

Consultant Sociologist

The Musings of an Applied Sociologist

Applied Sociologist

A monthly conversation among Applied Sociology members of The Australian Sociological Association

Social Change

Professional Development

Alan Scott MA, PhD
Applied Sociologist



TASA The Australian Sociological Association



Understanding our world, making a difference

The Musings of Applied Sociologist: A monthly conversation among Applied Sociology members of The Australian Sociological Association

Alan Scott

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sjaicb@midcoast.com.au

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Introduction

Each month, from mid-2011 to December 2019, long time TASA member and Applied Sociologist, Alan Scott, wrote about Sociology from the point of view of those outside of academia. He engaged with Sociologists working in a range of occupations and industries and those working as paid consultants. In some ways he was working at the fringes of Australian Sociology, and writing to a particular audience whose interests and questions were outside the mainstream sociology of TASA.

In my reading of his monthly entries, one important point that stands out is his insistence that Sociology and Sociologists should engage with public debate in ways that other social scientists have done, and continue to do. Professions such as Economists, Psychologists and Historians are regularly evident on the ABC and SBS, as well as local ABC radio stations and Radio National. It may be the populist push on the ABC, but it is frustrating to watch a program like 'The Drum' where they clearly discuss 'sociological issues' without bothering to invite Sociologists onto their panel. Instead, 'social commentators' – who seem confident (or arrogant) enough to talk about almost any issue without recourse to evidence, literature or research. Sociologists have taken to social media with vigour but our engagement with mainstream media remains underwhelming. This clearly troubled Alan Scott and he admonished sociologists for their absence in this arena.

Another problem was that students that Alan engaged with had a negative view of Sociology seeing it as 'useless' or not providing a path to a fulfilling job or career. However, at the same time, and also engaging with students, Alan noted that many were indeed 'practicing' Sociology in their various occupations and careers, and often acknowledged so, without recourse to a body of knowledge or a community of like-minded people within their organisation. He views this vacuum as an opportunity for organisations like TASA to engage the broader audience of sociologically-inspired colleagues outside of academia.

Alan Scott's biggest project is his aspiration to see the status of 'Applied Sociology' lifted and recognised as a legitimate career activity. Alan himself spent many years as a consultant sociologist across a number of sectors, from government to private and non-for-profit organisations. Over the decades, a number of prominent TASA members have also pursued careers, or part of their career, as applied or consultant sociologists.

Alan Scott's enthusiasm and persistence has paid dividends. As far back as April 2012, Alan noted that of the more than 80 Sociological Associations around the world, TASA was just one of three national organisations that formally acknowledged and catered for Applied Sociologists. As well, seemingly through his own efforts at alerting other national bodies to the perceived shortcoming, another three organisations responded to his letters stating that applied sociology was on the agenda in the forthcoming year.

TASA is at the forefront of recognising the important role of Applied Sociology. At the TASA Executive meeting at the TASA 2015 Conference in Cairns, a presentation outlined the need for a more formal role for Applied Sociology. A specially arranged SGM ratified the decision in early 2016. Current Applied Sociology Executive member, Catherine Robinson, has a wealth of knowledge, especially in the not-for-profit area and will bring this wisdom to the position.

When the TASA Executive Officer, Sally Daly, and I were discussing the possibility of compiling the 100 or so monthly emails, into a book format, we were wanting to cherish the dedication of TASA members such as Alan, who have made TASA a dynamic organisation. In reading through each monthly email, I have come to fully appreciate the breadth of Alan's understanding of Sociology. On behalf of the TASA Executive, I invite you to read or browse this book and hope that it adds to the appreciation of Alan Scott, Applied Sociology, and the growth of TASA.

Dr Roger Wilkinson

The practical side of Sociology: August 2011

Having said I will take over from Anthony Hogan as Convenor of the Applied Sociology Thematic Group, I want to thank Anthony for all the hard work he has put in to keeping us going, and to say “Hello” to you now that I am not just a name on the list. I have just looked at the CV I sent to Anthony, who has since distributed it to you, and see that I need to apologise for the uncorrected errors (mostly grammatical or spelling) that were in it. However, it gives you some idea of my background. I have tried to keep in touch with academia but most of my work has been in dealing with issues that were of concern to people at various levels in the community, by presenting them with an analysis of the issue from a sociological perspective.

At the first SAANZ Conference (the predecessor to TASA) we were told by our guest speaker (from England) that at his University, sociology was considered to be a suitable subject for Ph.D. candidates only. When I was doing my M.A., I was rebuked by some lecturers for suggesting ways in which their sociological theories could be applied. I was told that sociology should be kept as a pure science and not sullied by practical applications. Despite all this negativity, I have always believed that sociology has to be shown to have practical applications or it will die on the vine of academia.

Of course there have been many others who have tried to demonstrate sociology’s practical side. Two that I have found inspiration from are Ferdinand Tönnies and his later disciple Piotr Sztompka. These sociologists have concentrated on the practicality of sociology to help people in various communities to understand what is happening. However, in my experience, their broad applications have largely been ignored in academia.

I see TASA as providing a professional identity that should be equal to other professional organisations such as psychology, chemistry, economics etc for its members. This is not so important for those working in academia because their professional identity is confirmed by their department. However those of us working outside academia need the strength of professional identity. I see the Applied Sociology Group as a means of providing this strength for those working outside of academia. The *Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* (1994 Ed) tells people that “the notion of applied sociology is neither a discrete and developed area of the discipline nor a term which is commonly used by sociologists. It raises problems of ethics and professional autonomy”. The *Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* (2006 Ed) simply says “Applied Sociology See: POLICY RESEARCH”. We still have a lot to prove. We need to believe in our discipline and, if necessary, flaunt it. I have spent many years now being the lone sociologist in the midst of people from other disciplines and know how lonely that can be. Now that I have time on my hands I would like to devote some of it to help put a much better understanding of the practical application of sociology and those of us who are applying it.

