

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 28, 2005

TO: ASA Council

FROM: James Ennis, Task Force Chair
Roberta Spalter-Roth, Staff Liaison

RE: Task Force to Revise the ASA Specialty Areas

RECOMMENDATIONS

In its two years of deliberations the Task Force to Revise the ASA Specialty Areas faced the three major issues. These were:

1. Can the current listing of 70 + specialties be organized so that they reflect a smaller list of broad or core categories, without losing the detail of the specialties? What are the structural relations among the specialties?
2. Can we devise a way for members to describe their own work in a more open ended way?
3. Are names for specialties current or outdated (and how can we best track changes over time)?

The Task Force approached several of these questions by means of a cluster analysis of ASA member data, as a guide to which current categories might be aggregated into larger groupings. We circulated an initial version to section chairs and have implemented some of their recommendations. The resulting revised form preserves the detail of the existing system, while grouping specialties in a more coherent fashion. It is presented below. While no change will perfectly meet the preferences of all concerned, we believe that on balance the proposed changes are an improvement upon which further refinements can be built. Therefore the Task Force on specialties recommends the following:

1. Council should accept the new system of 16 categories and 77 sub-categories (see Appendix I), based on a restructuring of the current system (Appendix II). This new system also allows members to name a new category of interest. Since this system is based on currently used categories it will allow for a transitional period between this system and what might be a more radical change in the future. While Council was neutral about the number of categories allowed, the Task Force agreed as

to the importance of a structuring of the current hodge-podge of categories.

2. At Council's direction, the Executive Office should place on the 2006 membership/renewal forms the *full revised* list of areas of sociological interest (+/-77) categorized under the 16 major groupings as developed and refined by the Task Force. In addition, the Executive Office should include the free field suggested by the Task Force (for members to list their current primary field of work). Members should be instructed to check of both the broad and the narrow category for each of the four subspecialties they rank. For example, someone who works in the subspecialty of "alcohol and drugs" would check off B and 3 (see Appendix I).
3. Along with the broad and narrow specialty method of categorizing, Council should instruct the Executive Office to place a "free field" on the 2006 membership form.
4. The Task Force recommends an article on this Task Force's work in the first post-meeting issue of *Footnotes* as well as a reminder in Member News and Notes to make the members aware of the process that resulted in the change, and information about filling out the updated 2006 membership form.
5. In the designing of the 2007 membership form, the Executive Office could also include a place for members to specify further their area of interest for *each* of the 16 major categories (e.g., Sociology of Culture (specify)_____).
6. These data gathered in the 2006 and 2007 membership years will be available in the fall of 2007 after the close of the membership year. At this point, the Executive Office Research Department should analyze the open-ended categories and, with the assistance of an advisory group or a follow-up Task Force, should review the results and suggest further changes to the codes, if necessary.

THE TASK FORCE AND ITS ACTIVITIES

Background

At its winter meeting in 2003, Council created a Task Force to “Revise the ASA Specialty Areas” used on the Association’s membership and renewal application. Presented as a check off list, members are asked to select up to four areas of interest and to rank them. This information is entered into ASA’s electronic membership database (NOAH). It is used in ASA’s Directory of Members, and it is used to provide members, other scholars, publishers, media representatives, policy-making bodies and others who inquire information about the scholarly interests and expertise of members.

Over the years new categories have been added to the membership form, particularly ones that corresponded to newly-forming ASA sections, an indicator that there was a critical mass of people with that special interest. The list of sections is also on the form, however. The result was a hodge-podge of 77 categories that had grown like topsy over time. The Executive Office had not reorganized the list in a long time primarily because it recognized the tension between having a consistent set of specialties over time so researchers on the discipline and profession can study trends longitudinally, having members able to identify their work and interests in terms that change over time, and providing more detailed specialties for the media, publishers, and foundations to find sociologists that meet their needs. In giving instructions to the newly created Task Force, Council recognized that the Task Force would need to refine the existing “Areas of Sociological Interest” that members are asked to identify.

