Melvin L. Kohn: Linking Social Structure and Personality

by Glen H. Elder, Jr.

W.L. Thomas once wrote a thoughtful essay about the Great Depression which outlines a framework for the study of social structure and personality. This framework soon came into its own spurred on by research during the Second World War and subsequent era. Mel Kohn's sociological career had its beginnings in the buoyant postwar era of social science. But from the start, Kohn was pioneering bridge to many aspects of contemporary study in the field of social structure and personality.

Across more than 30 years of inquiry, Kohn and his colleagues have directed their attention to the explication of relations between people's location in the social order and their behavior. Two perspectives are involved. One focuses on the process by which the social imperatives of a position make a difference in how people actually function—how they think, feel, and behave. The other examines the choices of the individual, such as the selection of a job, marital partner, and method of parental discipline. Values provide clues to such choices and their origins are often found in the imperatives of social roles and positions. Both perspectives are expressed in Kohn's sociological works.

More striking yet is the research "project" which Mel has directed over so many years, especially as Chief of the Laboratory of Socio-Environmental Studies at the National Institute of Mental Health. Through this model and to Mel's inner-directedness that much of his current research reflects the legacy of the 1963 essay.

This essay marked the beginning of a new approach to the study of social structure and personality, as did his 1960 transition to Chief of the Labora-

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The 1986 presidential elections brought out a record number of candi-
dates, with 35 individuals from 36 states running for the office.
A number of inquiries by mem-
bers has led to this decision to
publish this retrospective on the
election, I hope it will answer most of the questions that
might have arisen and not been an-
swered in any way in the August 1986
Footnotes. I will proceed in the follow-
ing way: (1) review voting patterns over the
past seven elections; (2) describe in de-
tail the Hare Method as it was em-
ployed in the 1986 election; (3) present
the results of the voting in
the 1986 election. Please note that
the final vote totals for Gans, Etzioni
and Smelser are different from the
results published in August Footnotes. Due
to a computer error, the count was stop-
ped at the lower number previously re-
ported when a majority for Gans was
assured. When this error was dis-
covered, the votes were recounted and
all ballots checked; the results published
here are official and final. In accord
with the ASA Constitution, all en-
voyes and ballots are retained in stor-
ge for 18 months.
Table 1 presents the voting patterns
from a different point of view. It shows the number of votes received by each
candidate for each round. Table 3 helps
answer the question whether there
might have been a candidate who was
evergreen second-choice performer at
which might have been obscured by
the Hare Method. For this election, in
effect, Table 3’s supporters harkened
emerged with the Hare Method, at least as regards the relative strength of the top
five candidates.
Many people asked if it would be
better to rank order all candidates or only
vote for the one or two people about whom
they felt most strongly. The fact
that it took all five rounds to achieve a
majority suggests that in the majority of
cases those ranked all candidates had
more voice in the outcome than
those who did not. It is not the case,
for course, of those whose first choice was
Etzioni or Gans.
Given the fact that the percentage of
eligible members voting has ranged

Table 1: 1986 PRESIDENTIAL VOTE TOTALS, 1980-1986

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>First</th>
<th>Second</th>
<th>Third</th>
<th>Fourth</th>
<th>Fifth</th>
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<td>3348</td>
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<td>493</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981</td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
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<td>729</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>680</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>3213</td>
<td>3324</td>
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<td>529</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>680</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>3213</td>
<td>3324</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>3213</td>
<td>3324</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>680</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of votes cast* 3213

Table 2: 1986 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, BY ROUNDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Round</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>4th</th>
<th>5th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Round 1</td>
<td>3348</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>723</td>
</tr>
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<td>Round 2</td>
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<td>680</td>
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<tr>
<td>Round 3</td>
<td>3213</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round 4</td>
<td>3213</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round 5</td>
<td>3213</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>680</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*See note at bottom indicating percentages on their balls, the number of votes cast becomes progressively smaller.

In the Hare Method of voting, voters are asked to rank order the candidates. This
implies that at some point one candidate
will emerge with a majority of the votes
in a particular round. At the end of round 1, the candidate with the lowest
number of votes is dropped from the cont-
est, and her/his votes redistributed
accordance to the second choice rankings
from 36% to 5% regardless of the num-
ber and gender of the candidates. One
may now ask who elects ASA presi-
dents? Since the envelopes and the bal-
lots have long since been
may be able to shed some light on this
question with a small-scale study. We
promise to keep you informed.—
WIDA

Kohn, continued

Carrle Schoenbach, among others, were closely with Mel and Carmi in
cross-national extensions to Poland
(1978) and Japan (1979). The Polish
survey, also carried out by Reiss and
co-workers, was helped along in some
way, especially through the
international theme for the
Chicago meeting of 1987, Mel is busily
engaged in developing cross-national
themes sessions involving scholars from
many countries.

Many have come Mel’s way, including the Ernest Burgess Award for
Family Studies, an invitation to the Cen-
ter for Advanced Study in the Social
Sciences, and election as fellow of the
American Academy of Arts and Scien-
ces. He has received decorated for his
work, including the tuning his in-
forming in the Laboratory of Social
Psychology. Melvin L. Kohn’s career is
nothing short of an academic success story. All in all, the post-1974
era witnessed an extraordinary effort to
determine the generalizability of the
interpretive model linking job con-
ditions and psychological functioning.
As reemerged in Weidman 1983, Mel,
Carmi, and their colleagues
found the model held up remarkably
well across groups and cultures.
If we ever doubted philosopher Adam
Smith’s assertion on the molding in-
fluence of the occupational life, the Lab’s re-
search on work and personality has
given us more reason to believe. From
every conceivable angle, the analysis on
the storyline remains the same; work affects personality, and personality
influences work. With conditions for work
and personality are both stable, the
results published in August Footnotes. Due
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Table 3: VOTES RECEIVED BY EACH CANDIDATE FOR EACH RANK

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<tr>
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<th>3rd</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3348</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etzioni</td>
<td>3348</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>502</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gans</td>
<td>3324</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reiss</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smelser</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallerstein</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>680</td>
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OCTOBER 1986

Footnotes

Monograph on Branch Campuses

The ASA Teaching Resources Center has commissioned several monographs on
teaching in sociology. One monograph focuses on the
special context of the branch campus. In many western
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