In the meantime, if it is all getting too much for you, feel free to email me at sjaicb@midcoast.com.au.

Alan Scott

Aims for the future: September 2011

Last weekend I went to a Volunteer Marine Rescue exercise at Camden Haven, NSW. We spent the weekend going through the processes necessary for saving life at sea and testing it out on the ocean. On the way home I was reminded just how tenuous life can be on the land. Whilst driving home along the Pacific Highway, my car was clipped by a semi-trailer, thrown across the road, rolled over and became a total wreck. I, and my three passengers miraculously were able to walk away without a scratch. At the same time I was reminded how caring complete strangers can be. People stopped and came to help. Ambulances arrived and insisted we should be checked out at the hospital. The head of Marine Rescue, Coffs Harbour, was told and immediately drove two hours in the dark to check on us and drive us home when we were released. The next morning the regional manager was at my door and the NSW Head of Marine Rescue telephoned me, to make sure I was alright and offer assistance if needed.

I would like you to see our Applied Sociology Thematic Group, not just as providing a place for papers to be published or an occasional meeting but as a backup for your professional life. I hope we can develop it as a place where you can get help for cares and concerns your professional life brings. Being a professional sociologist outside of university usually means you are struggling to make your professional contribution among people who have little or no idea what sociology is about. I hope we will be able to find ways in which we can support each other, further our own professional development and make a real sociological contribution to our society.

I intend to keep in contact with our group by email on a monthly basis. I hope this will remind you that you are thought about by your professional Association, that through this medium we can share information (if you help by passing information on to me), and provide for the group a collegiate atmosphere for those of us who do not have the support of a college or university.

My piece of information for this month is probably old hat to some but may be new to others: The 'Sociologists Outside Academia' section of the [British Sociological Association](#). They see themselves as "a group of who have come together through our common experience of being members situated largely outside of academia or who do not fit the 'traditional' profile of institutionally based sociologists. Their aims are to strengthen the idea that we are first and foremost sociologists regardless of our circumstances. Raise the profile and value of sociologists working largely outside the academy (including post-graduate students who may not wish to, or are unable to remain in the academy). Raise the status of sociological work undertaken beyond an academic context. Raise awareness of the support needed for sociologists outside academia and they have a journal with interesting articles.

Being an Applied Sociologist: October 2011

How can we get Professional Development outside Universities?

Professional development is an acknowledgment that, even in the profession we have been trained in, there are many things we still have to learn. We need to know there are different ways of looking at things we think we know and there are things that no one knew, coming to light. In some Applied Sociology situations you can find yourself dealing with a succession of unrelated research that demand different approaches to the research methods you think you know well. There are also times when you can see that the application of old knowledge from one area can be applied to an entirely different area, even when most of you colleagues are telling you, you are wrong.

I once advertised for a sociologist to work with my research team. One applicant wrote that they had just completed their bachelor's degree and now knew all about sociology. Such overconfidence says something about poor teaching and misses a point that one recently famous American has said "There are also unknown unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know."

I have seen work badly done because the person doing it relied on what they thought was a well tried approach and never stopped to ask if there could be a better way. Both Guba and Lincoln (1989) and I (Scott 1980) have argued, that to make the best use of information collected, the social scientist needs to approach their material with an open mind not a theory. They must interpret the information collected so its interpretation is clearly representative of an agreed understanding with the people providing the data and not simply fitted into the researcher's theoretical assumptions, even if the results do not conform to any existing theory. Okely (2001) also illustrates this point, quoting from Leach's (1967) participant observer based study in a single village. In his study, he demonstrates that a large scale quantitative study on 57 villages (Sarkar & Tambiah 1957), (which included the village in his study), had missed so many important details that the validity of their conclusions was in serious doubt. He observes that the numerical apparatus, in which their conclusions are embedded, is largely, a complicated piece of self-deception.

One way in which we can save ourselves from this kind of situation is by developing a Professional Development approach based on using our Applied Sociology Group as a network. An on line place where we can ask "Hey, has anyone else had to deal with this type of study? How did you approach it?" We have then opened ourselves up to a mentoring situation where we engaging in professional development by being ready to learn from others. If none of us have ever dealt with such a situation, we can all make suggestions and perhaps all of us learn something new. I will come back to this topic again soon.

Try not to get into too much complicated self-deception.

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Research and Social Change: November 2011

Sociology: n. the study of the development, structure, and functioning of human society.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary

One issue that has been on my mind over the last few weeks has been the phenomenon of people power. There have been the riots in Britain, the Arab Spring in the Arab world, Occupy Wall Street, and similar demonstrations have been held in 670 U.S. towns, and more than 900 towns and cities around the world, including Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. They are mainly protesting about social and economic inequality, corporate greed, corruption and influence over government – particularly from the financial sector and lobbyists. Many of the participants have been mobilised by social networking, internet sites or mobile phones. Mostly people have been seeking change to the present social structure. To try to stop them, the politicians in power have used the police or the military to break the protests up but they keep coming back.

I have seen or heard journalists, psychologists, politicians, even economists, commenting on these events, but I have yet to see or hear a sociologist being asked to comment. I can imagine one or two Ph.D. students thinking about it as a topic but even if they take it up it will be several years before they finish and perhaps then it will have little relevance. Yet explaining what is happening in society now is supposed to be our specialisation. You would therefore expect a sociologist would be the first to be asked for comment. This raises the question of whether our discipline is dynamic enough to offer an explanation of the ‘development, structure, and functioning’ of society as it happens or can we only think about it in the abstract over time?

Suppose a miracle happened and tomorrow morning, your boss came to you and said: “You are a professional sociologist, I want you to give me an assessment of the social changes likely to occur because of these ‘Occupy’ demonstrations and how they could impinge on this business (or department).” What would you say in your report?