Work of the Task Force

In response to its charge from the ASA Council, the Task Force met during the 2003 Annual Meeting to consider improvements to the way members’ specialty areas are recorded and categorized. Although Council did not specify whether from a policy perspective it thought the Task Force should reduce the existing number, from the beginning, however, the Task Force thought that the list of categories was a hodge-podge with no organization or structure to it, unlike the categories used for Anthropology, Economics, and Political Science, for example. To begin the process of developing a structure, the Task Force chair, James Ennis of Tufts University, provided members with the results of a hierarchical cluster analysis he had carried out on a SPSS data file that contained members’ selection of interest areas and current choice of sections (see Appendix III). For all members Ennis coded binary variables for each member’s interest area self-descriptions, in addition to the binary coding of their current section memberships. He then formed a matrix reporting the degree of shared membership (via Yule’s Q), and ran SPSS’s hierarchical clustering algorithm.

The resulting tree diagram in Appendix III can be read from the left as indicating which areas of interest are most closely connected (via shared members). Reading the diagram on Appendix III from the right, the diagram reports a series of 'cuts' producing ever more homogeneous subgroups, that is, the further out the line or the greater the number of cuts, the less likely the particular specialty is to fit in the cluster. The Task Force agreed that the clustering technique was a useful way to start the analysis and generally accepted the logic of resulting 16 clusters, making some changes and adjustments. They discussed many changes to these clusters through phone and e-mail communication after the August 2004 meeting.

The Task Force made a preliminary report at Council's January 2004 meeting. The Task Force recommended the list of broad and narrow specialties (16 broad specialty categories and 77 narrow sub-specialty categories shorter and more concise list of specialties. It recommended switching to more modern terminology where appropriate. In addition, it recommended the addition of a free-response field with which members could list their specific, primary research focus. Council requested the Task Force get input from ASA Section Chairs about these recommendations.

An e-mail was sent out by Ennis to all Section Chairs, 15 of whom responded. Most of these comments say that they could live with method of categorization the 16 major categories or suggested minor changes that can be made without much difficulty (see Appendix IV for a complete list of comments). For example,

1. Lynn Smith-Lovin

Works for me: gets my two big areas (social psych, gender), and I have no trouble with emotions being subsumed under social psych...at least the way I study them. So, it would work well for me personally.

2. Eileen Crimmins: I am responding as the Chair of the Aging and the Life Course Section. My reaction is that the Life Course is a meaningful identity to many Sociologists - more so than Social Gerontology. I would think that it would be better to use the words that have been already used to characterize our section. There is a lot of emphasis on life course work now - whereas Social Gerontology almost has a Social Work interpretation.

3. I am quite comfortable classifying myself in "Social psychology and interaction", "Quantitative approaches", and "Qualitative approaches". Since I'm happy, maybe I should say no more. However, I do suspect that some of my colleagues (like Bill Corsaro and Donna Eder), as well as many symbolic interactionists, might be happier if the first of these classifications were named something like "Social psychology, interactionism, and socialization".

4. G. William Domhoff

I don't feel qualified to make an overall judgment, but it looks good to me from my vantage point on the parts I have some sense of, and I respect the kind of work that went into the new categories, and political sociology is still on the radar, which has to be my main concern as political sociology section chair at this juncture, so I feel comfortable saying I see no problems with it.

5. Ruth Milkman:

Thanks for taking on this project - it's a good idea and in many respects long overdue! Having said that, I would have thought "industrial sociology" was one of the archaic categories! And it might be good to have a new one that captures the "labor and labor movements" area which as you know is the section I chair... perhaps that could substitute for "industrial soc"??

6. Michele Lamont:

This looks good to me. My one suggestion would be to use "Cultural Sociology" (as opposed to "The sociology of culture") as the overarching name for this cluster of work. Cultural sociology is more inclusive and is already adopted by 1203 members.

The comments made by some section chairs would require major rethinking in the methodology for grouping the categories and particularly the category theory, knowledge, science, and religion (see the extensive comments by Scott Feld, for example).

At its August 2004 meeting, the Task Force discussed these suggestions, as well as an alternative method of categorization suggested by one Task Force member. In the end, the Task Force decided that the 16 broad categories and 73 sub-specialties represent the current organization of sociology, and they decided to recommend it be included on the 2006 membership form, noting that members should be instructed to select and rank check off a broad and narrow specialty and sub-specialty. In addition, they decided to recommend including one-free field that would give members a chance to describe their work or their specialty in their own words.

