professional practice, (3) employed in private nonprofit organizations, and (4) employed in public employment. It is assumed that categories 2 and 3 are intermediate and that category 4 is at the greatest distance from the private business sector.

Mannheim distinguishes only implicitly between the two ways of being unattached, but the following difference can be discerned. One of the two modalities, remoteness from business, is described in purely negative terms, rather than as a source of influence capable of shaping people's ideas. Structural overlap, on the other hand, combines different stimuli in such a way that the development of a synthesis is one of several conceivable reactions; indeed, it is the one most consistent with a dialectic perspective.

Yet, the hypothesized tendency of structural overlap to generate syntheses is vulnerable. It requires at least a rough equilibrium between the conflicting points of view, but the balance is readily disturbed by additional influences that can give preponderance to one point of view over the other. Mannheim seems to assume that work in a private business enterprise, more than any other kind of employment or self-employment, is a source of material interests on the side of either workers or entrepreneurs, and that distance from the business sector weakens these interests.

In brief, when different social strata produce conflicting beliefs, overlap between these strata is the basic factor in the structural dynamics of syntheses, while distance from the business sector impedes the intrusion of factors that interfere with the development of syntheses. One would expect, therefore, that the frequency of syntheses will vary directly with structural overlap and with distance from the business sector; the relationship should be strongest when high scores on both of these variables coincide.

Summary

It is difficult to steep oneself in a body of literature rooted in Hegel and Marx without coming under the spell of the terminology of

dialectics. One is almost irresistibly tempted, therefore, to conclude this article with the remark that its relation to Merton's authoritative interpretation of the sociology of knowledge is dialectic. On the one hand, the article was guided by Merton's call for a mutually advantageous consolidation of the sociology of knowledge with public opinion research. On the other hand, it attempted to demonstrate that the sociology of knowledge, even in its European beginnings, is not as much of a pièce de résistance as Merton believes, but that a wide range of its concepts and propositions can be made accessible to the procedures of survey research.

Thus, the main task was not to spin new theories but to show how some old ones can be approached empirically. Nonetheless, as Merton (1949: 105-111) has pointed out, to subject purely theoretical ideas to the mundane considerations required for empirical work has theoretical implications, particularly by contributing to the specification and systematization of hypotheses. If the attempted specification of hypotheses has also been a step toward systematization, it is because the undertaking was organized around not more than two sets of independent variables: structural differentiation, as represented by social inequality, and structural overlap.

Insofar as their hypothesized impact in the realm of ideas is concerned, inequality and structural overlap appear to differ in their relevance to particular aspects of ideas. Inequality is likely to have more effect on substantive aspects, that is, on the content of beliefs and definitions. The structural overlap variable, on the other hand, seems to account better for differences in nonsubstantive, formal aspects of beliefs (abstraction), the instrumental use of beliefs (cognitive legitimation), attitudes toward one's own beliefs (commitment), and the extent to which beliefs are independent of status or power bases (relationism, syntheses).

There is also a difference between social inequality and structural overlap with regard to their "connectives" in Merton's (1949: 254-258) sense—that is, particular aspects or functions of a sociostructural factor, in terms of which its cognitive effect can be explained. For inequality the matter is relatively simple. Even before the explicit introduction of "interest group theory" (Centers, 1949: 28), the assumption that inequality creates opposite interests was the chief rationale for predicting cognitive differences between social strata (Valentine, 1975: 312). Structural overlap as an independent variable, on the other hand, involves one or the other of two connectives: the generalization of

cognitive reactions to structural features, or the experience of cultural inconsistencies that converge in the individual.

There are precedents for treating structural features as sources of generalized cognitive patterns; Durkheim and Mauss's previously mentioned theory of thought models is perhaps the most prominent example. The generalization connective is implicit, first of all, in the relation between structural overlap and abstraction, because this mode of thought is hypothesized to evolve as an extension of social distinctions that become familiar under conditions of structural overlap.

The assumption that a cognitive response is generalized also connects the observation of differences between concrete beliefs of concrete structural units—an observation afforded by structural overlap—and the hypothesized formation of relationism as a more general mode of thought. The same type of linkage is assumed in the hypothesis that a low degree of dogmatism, as a generalized attitude, is fostered by the experience of specific disagreements with other persons in a heterogeneous social setting; hence, this connective also enters into the chain of hypotheses on cognitive legitimation.