Perhaps some of the things you could consider are:

1. That demonstrations by the ‘silent majority’ are not new and are recorded through history.

Ancient Egypt 1152 BC. A demonstration by the equivalent of Public Servants because of corruption and the loss of supplies. See Romer, J. (1984:118-23, 124.), *Ancient Lives*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London.

England 1832. A Trade Union was formed (Not by the Communist Party but by Members of the Methodist Church) for which they were arrested tried and transported to Australia. This generated such an outcry and 800,000 people signed a petition for their release and their supporters organised one of the first successful marches in the UK. The men were released and trade unions permitted. See Marlow, J. (1985), *The Tolpuddle Martyrs*, Grafton Books, London.

More recent examples are of course those that have filled the TV screens over the past year or so that have resulted in significant social change.

2. Perhaps your report could then point to the fact that when a large number of ordinary people become sufficiently concerned about a particular abuse of power and protest, and are prepared to continue protesting, despite the application of force against them, then social change is likely to occur in the area of their concern. To this you can add something of Tönnies concern about the loss of community, Durkheim’s concern about anomie and moral chaos, Gasset’s concern

about the decay of mass culture and the dangers of massification, Weber's point of the iron cage of bureaucracy and instrumental, manipulative rationality. To this you should perhaps add Sztompka's point that change has an unequal influence on the various components of society, and does not have an inevitable impact, or necessarily any impact, on all sections of society.

3. Finally, you will have to assess where your organisation sits in the social structure and judge whether or by how much the particular issues of social change being demanded will have on its operations.

If you feel like it, I would like to see your answer to the question. Then perhaps those of us going to the Conference can have a discussion about the question.

Sociology in the non-academic society: December 2011

The big event in the Sociological calendar in November was, of course, the Annual Conference. I had originally thought that I would not be able to afford to go, but almost at the last moment my finances improved to the extent that I could make it. I enjoyed my time there but understandably, there were very few from this section who could attend. Reflecting on what I got out of the conference; the most important thing for this Group was an increased realisation that the factors that contribute to the professional standing of those who work in academia is very different to how professional standing is gained by those who work outside.

To operate effectively in both groups you must have a broad grasp of sociological theory, research methods and how and where they can be applied. The academic usually has the dual role of passing on knowledge to new comers in the discipline and regularly publishing their own work, either in writing or as conferences papers. Thus the academic sociologist is usually concerned with people and issues within the discipline.

As you well know, for those working outside academia, the environment is quite different. Here you are working alongside people who have no understanding of sociology, and other professionals who already know that their discipline can solve all the problems of the world, be they economists, engineers, psychologists or social workers. Over this environment you have a boss who doesn't want to know what theory you use and is not impressed with two pages of reference. He or she simply wants to know what you can contribute to solving the issue that is concerning them at the moment. In other words they do not want a nicely balanced academic paper; they want, in the briefest form possible, your assessment of what should be done. To do this means that you have to know your discipline thoroughly, not by rote but as a body of knowledge that you can incorporate, and mix to make what you know, able to be integrated into a larger whole. This means you may possibly have experienced what Thomas Huxley once noted: "the great tragedy of science is the slaying of a beautiful hypothesis by an ugly fact". At the conference, one sociologist employed outside academia, who is in a position to give undergraduates real sociological work experience, complained that he had found that sociology departments rejected his offers with the response that they didn't want to get involved in that sort of thing, whereas other departments were eager to send students. There is a lot of understanding still to be developed.

If you are about to holiday, have a great time, if you are to continue working, I hope the stress levels will be low.

Applying sociology beyond academia: January 2012

This month's letter is by way of a report. On the 'Draft Threshold Learning Outcomes for Sociology, Consultation Paper'. As you will know from the December TASA E-list News:

That TASA, as the peak body for Sociology in Australia, has been tasked with developing Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs), or minimum standards, for Australian undergraduate Sociology degrees. A process has been undertaken to develop draft TLOs for Sociology, and TASA is currently seeking feedback on them. In response to this request I offered the following feedback:

Having read the Consultation Paper and the British Benchmark Statement I would like to comment on two matters in particular.

First, the third paragraph of 'Threshold Learning Outcomes for Sociology'.

The paragraph consists of two sentences:

1. "As a discipline, Sociology is characterised by empirically based social research and by carefully examined social theory. Sociology students develop skills in critical thinking, self-direction, collaboration and communication."
2. "Graduates of sociology programs are well equipped to go into a variety of careers across a range of government and non-government sectors, particularly those that require high level research and critical thinking skills."

I am not sure that the first sentence is entirely true and even if it is, the second sentence does not automatically follow. In my role as convenor of the Applied Sociology Thematic Group, I keep in touch with my members on a monthly basis through an email where I highlight issues of concern to those who work outside universities. In the December 2011 email I raised the following matters. I then copied the email and the responses I received from you about my comments.

Second, I referred to the statement made in item seven in the 'Engagement' section which reads: Demonstrate an ability to communicate sociological ideas, principles and knowledge to specialist and non-specialist audiences using appropriate formats.

I then used the illustration I used in my article in the last issue of *Nexus* (Vol 23 No. 4) on sociology outside universities.

One Professor from Melbourne University was given a large grant by one of the mining giants to do a study of the towns they had set up and provide recommendations for future towns. The results of his study were written up and bound in 16 volumes. When he presented the study to the Company Board he set out the volumes before them and told them what they contained would provide the guidance the company needed. The Managing Director, said: "That's no use, where is the executive summary?" The Professor's response was; "If you want to know what to do, read the report." And walked out. Neither understood the other. They each had their normal way of doing things and could not understand what had gone wrong.

To this I added: The approach to knowledge and its application outside universities is very different to what is required in academia. In universities, as your paper very properly indicates, you have to demonstrate you understand the breadth and depth of the discipline. Whilst this is a basic requirement in both arenas, in academia it is tested, in other places it is expected.