In the Task Force's view, an article in *Footnotes* and a reminder in Member News and Notes are needed, because members have not yet seen this new method of categorization. This step is important because the responses on the 2006 membership form will be used in the 2007 Directory of Members. Department might also like to review these codes (especially the broad categories) in revising their entries to the Directory of Graduate Departments.

It also makes sense for the Association's database to contain both the broad and narrow categories, although in future years we might put the general codes in the membership directory rather than the detailed codes. The reasons for keeping the underlying detailed data include enabling trend data to be analyzed and to permit the Association to continue to run highly specialized member lists that are purchased by publishers and others to communicate with specific parts of our membership.

Future

If Council endorses the Task Force recommendations than members of the Task Force along with members of the Executive Office would need to monitor the comments from the 2006 membership category to refine the 2007 categories. To

continue with an iterative process of updating and modernizing categories, the Task Force suggests that planning should begin to a 2008 membership form that would contain an open-field under each of the broad specialty, so that sub-specialties can be refined and updated using the memberships' own language. These new categories could be available for the 2008 Directory of Members. Council may, of course, appoint another small group rather than the current Task Force to help to plan and monitor this activity participates in this activity.

Task Force Members

James Ennis, Tufts University, Chair

Joan Spade, State University of New York, Brockport

Ezter Hargittai, Northwestern University

Stephen Zehr, University of Southern Indiana

Kevin Vryan, Indiana University, Bloomington

Lynn Smith Lovin, Duke University, Council Liaison

Roberta Spalter-Roth, American Sociological Association, Staff Liaison

Appendix I

New Areas of Sociological Interest

Select four areas of interest from the following list, in order of priority:

First:

Second:

Third:

Fourth:

A. Social Control, Law, Crime, and Deviance

1. Criminology/Delinquency
2. Penology/Corrections
3. Criminal Justice
4. Deviant Behavior/Social
5. Disorganization
6. Law and Society
7. Social Control

B. Medicine and health

1. Medical Sociology
2. Mental Health
3. Alcohol and Drugs

C. Family and life cycle

1. Family
2. Children and Youth
3. Policy Analysis/Public Policy
4. Social Welfare/Social Work
5. Aging/Social Gerontology
6. Disabilities

D. Social psychology and interaction

1. Small Groups
2. Social Psychology
3. Emotions
4. Socialization

E. Application and practice

1. Applied Sociology/Evaluation
2. Research
3. Sociological Practice
4. Microcomputing (change to communication and information technologies?)
5. Undergraduate Education/Teaching

F. Quantitative approaches

1. Mathematical Sociology
2. Rational Choice
3. Social Networks
4. Quantitative Methodology
5. Statistics

G. Work, economy and organizations

1. Industrial Sociology
2. Work and Labor Markets
3. Occupations/Professions
4. Organizations, Formal and Complex
5. Social Organization
6. Economy and Society

H. Politics, Conflict, and Social Change

1. World Conflict
2. Conflict Resolution
3. Military Sociology
4. Marxist Sociology
5. Political Economy
6. Comparative Sociology/Historical
7. Sociology
8. Political Sociology
9. Collective Behavior/Social
10. Movements
11. Social Change

I. Gender and sexuality

1. Sex and Gender
2. Sexuality and Homosexuality

J. Sociology of culture

1. Cultural Sociology
2. Art/Music
3. Mass Communication/Public Opinion
4. Visual Sociology
5. Leisure/Sports/Recreation

K. Qualitative approaches

1. Language/Social Linguistics
2. Ethnomethodology
3. Anthropology
4. Qualitative Methodology

L. Theory, knowledge, science, religion

1. History of Sociology/Social Thought
2. Theory
3. Knowledge
4. Science and Technology
5. Religion

M. Population and ecology

1. Demography
2. Human Ecology
3. Biosociology

N. Place and environment

1. Community
2. Urban Sociology
3. Environmental Sociology
4. Rural Sociology
5. Development

O. Stratification and Education

1. Education
2. Stratification/Mobility

P. Race and ethnicity

1. Latina/o Sociology
2. Migration/Immigration
3. Race/Ethnic/Minority Relations
4. Race, Class and Gender

Please briefly describe your main topic, question or issue of interest in sociology (limit 80 characters?)