Perhaps a more conspicuous linkage with other dependent variables lies in the fact that structural overlap exposes people to diverse, and often contradictory, cultural influences of different structural units, and thus subjects the individual to the experience of inconsistencies. The distinction between cognitive and normative cultural items, more specifically between beliefs and value judgments, generates the possibility of three kinds of inconsistency: between different beliefs, between different value judgments, and between beliefs and value judgments. Each kind of inconsistency is primarily relevant to a different hypothesis.

The synthesis hypothesis, stemming from the concept of the "unattached," presupposes cognitive counterpressures on the individual as a result of inconsistencies between beliefs. Inconsistency between value judgments, on the other hand, is more likely to have affective than cognitive implications, but it seems to enhance the utility of beliefs as instruments of cognitive legitimation. Last, inconsistency between beliefs and value judgments explains how commitment to beliefs is weakened by structural overlap.

Notes

1. There are, however, a few studies in which sociology of knowledge problems and survey research are brought together (see Cazeneuve et al., 1971; Huber and Form, 1973; Bell and Robinson, 1980).

2. The survey was directed by Professor David Goldberg. Allen Beck, Nancy Grassmick, Kathy London, and Herbert Smith were the assistants. The expertise of the research staff contributed greatly to the undertaking.

3. This use of "cognitive" follows Parsons (1951: 328) and seems to be more common among sociologists than psychologists, reflecting a concern with thought products rather than thought processes. In the psychological literature, the term "cold cognition" (Zajonc, 1980: 160) has been employed in a similar sense.

4. Parsons (1951: 327) uses the term in this restricted sense; other students of beliefs give it a broader meaning (see Converse, 1964: 207; Borhek and Curtis, 1975: 5).

5. This item was used in a questionnaire study (Lewis, 1963) and was kindly communicated by the author.

6. The same reasoning also leads to the complementary expectation that the opposite kind of belief, called "utopia" by Mannheim, will have more support in the lower strata (Mannheim, 1936: 40).

7. Admittedly, Mannheim discusses also the use of definitions by the expert, or "investigator," but this is merely an elaboration of his basic point, which applies to any person.

8. The effect of factors such as education or occupation on cognitive legitimation can be compared with their effect on what may be called "normative legitimation"; that is, legitimation through the assertion of a more basic norm, value, or standard of right and wrong. The following statements about prayer in public schools illustrate each type of response. Cognitive legitimation: "It builds character" (pro); "it separates some children from the rest" (con). Normative legitimation: "It is in accordance with freedom of religion and the right of self-expression" (pro); "the Constitution forbids it" (con). Nonlegitimation: "That is the way I was raised." See also Westie (1965: 530).

9. It seems unnecessary to discuss measures of dogmatism at this point, because this matter has been treated in the literature. Suffice it to mention that the questions used in this study are modifications of Doob (1967: 418, item 62), Meresko et al. (1954: 90, item 18), and Rokeach (1960: 79, item 57).

10. This hypothesis is inferred from Parsons's (1951: 349-354) discussion of "ideological" beliefs both as sources of cognitive legitimation and as objects of commitment. In line with the central role of values in his theoretical scheme, Parsons seems to assume that as objects of commitment, beliefs do not stand entirely on their own feet but depend on a service relation to values.

11. Mannheim (1936: 78-79) introduces this term in order to avoid the philosophical connotations of "relativism." Other points included in his discussion of relationism fluctuate but depend on the point stressed here.

12. This opinion is a response to the question of whether in this country a person gets ahead mainly on talent and training, or whether other things are more important.

13. An analogous and perhaps more familiar case is Durkheim's treatment of suicide among Protestants and Catholics, which is not a theory of religious affiliation but of a factor he calls "egoism."

14. Since structural overlap in this context is limited to vertical structure, previously discussed measures of structural overlap need to be modified accordingly. In particular, only those background characteristics of interaction partners that pertain to socioeconomic status should be used.

15. In addition, Mannheim attributes supplementary functions to higher education as a shared feature of the intelligentsia. Particularly, it is supposed to subject "the educated man" to the influence of conflicting tendencies in society (Mannheim, 1936: 156); but, even if true, that would make this function of higher education merely a substitute for structural overlap. Education, however, is the single most important control variable in the sociology of knowledge.

16. An example from the Detroit study contrasts the assertion that this is a land of unlimited opportunity for people who are willing to work with the assertion that nowadays it is almost impossible to get ahead by hard work. The first criterion is met by an answer that says opportunities have not disappeared but have become quite limited. The second criterion is met by answers saying, in effect, that one assertion is closer to the truth for whites, the other for blacks.

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