A third point I raised, dealt with the continuing educational issue which is not covered in their paper and I acknowledged that the committee may consider it to be outside of their remit. However, having raised it, it might get some action from somewhere. To cover this point I attached a copy of my October email to you where I raised the question 'How can we get Professional Development outside Universities?' To this I added: Most professions today require their members to undertake regular professional development programmes or lose their status as a member of the profession. Even the company that provides my house cleaner requires their cleaners to undertake regular in service training. If sociology ignores this approach it is in danger of being diminished in the eyes of employers and other professions. It would be helpful if university sociology department could formally develop professional develop programmes jointly with people working as sociologists outside academia. I suggest that both areas of sociology would benefit from this approach.

Well that is what I have been up to, I hope you approve. There has not been any response from the committee as yet. Any feedback you care to make will be gratefully accepted.

Professional Sociology: February 2012

There was reaction to my January email, I am glad to say, which produced responses as most of you will have seen, from Eileen Clark, Dina Bowman and Christine Walker. Thank you for your comments. However, to all you reluctant professionals, I can tell you, you are indeed a Professional, albeit a lowly one, because The Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations, says so.

The first occupations identified as being a [Profession](#) were 'the Law', 'Medicine' and 'the Church (CE)'. What marked out a profession was that: 1. It is was a full-time occupation and 2. It required a university qualification. Over time two more requirements seem to have been added: 3. There must be a national association and 4. It has a code of professional ethics, and in some instance a fifth requirement is a government licence. Since the late 19th century, groups outside of the first three professionals have said: 'We have the same kind of requirements as you, so, ipso facto, we are also professions'.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines a 'profession' as 'a paid occupation, especially one involving training and a formal qualification' and a 'professional' as someone 'being paid to use their skills rather than being an unpaid amateur.

Given all this, I hope we can agree that 'Sociology meets these criteria and can therefore be identified as a 'Profession'. However, I believe we still have a problem. The Classification of Occupations defines Social Professionals as those who "research and study human behaviour, society and institutions from current and historical perspectives, and verbally render spoken statements, and transcribe text and recorded spoken material from one language into another". Under this heading they pick out as the main professionals meeting this definition as:

- Historians
- Art Historians
- Cultural Historians
- Economic Historians
- Geographical Historians
- Interpreters
- Translators
- Under this they list the less important sub-groups i.e. 'Social Professionals not elsewhere classified'. Included in this group are:
 - Anthropologist
 - Archaeologist
 - Criminologist
 - Ethnographer
 - Geographer
 - Heritage Consultant
 - Linguist
 - *Parole Board Member
 - Political Scientist
 - Prehistorian

- Sociologist
- *Transport Analyst

It seems to me that under their definition of Social Professionals, historians are not the most appropriate. Except for 3*, the disciplines on the also ran list seem to be regarded as being university employees but not otherwise part of the general work force. However, 'History' should be in the same category. Possibly it is not realised that 'Sociology' and some of the others have members who are employed in the general workforce. This is perhaps, an image problem of our own making. We tend suggests that we have little to offer the community outside the university. The rest of the community sees us, if they see us at all, as being as obscure as a Heritage Consultants, Parole Board Members or Transport Analysts. Perhaps the standing of sociologists in the community and our classification under the 'Standard Classification of Occupations is something TASA needs to address. I look forward to your further comments.

Off shore Jobs: March 2012

The 'Good Weekend' supplement in a recent 'Sydney Morning Herald', featured an article by Greg Bearup about a person in Sydney who is making millions by providing a service that offers contacts for companies to outsource the work done by architects, accountants, lawyers, web designers, analysts, geologists, engineers and computer programmers and other 'knowledge workers'. He can find you a qualified person who lives in a society where your job can be done at, say \$5 per hour, instead of the \$50 per hour it would cost in Australia. We have got used to the situation where Australian manufacturing jobs or call centre jobs have gone overseas but I, at least, had not had occasion to think about the effects on the types of jobs, requiring higher degrees of skills and knowledge, that could be done overseas.

Having been alerted to this happening I started to look at what research was being done. I discovered that in 2007 Professor Alan S. Blinder of Princeton University, expected "that between 22% and 29% of all U.S. jobs are or will be potentially 'offshorable' within a decade or two". He notes that the criteria are not the job's skill or its necessary educational requirements, but rather whether the service "can be delivered to its end user electronically over long distances with little or no degradation in quality". In Australia, I found A/Prof. Stephen Chen and Hassan Kharroubi, from Macquarie University had indicated in their 2010 Australian business survey; that 36% of their respondents are currently offshoring, a further 21% are in the process of moving activities offshore and a further 12% were discussing it. Of those who were currently offshoring, the most common function offshored was finance/accounting (36%) followed by procurement (31%). So this is not some future dream, it is already happening. As one architect has said¹, "the conceptual work will still be done in Australia, but the detailed drawings and plans are beginning to be done overseas because it is cheaper and this change is moving at a staggering pace". As Bearup¹ also comments: "The offshoring tsunami rising off the coast of the First World – when it hits, it will profoundly change our economy and wash away the careers of many of the people reading this article." "There is a tectonic shift to society that is under way and this shift is going to be so significant it is going to change the way that we live our lives, and the way we do business. It is going to change everything." Associate Professor Julie Cugin, of the Australian School of Business (UNSW) is reported as saying "This is really, really scary. You think of the next generation. There is going to be far less job security, maybe reduced conditions and pay and a casualisation of the workplace. This has huge implications for our children and even for us now." (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 March 2012, p22).

What occurs to me in all this is, that sociology is a discipline which described itself as being 'Characterised by empirically based social research.' and proclaims it is about the 'analysis of the structure of social relationships as constituted by social interaction', but what is sociology, doing to make the community and the governments aware of the social consequences of offshoring as this article underlines or any other issue?