APPENDIX II

AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



[search](#) | [site map](#) | [contact us](#) | [about ASA](#) | [publications](#) | [membership](#) | [annual meeting](#)

Areas of Sociological Interest [Membership Profile](#)

Select four areas or interest from the following list in order of priority.

First:

Second:

Third:

Fourth:

Art/Music

Social Networks

Science and Technology

Theory

Submit and Return to the Main Menu

Aging/Social Gerontology (38)

Alcohol and Drugs (58)

Anthropology (67)

Applied Sociology/Evaluation Research (01)

Art/Music (39)

Biosociology (02)

Children and Youth (59)

Collective Behavior/Social Movements (03)

Community (04)

Comparative Sociology/Historical Sociology (05)

Conflict Resolution (68)

Criminal Justice (49)

Criminology/Delinquency (06)

Cultural Sociology (07)

Demography (08)

Development (09)

Deviant Behavior/Social Disorganization (10) Disabilities (63)

Economy and Society (11)

Education (12)

Emotions (52)

Environmental Sociology (13)

Ethnomethodology (50)

Family (19)

History of Sociology/Social Thought (14)	Human Ecology (15)
Industrial Sociology (16)	Knowledge (40)
Language/Social Linguistics (41)	Latina/o Sociology (57)
Law and Society (17)	Leisure/Sports/Recreation (18)
Marxist Sociology (60)	Mass Communication/Public Opinion (20)
Mathematical Sociology (21)	Medical Sociology (22)
Mental Health (51)	Microcomputing (53)
Migration/Immigration (65)	Military Sociology (25)
Missing (99)	Occupations/Professions (26)
Organizations, Formal and Complex (66)	Other (97)
Penology/Corrections (27)	Policy Analysis/Public Policy (69)
Political Economy (70)	Political Sociology (28)
Qualitative Methodology (23)	Quantitative Methodology (24)
Race, Class and Gender (64)	Race/Ethnic/Minority Relations (29)
Rational Choice (61)	Religion (30)
Rural Sociology (31)	Science and Technology (42)
Sex and Gender (43)	Sexuality and Homosexuality (62)
Small Groups (32)	Social Change (33)
Social Control (34)	Social Networks (71)
Social Organization (35)	Social Psychology (36)
Social Welfare/Social Work (72)	Socialization (37)
Sociological Practice (54)	Statistics (73)
Stratification/Mobility (46)	Theory (47)
Undergraduate Education/Teaching (56)	Urban Sociology (48)
Visual Sociology (55)	Work and Labor Markets (44)
World Conflict (45)	

You are currently logged in as James G. Ennis
[Logout or Login as another user](#)

Please contact the ASA Membership Department (e-mail: membership@asanet.org; phone: 202-383-9005, ext. 389) if you have any questions or concerns.

Please do not bookmark any of these pages. They are dynamically generated and will not be available again.

This site is designed to work best with Microsoft Internet Explorer version 5 and above. Some functionality may be lost if other browsers or earlier versions are used. [Follow this link to](#)

download the latest version of [Microsoft's Internet Browser](#).

This site is designed to use Cookies in order to serve you better, please be sure to accept any Cookies generated during your visit.