Sociologists for well over a hundred years have been indicating the consequences of profit driven social change. In 1776 Adam Smith (a pre-sociologist) wrote: 'A merchant is not necessarily the citizen of any particular country'. In 1887 Tönnies, with his concern about the growing power of the merchants, wrote:

'Trade tends, finally, to concentrate in one main market, the world market, upon which all other markets become dependent. The larger the area, the more evident the truth becomes that the leaders and creators of trade do everything that they do for the sake of their own profit. They put themselves into the centre of this area, and from their point of

view the land and labour of the country, like those of all other countries with which they deal, are actual or possible objects for investment and circulation of their capital, which is for them a means for augmenting their capital. In addition, the more the directors of actual work and production, as owners of the soil and other material factors and also as owners of labourers or purchased labour, conduct their business solely with a view to profit or increased value.'

And so on up to the present day. We know that Merchants, Traders, Big Business Multinationals, call them what you will, have as their motivator the increase of their profits. We also know that any technological development that will aid in this process will be used. However, because something can be done, it shouldn't mean that it must be done. Robertson, C., et.al, contend that "investors use different moral paradigms compared with consumer stakeholders, as a result the stakeholder role an individual occupies significantly influences their ethical evaluation of offshoring and outsourcing decisions." Most of the offshoring papers that I found were from business schools. I did not come across one from a sociology department. Yet if "the tsunami rising off the coast of the First World will profoundly change our economy and wash away careers", it ought to be in the sociologists court to confront the community with the consequences, before they happen.

I know it is hard to motivate the community to see it has the power to change what is happening. From the papers and research reports I have produced over the years, I can point to quite a few where I effected change in an organisation or an educational approach and some that actually did induce a change of the legislation about the way the community dealt with particular issues. To me, this is one area where applied sociology ought to be active. Applied Sociology takes the theoretical work and the accumulated data to actively demonstrate to the community what continuing down a particular path will mean and offer alternative solutions.

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p.s. If you want more horror stories read the essay 'www.yourjob.gone' by Anson Cameron,

Applied Sociology overseas: April 2012

This month my thoughts have taken me overseas. It got through to me that we are not alone. There are 82 sociological associations and in the main they assist in the interchange of sociology theory and practice among university staff.

It occurred to me that if we could locate any sections of other sociological associations that share our concern for sociologists outside academia and develop an international link where we might share information and ideas and perhaps help encourage the employment of sociologist in new organisations it could be beneficial to all of us.

However, having looked at the list of sociological associations there seems to be few who have a particular section for Sociologists, working outside of a University. In fact I could find only three. Ourselves, the British Sociological Association and probably one in the American Sociological Association. I contacted the convenor of the British Association and got an encouraging response and the news that there was another group in France and she would forward details. I have since written to the American, Canadian, South African and New Zealand Associations to see what their response might be. I now have two replies one from Canada which reads:

“Dr. Scott: thanks for the note. No, we don't have a sector that focuses on this. However, as of next year, we will have some sort of organization to help these individuals. I say this because this year we are announcing an award for “sociology practitioners” to be given each year as well as a scholarship for a student involved in applied research. So, we are working in that direction. Keep us in mind as you go forward. JIM”

And one from New Zealand:

While we don't have a specific section, I am aware that some (though not many) of our members are not in academia. I am happy to distribute your inquiry to our general membership, with a note to contact you if they fall into the relevant category. Would that be suitable? If not, feel free to suggest an alternative. Best wishes, Maxine

That is three encouraging responses so I will let you know how things develop in due course.

Whilst exploring in the international domain I came across the Russian ideas of what constitutes sociological organisation; you may find it interesting:

The Union of Sociologists of Russia is intended to unite all those who respect the history of national sociology, critically perceive and recognize its legacy and are ready to bear joint responsibility for the authority of sociological knowledge and the perception of a sociologist as a professional, responsible, and moral personality. The goal of the Union is the development of sociological science, education and practice on the basis of consolidating Russian sociologists in the interests of scientifically and practically contributing to the social and economical progress of the civil society and the strengthening of the welfare state ensuring the harmonious development of the people actively participating in labour activity and public life. The Union is intended to unite sociologists of Russia and sees its major task in creating conditions for resolving contradictions accumulated within sociology, increasing quality of fundamental and applied research, sociological education and enlightenment.

Congresses of the Union of Sociologists of Russia are held annually in Moscow with the traditional participation of internationally known scientists, professors, representatives of governmental and legislative bodies, public organizations, business, and foreign guests.

Defining what we do: May 2012

There were several responses to my last contact email suggesting that we use the Canadian descriptor 'Sociology Practitioner'. In addition one person also makes the point that "Perhaps we should use this instead of the turgid 'sociologists outside academe?'" They also report that a friend of theirs, was deeply opposed to any name or definition that identified someone by what they were not and adds, "'Practitioner' is certainly more positive than 'outside academe'. It does not define us by our relation to the (dominant) academy."

This prompted me look at word meanings. The word 'Practitioner' is defined in Samuel Johnson's dictionary (1755) as: "One who uses any sly or dangerous arts." Today, the Concise Oxford Dictionary (COD) tells us we have moved on a little from that and it now means "a person actively engaged in an art, discipline, or profession". (Presumably sly or otherwise.) So to that extent we can certainly make a claim to the descriptor but I think that will mostly be a personal choice. Some at least would see 'Sociologist' as sufficient. It would probably work better for us as a plural descriptor where, instead of using 'sociologists outside universities or academia' we can use 'Sociology Practitioners'. Our generic descriptor 'Applied' (Sociology) is defined by Johnson as an antiquated term meaning 'to keep busy' (at sociology). Although it seems the word has taken on a new life and now means (COD) 'practical rather than theoretical.' So 'Applied' sociology could be said to give a negative interpretation to mean "Non-theoretical Sociology". I don't even want to get into the discussion raised by the descriptors "Pure and Applied" (Sociology). In the end a name becomes what you make of it and that becomes its definition for you. Let me know what you think.