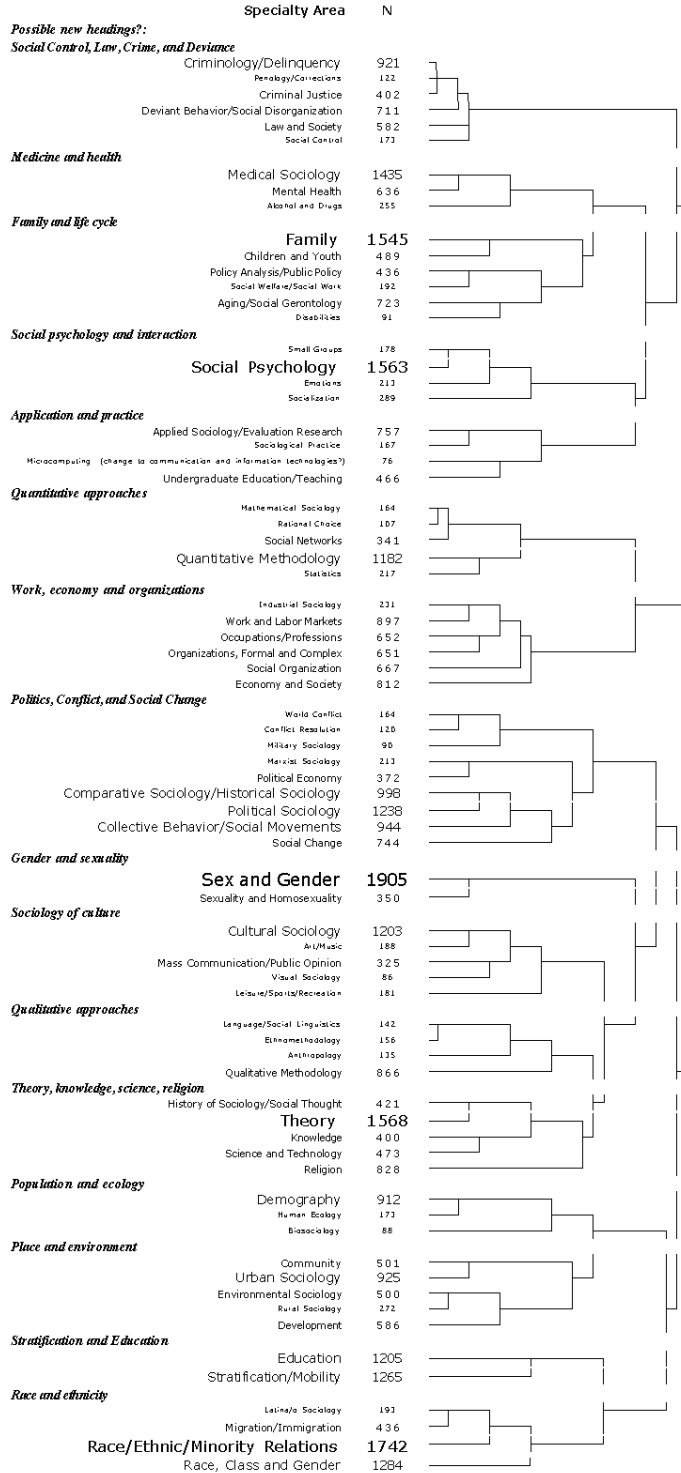
AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, 1307 NEW YORK AVENUE, NW, SUITE 700, WASHINGTON, DC 20005 (202) 383-9005

Appendix III

Possible consolidation of 73 current interest areas into a smaller number of categories.

Headings could stand by themselves (e.g. "Social psychology and interaction") or with subheadings ("... Including socialization, emotions, and small groups")

Hierarchical clustering of ASA areas of interest, 2001, all members



Appendix IV

Comments from Section Chairs

Lynn Smith-Lovin

Works for me: gets my two big areas (social psych, gender), and I have no trouble with emotions being subsumed under social psych...at least the way I study them. So, it would work well for me personally. Cheers, Lynn

2. Scott Feld:

I appreciate your and your committee's efforts to update the area labels, and also appreciate your request for feedback on how it seems to fit our needs. So, I will give you my thoughts:

1) As Chair of the Rationality and Society section, there does not seem to be any label that fits well with the identity of my members. I know that we have a serious contingent of mathematically oriented theorists, but we also have a substantial group of non-mathematical people who are uncomfortable with thinking that rationality requires mathematics. It is possible that our needs could be met with a label of "Theory" combined with a sublabel of "Rationality". However, the currently suggested label of Theory, Knowledge, Science, Religion seems much too broad. "Theory" with its components of classical, contemporary, theory construction, rational choice, conflict theory, ethnomethodology, etc. would seem plenty broad enough.

2) Also, having focused my attention on that designation, I would have trouble with it as someone interested in religion as well-- I expect that Science and Knowledge have some coherence, but Religion tends to involve a very different set of institutions-- so I don't think Religion people would feel well represented with that global label.

3) As one of several mathematical sociologists who combine interests in social networks and rational choice, I am comfortable with representing my interests under a broader rubric of mathematical theory or formal theory or systematic theory. However, many of us have struggled to distinguish our interest in mathematical theory from quantitative methodology, and the current label of quantitative approaches conflates the two. I think that quantitative methodology should not be covered by the same label as formal theory.

4) An area of "theory construction" might appeal to people like me as well as certain compatible others.

5) I wonder if it might be useful to have an area of "experimental methods"

These last two suggestions are not intended to add complexity to an already challenging task. However, any effort to make a contemporary list of labels should look for areas that have previously not been adequately labelled as well as reducing the old labels. The factor analysis procedures you have used necessarily gives less attention to areas that are less travelled, but distinctions may be MORE important at the periphery,

rather than less.

Good luck on the task. Please let me know if I can be of any assistance.

3. Eileen Crimmins:

I am responding as the Chair of the Aging and the Life Course Section. My reaction is that the Life Course is a meaningful identity to many Sociologists - more so than Social Gerontology. I would think that it would be better to use the words that have been already used to characterize our section. There is a lot of emphasis on life course work now - whereas Social Gerontology almost has a Social Work interpretation.

4. David Heise:

I am quite comfortable classifying myself in "Social psychology and interaction", "Quantitative approaches", and "Qualitative approaches". Since I'm happy, maybe I should say no more. However, I do suspect that some of my colleagues (like Bill Corsaro and Donna Eder), as well as many symbolic interactionists, might be happier if the first of these classifications were named something like "Social psychology, interactionism, and socialization". On the other hand, Kevin is on your committee and I defer to his opinion on this.

Thanks for letting me see the results of the cluster analysis. An interesting approach!

5. Neil Fligstein:

I think fewer is better. But, I am a Luddite.

6. RUTH MILKMAN:

Thanks for taking on this project - it's a good idea and in many respects long overdue! Having said that, I would have thought "industrial sociology" was one of the archaic categories! And it might be good to have a new one that captures the "labor and labor movements" area which as you know is the section I chair... perhaps that could substitute for "industrial soc"?? best, RUTH

G. William Domhoff

I don't feel qualified to make an overall judgment, but it looks good to me from my vantage point on the parts I have some sense of, and I respect the kind of work that went into the new categories, and political sociology is still on the radar, which has to be my main concern as political sociology section chair at this juncture, so I feel comfortable saying I see no problems with it.

Congrats on some fine work,

8. Jeanne Ballantine:

Hi there! I understand that every section probably wants their little spot in the sun, so I respond with that in mind. About 2 years ago the Section on Teaching and Learning in Sociology went

through a name (and definitional) change. We are no longer "undergraduate", but all teaching and learning and SOTL-related issues. In other words, there is a "field" here distinct from Applied/Practice (of which I am also a member) and Sociology of Education and other section areas. We cross over all areas. Therefore, I feel very uncomfortable "in the name of collapsing categories" to try to collapse this one which really doesn't fit with other Sections. I am forwarding your message to other officers in our section for their reaction. And please understand, I am very sympathetic with the the goals and mission of your task force and hope we can get the number down and consolidate. I don't think this one is where to do it! Thanks for consulting us. Jeanne Ballantine

9. Steve Warner

I certainly wouldn't be happy to see soc. of religion become a subset of theory (which is another section I belong to). I can see linking soc of relig with soc of science, because both study institutional sectors, but the linkage with theory makes this look like it's based on citation counts. (Just because we cite Weber and Durkheim, that means we're theorists.) So I say nix.

Similarly, I don't like linking political with comp historical, two other sections I've been affiliated with. This again looks like the Weber club. Not a good way of defining subfields. I'd link political, family, religion, and science as institutional sociologies. But I have to admit that some of my colleagues would link religion and culture, a tendency I fight against all the time.

Do you want me to pass this by the council of our section? You've taken on a Herculean task (=Aegean stables) and I don't envy you.

10. David S. Meyer:

Although I agree with nesting cbm in politics and social change, I think many of my colleagues would see that as too state-oriented for their concerns, which include small group interaction, culture, religion, and discourse. I'm not sure what a better way to do this is.