All this got me thinking how do we know we are 'doing' sociology? A skim through one or two fairly old applied sociology text books, brought me to seeing their usual approach was to raise a subject area, then add a few papers that fitted the subject. This seems to me to be what I would call the lawyer's approach. You have your given statements (theory) about the issue and you set about applying them. For me applied sociology is about the sculptor's approach. The sculptor gets a commission, the commission is not the problem, the problem is the block of granite. To solve the problem the sculptor must be ready to use any or all the sculpting techniques to get the desired result. This approach in sociology is not a one theory approach, it requires a wide knowledge of the discipline so that you can apply, blend or develop the best technique at each stage of the project, to arrive at a meaningful final product.

Academic changes: June 2012

This month I turn to a topic that is inside Universities, at least in Australia. It seems that 'Productivity' has become their new buzzword. The Vice-Chancellor of Sydney University recently wrote to his staff with the following message.

“As a research-intensive University, we are judged, and receive funding, based on our research performance. The University’s proposal is that assessments of academic staff will be based on their research outputs. ... The process will be based primarily on relative research performance on a University-wide basis.”

As a result of this policy it is reported that the University of Sydney will slash staff by 7.5%, with Vice-Chancellor Dr Michael Spence saying “We can no longer carry members of the university who are not pulling their weight: it is simply too expensive to do so.”

TASA has been looking at ways to get more recognition for sociologists. One avenue that has been explored is the ABS Classification of Occupations. The Bureau of Statistics has decreed that:

For “sociologist” to justify a separate occupational category, the number of professionals who primarily specialise and are practising in the sociology field must be statistically significant and comparable to other occupations within the “Social Professionals” Unit Group.

They also point out that University staff who teach Sociology are classified as “University Lecturers and Tutors” and not as sociologist.

Given the new decree from Sydney and other Universities about research output, it would seem that we can now claim that University staff is primarily employed in the exercise of their profession rather than any teaching role.

Whilst all this is going on, the world economy is falling apart and employment in commercial or government is rapidly reducing and this must reflect on the number of sociologists employed outside of Universities. The current membership of TASA is composed of 52% in academic appointments and 42% other work and 6% not identified.

It seem likely that at least some commercial and government employers may find it cheaper to hire university staff, who will now be looking for contract sociology projects, for any sociology work they may have, rather than meet the costs of employing their own sociologists.

Please share with us what you see happening in the world beyond the university.

In addition, TASA is keen to expand the services it can offer to those not in academia and if you can identify anything that would be of use, please let us know.

Political use of “crisis”: July 2012

Old theorists never die, they simply fade away.

Some years ago I was inveigled to go to hear a lecture from the latest psychologist on his marvellous new theory. When it came to question time I pointed out that I had heard bits taken from various older theorists, strung together without acknowledgment, to make what was now being billed as a challenging new theory. The people who had inveigled me to go said to me afterward, who were these people you were talking about. Theorists that had been important to me were no longer known. In itself there is nothing wrong with revamping older theories, as long as you show how and where you have drawn the ideas from. But because the theorists of the past tend to fade into the background, later generations understand less and less about them. Cahnman & Heberle make the point that Tönnies 1887 ‘Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft’, is well known to sociologists but few have read the book cover to cover and how many of us have followed through on his later development and redefinition of these early ideas in the 900+ other publications he wrote over the next 49 years?

In the practice of applied sociology, I have always found Tönnies a helpful theorist. Whether I have always used his ideas in the way he intended, is another matter. What I find helpful about Tönnies is that in 1887 he uncovered for us the foundations on which the 20th century was built and the 21st is still building.

One of the social issues that is currently of concern for people and communities in Australia, is the number of people losing their jobs – a social catastrophe for many families and communities. At the same time we have it being argued there is a need to import several thousand workers for the mining industry. Then we have several thousand other people in immigration detention doing nothing productive but costing the country a great deal of money.

In 1887 Tönnies was pointing out that the more extensive the commercial trading area, the more probable it is that the pursuit of profit for its proprietors will prevail over any or all the needs and concerns of other people. In recent times, Piotr Sztompka has drawn to our attention a new weapon that is underpinning the pursuit of profit and politics – the use of ‘crises’. Where once a ‘crisis’ was temporary and soon to be fixed, now, it is a chronic, permanent and endemic feature of modern society. Sztompka also observes that people have become accustomed to accept the recurrent or endemic ‘crises’, to enforce economic, political or cultural changes. They understand there will always be a crisis that is said to require social change to maintain the economic status quo. Where Tönnies identified the *gesellschaft* as the platform on which these social crises would be acted out, Sztompka extends this by arguing that the way to study social change is by identifying the effects of change so that the social trauma that is generated is laid bare.

Because a theory was promulgated what seems a long while ago, it doesn’t mean that it has no value. However, as Cumming (2000) has said; “The usefulness of a theory depends upon its ability to explain the present and predict the future”. Where does applied sociology stand in challenging the present overarching dominance of the need for profit and increasing profit against the needs of people? Can we afford to lay bare the social trauma generated by large scale redundancies? Dare we point out what these decisions do to the fabric of communities? Has applied sociology a role in critiquing the effects of political and economic policies?

Value of Arts degrees: August 2012

In *The Age* (Melbourne) (23 August 2012) Mehal Krayem, who calls herself “*a researcher-cum-sociologist-cum-writer-cum-teacher-cum-postgrad-student-cum-chocoholic*”, wrote an interesting article on the ‘Arts Degree’. She reported, that when asking High School students what they wanted to become; “there would be the usual chorus of lawyers, mechanics and journalists. But there were always the students who couldn’t tell you what they enjoyed and were certain they had zero passion for anything. Often these same students were bright, pensive and oozing with potential. For these students, I would often suggest the infamous, ever-relevant (drum roll please) Arts degree. More often than not I would get a disgusted ‘NO WAY!’ in reply. I was told repeatedly (by students and parents alike) that Arts degrees were for people who didn’t want to do anything productive with their lives. Those Arts students were the lazy, non-contributing, intellectual wastage of a modern society.”

She goes on to make the point that, “Over the years I’ve realized that the angst stems from the fact that Arts graduates don’t leave with a ‘title’ and in a world where what we do, not who we are defines us; this renders them title-less, somehow deficient. The fact that we can’t be pigeon-holed must be frustrating when the world is about speedy introductions and snazzy labels.”

I looked up Monash U’s Bachelor of Arts. There you can get a BA with a label, BA (Psychology) but not a BA (Sociology). The University of WA told me that the Bachelor of Arts (BA) can include the study of humanities, social and cultural studies, languages or music. They also told me that studying Arts equips you for every aspect of life. It enables you to discover your talents, interests and abilities and develop them fully. That an Arts degree helps you develop highly sought-after skills such as critical thinking, communication, reasoning ability and problem solving. But Mehal is right; it does not appear to give you a qualification that is marketable. Yet UWA boasts that its Arts graduates have become some of the highest achievers in the nation and include: state premiers, ambassadors, writers, journalists, musicians, business and community leaders.

I get the impression that the universities do not see sociology as a lifetime occupation. Sociology is just one of an eclectic group of useful bits that will get you to degree status but with no identifiable job label.

I have in my book collection “The Complete Encyclopedia of Illustrations” which contains all the original illustrations from the 1851 edition of “The Iconographic Encyclopedia of Science, Literature and Art” which set out to cover Mathematics, Astronomy, Natural Science, Military Science, Navel Science, Geography, History, Ethnology, Mythology, Religion, Fine Arts and Technology. The introduction to the present book tells us that: “In the mid-nineteenth century, a man (their sexist identification) was not considered fully educated unless he had a broad, deep and detailed knowledge of all areas of culture and human endeavour. This was expected to include a solid grounding in the scientific disciplines, an appreciation of art in all its manifestations, a store of mythological references and tales, considerable knowledge of geological wonders and oddities, plus a curiosity about technological developments.”

Later development in the 19th and 20th centuries invented ‘specialisation’. A broad education was no longer required. I can remember when organisations coming from the 19th century, such as ANZAAS, held an annual conference where all the disciplines came together and people could get insights into their own discipline by listening to presentations from others. Then, in the early 1980s the universities decreed that they would only fund attendance at conferences in one’s own discipline and organisation like ANZAAS died.

It seems to me that the Arts degree, at least in some places, is a left over from the 19th century and that sociology (together with other disciplines) is reduced to being just one of a number of possible useful areas that can be added together to give degree status to the broadly educated person, but not the perceived detailed skills that are expected in employable people.

So where does the Applied Sociologist get their identifiable skills for employment and a community recognition that a sociologist has skills, needed and usable by society? At the moment it seems only by dint of their own efforts. When will we see a BA (Sociology) or indeed a B. Soc?

Getting a Job: September 2012

My thoughts this month have turned to the question of jobs for Practitioners of Sociology. At a time when jobs are hard to get, can a Sociologist get a job outside academia? A look at the job adverts and the on-line employment agencies sites, will occasionally produce results. For instance, Advertised by 'Jobsearch' this month at: <http://www.jobsearch.com.au/>

Senior Sociologist

URS Corporation – 9020 – Brisbane QLD

Requisition Number: URS52922 Interest Category: Project/Program Management Interest Sub Category: Planning Job Title: Senior Sociologist Employment Category/Status: full-time Type of Position: Regular, Hire Country: Australia State/Province: Queensland City: Brisbane Minimum Requirements: Qualifications. Relevant degree and at least 8 years equivalent direct work experience. Current Driver's License in accordance with Queensland legislation. Effective and proactive management of time. From URS Corporation

URS is a professional services company providing engineering and environmental and expertise to businesses and communities within Australia and around the globe. Our Australian staff are dedicated to delivering technically excellent, cost effective, innovative and sustainable solutions tailored to specific project and client needs. We form a strong multi-disciplinary team bringing knowledge, talent, experience and passion to what we do. We operate with a global network of more than 50, 000 personnel in 34 countries. In Australia we have 10 offices with more than 850 professionals. Offices are located in: Adelaide, Brisbane, Broken Hill, Canberra, Darwin, Melbourne, Newcastle, Perth, Sydney and Tatura.

This position has now been filled.

The Federal Government's Job Outlook web site for Social Professionals (<http://joboutlook.gov.au/pages/occupation.aspx?code=2724>) describes their skills and the work they do as: "Social Professionals research and study human behaviour, society and institutions from current and historical perspectives, and verbally render spoken statements, and transcribe text and recorded spoken material from one language into another." They then give a 'clear' indication of who these people are: "Historians, Interpreters, Translators and Social Professionals" but they do not define who is a social professional. TASA needs to take this up.

Another site: <http://www.myfuture.edu.au/the%20Facts/Work%20and%20Employment/Occupations/Details.aspx?Anzsco=272499H>) does identify Sociologists and tells the reader that they may perform the following tasks: observe and investigate social groups and subjects such as the family, the community, education, industrial relations, crime, politics, minority and ethnic relations, poverty and mass communications research, collect and analyse data, often using computers record and interpret facts and figures and write reports undertake systematic interviews of selected individuals live in the community being studied to assist their own understanding.

Jobrapido (<http://au.jobrapido.com/>) lists (12 Sep) the following jobs for Sociologists:

- Social Scientist (Rural sociology)
- Company name not available, www.nrmjobs.com.au , 12 Sep 2012, East Maitland
- School Administrator
- Australian National University, www.anu.edu.au • 11 Sep 2012, Canberra
- Human Resources Manager, Western Australia

- URS Corporation , www.urscorp.com , 11 Sep 2012, City Of Perth
- Academic writers needed – Academic Writing
- Elance, www.elance.com , 3 Sep 2012, Australia
- Sociology Research – Research Academic Writing
- Elance, www.elance.com , 1 Sep 2012, Australia

Other sites, such as 'seek.com.au' or 'careerone.com.au' offer nothing. In the wider sphere the American Sociological Association offer a good service on available non-academic jobs. For instance, take a look at 'gfkamerica.com/careers/index.en.html' . The British Sociological Association also advertises jobs. Mostly academic but there are government and private industry jobs amongst them. TASA needs to keep an eye on the job market in Australia. Press for the acknowledgement of sociology as an employable qualification, and for sociological identification where sociological skills are required for jobs.