11. Clif Flynn:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed changes to the way members' interest areas are recorded. I am sure this was and is an incredibly challenging task.

As chair of ASA's newest section, Animals and Society, I have particular interests and concerns regarding this issue. For a member of new section, particularly one representing a relatively new area of study for sociologists, seeing one's subject area listed among the "areas of interest" is extremely important. As a practical matter, I know that there was confusion this year when some of our members attempted to renew their membership online. Several members initially did not renew their section memberships because they did not see any reference to "animals and society" among the areas of interest. They did not realize that "areas of interest" was separate from "sections." I would urge the task force to consider the connection between sections and areas of interest as they think about the choice of categories.

Secondly, while I agree with the notion that 73 interest areas are too many, I'm not sure that 16 is enough. I don't see a category where our members would neatly fit. The scholarship of human-animal studies overlaps many of the new proposed categories, but does clearly fall under any of them. Echoing my first point, if there is enough interest in a subfield to warrant a section, one could argue that it ought to qualify as an "area of interest."

There is a related argument that is both academic and political in nature. As a new, small, but growing area within sociology, I think it becomes critically important for our area to be listed in

some form as a category, and not resigned to “other” or to have to rely on individuals to volunteer some version of our subfield on their own. If “human-animal studies,” “animals and society,” “human-animal interaction,” or some other specific reference to our area doesn’t appear in the areas of interest, then I’m afraid that we run the risk of being of being marginalized before we even get started.

In sum, I urge the task force to include some reference to our section in the final version of the categories, so that a) it is clear to everyone, especially potential members, that our section exists; b) the areas of interest are inclusive; and c) “animals and society” is recognized as a legitimate area of sociological investigation.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns and for your work on this project.

Sincerely,

Clif Flynn, Chair
Animals and Society
cflynn@uscs.edu

12. Michele Lamont:

This looks good to me. My one suggestion would be to use "Cultural Sociology" (as opposed to "The sociology of culture") as the overarching name for this cluster of work. Cultural sociology is more inclusive and is already adopted by 1203 members.

13: Robin Wagner-Pacifici

As you no doubt know, this is a very busy time of year for academics. Thus, members of the sociology of culture section council have yet to respond to the questions you posed in your email below (questions I forwarded to them a couple of weeks ago). Nevertheless, in the interest of time I'll hazard a preliminary response myself. The Sociology of Culture Section is quite large (maybe the second or third largest in terms of membership in ASA sections), and is a big tent for people interested in culture broadly speaking. The sub-headings listed (Art/Music; Mass Communications/Public Opinion, and so forth) do capture many of the specific interests of section members, but they don't adequately capture the internally generated sub-field interests of our section. I am referring to what we call "Networks". These networks (intermittently active) are loose affiliations of members who, at various times, have organized mini-conferences, on-line conferences, and general email listserves. They are the following: culture and history; culture and theory; culture and religion; culture and ethnicity; culture and gender; culture and knowledge; political culture; symbolic boundaries; culture and cognition; identity construction; visual sociology; space and place. As you can see, only one of these "visual sociology" matches with the sub-fields provided in the spreadsheet. So I guess I'm wondering how, without generating an excessively long list, it might be possible to intercalibrate these with the sub-field terms already provided. Perhaps some key ones are those that are not simply couplings of culture and some other term. These would be: political culture; symbolic boundaries; identity construction; visual sociology; space and place - with perhaps the one "coupled" addition of culture and cognition (as that has seen alot of activity). Of course, as soon as I hear from council members, I'll pass along their reactions. In the interim, I hope this is helpful.

14. Denise Segura:

I have just found this email (I was out of town for a while and am amazingly backlogged which was not helped by a UCSB server change that moved 500 of my emails to some wierd location that I have yet to find) and thought to ask by when would you like a response? I would like to share this with the Sex and Gender Council.

Please advise,

Denise Segura, Chair. Sex and Gender Section
(5/19/04)

15. Phil Brown:

Environment fits in your 'place and env" cluster, but I don't think development does -- to me development is political economy , and fits in your cluster "politics, conflict, social change"

Phil Brown
Professor of Sociology and Environmental Studies
Brown University

16. John Hall:

Thank you for this email, and for visiting this issue, which affects all of us, and bedevils departments as well, when they puzzle over doctoral examination and faculty specialty areas.

I have looked the clustering and categories primarily from the view of the Comparative and Historical Sociology section, which I currently chair, but also have several general observations.

COMPARATIVE AND HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY

This specialization is a wild card in the cluster analysis results, since it really bridges uneasily among [1] epistemological and methodological interests, [2] an ontological commitment, and [3] various substantive emphases. The subfield is committed to developing methodologies to research social phenomena in their historicities, and deploying those methodologies to the entire range of social phenomena that are subject matters of sociology.

Methodologically, that commitment leads, ultimately, comparative and historical sociologists to invoke the whole gamut of sociological methodologies -- qualitative comparison, historical narration, quantitative analysis in the problems it encounters with historical and comparative inquiry, and even qualitative sociology insofar as it is used for historical purposes, for example, in oral histories. But the central concern remains with analyzing social phenomena in their historicities.

Substantively, it is true that historical sociology has had a very strong concentration of people interested in political and economic aspects of macro historical change. One thinks of Weber, Bendix, Moore, Wallerstein, Tilly, Skocpol, Goldstone, and many others. However, just as historians themselves have taken what can be called a sociological turn' over the past 150 years [and more so in the last half century], the substantive topics approached by historical sociologists have spread out to encompass the widest range of sociological phenomena. My own emphases for

example, have been on cultural and religious history. Others have been in the historical emergence and differential development of economies, organizational forms and institutionalized structures, or in education, families, stratification, race/ethnicity, gender, crime... the list could go on and on, you see.

Thus, it would be a major mistake, in my view, to fold comparative and historical sociology within the 'politics, conflict, change' category. This is so, first, because the strong methodological emphasis transcends the substantive category, and second, because the substantive interests of comparative and historical sociologists transcend it as well.

On a purely logical basis, it seems to me that it makes sense [as we view it in my department] to build sociology on a three legged methodological stool - quantitative, qualitative, historical/comparative, and to treat these methodological commitments as on a separate axis, cross cutting substantive interests. This solution also makes sense in terms of the cluster analysis, I think, if one looks at the [roughly parallel] numbers of individuals claiming these three areas.

Simply put, we shouldn't let the substantive alignments of methodologies at any given moment dictate their categorical status. Even if, for example, the cluster analysis showed a clustering of 'stratification' and 'quantitative,' they ought not be categorized together. The same holds for comparative and historical sociology.

A similar point holds for theory, which I discuss below.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Labels and subdisciplinary emphases come and go, but it would be nice to provide a [shifting] set of categories for member self identification, so long as it includes the possibility of people listing specialities not included.

The cluster analysis is helpful as a first cut, but it shouldn't dictate final categorizations.

I am not a quantitative sociologist, and thus not very conversant with cluster analysis. However, I wonder whether it has the possibility of generating alternative cluster orderings, in a way like factor analysis with alternative rotations. To put the matter differently, what would a Q-factor analysis look like, in which, in which member affiliations could be treated as cases? This might give a way [or maybe cluster analysis has a way?] of 'rotating' the variational space to alternatives. I raise this because obviously some of the clusterings are more meaningful than others.

Beyond that, some clusters don't well reflect what we should be thinking of as sociological clusters, in quasi theoretical terms. Social policy, for example, shouldn't be theoretically reduced to a category of family and life cycle, even if member affiliations make it turn out that way. They better belong with 'application and practice.'

'Work, economy, and organization' might be reworded to use the term 'social organization,' which is both old [Chicago school?] and worth reviving, especially since organizational studies are increasingly ecological, and the term 'organizations' is more specific [though admittedly it is a better institutionalized subdiscipline at the moment].

The 'theory' category seems theoretically incoherent [!]. Better put, there is an uneven relation between the items categorized and the culture category. For my money, it would be better to put

'religion' with culture. 'Science/technology' sits uneasily in any category, though one way around this would be to call the category 'theory, knowledge, science, technology.'

'Stratification...' and 'Race...' might be collapsed as 'class, race/ethnic, education.'

I hope this is helpful. Good luck with your deliberations!

John

54673