Another site you may find of interest is Beyond Academe: <http://www.beyondacademe.com/>. It's geared toward History graduates but its discussion about looking for jobs beyond academia applies to most humanities and social science graduates. We need to believe and see to it, that B.A. degree with a sociology major does have value beyond academia.

Progress: October 2012

Last Tuesday, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) published “Measures of Australia’s Progress”. The data is said to help Australians address the question, ‘Is life in Australia getting better?’ The ABS suggests that ‘progress’ has been made, compared with ten years ago, in health, education, training, work, national income, national wealth and household economic well-being. Areas that have regressed, compared with ten years ago, are: productivity, biodiversity and the atmosphere.

Classical sociology was full of the idea of ‘progress’. Progress meant change and this was seen as providing everlasting improvement to the human condition. It was born amid the acceptance of evolution, and saw growth and development as an inevitable and irreversible unravelling of inherent potentialities of society. Change was seen as having positive value in itself. It was always good, to be sought after and cherished for its own sake.

This understanding lasted into the 20th century and at some levels into the 21st where we find politicians still using ‘progress’ in its 19th century understanding. However, in the wider community people may no longer be convinced that ‘progress’ has any social meaning. Doubts about the validity of ‘progress’, emerged soon after the idea was first put forward and the idea has continued to be undermined. One challenge to the idea comes from the political use of the ‘recurring crisis’ as identified by Alexander & Sztompka (1990). Elsewhere, Sztompka (2000:6) has argued that what are considered to be ‘progressive’ processes, do not run in a smooth, linear fashion, but rather through temporary breakdowns, backlashes, even lasting reversals. As the changes expand and deepen, it can be seen, ever more clearly, that any declared ‘progress’, does not develop in a uniform manner in all areas of social life. Processes which can be judged as ‘progressive’ in some domains are found to produce various adverse side effects, and unintended consequences, in others. A focus on ‘crisis’ as the price of change, can be illustrated by well-known sociological themes initiated in the 19th century which still permeate sociological thought. Sztompka identifies these as: the lost community raised by Ferdinand Tönnies. The idea of moral chaos; emphasised by Emile Durkheim. The issues of bureaucracy raised by Max Weber. In the 20th C. the reality of decaying mass culture and the dangers of massification raised by José Ortega Y Gasset. The industrialization of war, ecological destruction, degradation of nature, the depletion of resources, the preaching of genocide, the spread of terrorism and local violence (2000:6).

The word ‘progress’ is defined (COD) as “forward or onward movement towards a destination”. If this is what we mean, what is our destination? A second definition uses the word to mean “development towards a better, more complete or more modern condition”.

Neither definition seems to fit what ABS is doing. In 1987 Bob Hawke made his famous declaration that “By 1990, no Australian child will be living in poverty. Today (15/10/12) ACOSS announced that 2.2 million people in Australia live below the poverty line. That does not sound like progress to me.

Sztompka (2000) also identifies a further defect in the idealization of progress and fetishization of change, in that changes are never equally and unequivocally good for all members of society. He also asks the question ‘for whose benefit is this ‘progress’ made and, raises the question ‘who pays for this progress?’ which has been taken up by numerous later authors who point to injustice, inequality. Sztompka’s main argument is that the study of society should not be wasted on identifying different types of change, but concentrated on the ‘effects’ of change. To emphasise

this he identifies 'social trauma' as the consequence of change. He argues it is an appropriate word to borrow from the medical and psychiatric vocabulary, because it makes sense of the consequences of social change. As applied to society, trauma is generated by making changes and it affects individuals and communities alike bring shocks and wounds to the social and cultural tissue.

Just identifying that we are in a period of economic or technological change when more and more people are being retrenched or retired does nothing to identify the effects of this change on society. It does not identify that this change has an unequal influence on the various components of society, nor does it have an inevitable impact or necessarily any impact on all sections of society. Change generates harrowing experience for some and the achievement of some goal for others. However, when progress is claimed, we need to ask who is it for? But more importantly, what does it do for those it does not reach.

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Training for Applied Sociology: November 2012

If you were asked to design an undergraduate course in applied sociology, what would you put in it and how would you run it? That is a question put to me this week by one of our members who has been asked to do just that.

For me, there are three parts. One is gaining an extensive knowledge of the sociology theories. The second is being able to test how they can be used to answer the range of questions that can be asked of the applied sociologist and the third is having a thorough understanding of questionnaire design, both qualitative and quantitative.

Over the years I have had to deal with people who think making up a questionnaire is the easiest thing in the world and it has taken time to make them see otherwise. In addition I have been presented with a great number of 'professionally' designed questionnaires which have so many flaws in them that the data they collect has very little value, if any.

I love pointing out flaws in questionnaires that people ask me to answer. They can get very annoyed and confused if you do. One example: just before an election a few years ago a pollster at my door and was reading out various questions and came to the one election questionnaires in Australia love.

P: "On a two party preferred basis, would you vote Labour or Coalition?"

Me: "Neither."

P: "But you can't say that. You have to say one or the other."

Me: "My answer is still neither."

P: "Oh. (Long pause) I'll put you down as undecided."

It is a very hard thing, to cover every possible answer in a quantitative questionnaire and even when you have seemingly relatively simple choices, if you could explore a little further you would find that people would often want to pick things you had not thought of or change their answer when they had thought about the question a bit more. So that your first run at the questions can be changed significantly when people are given the chance to tell you at a later time. I designed such a methodology for my Master's thesis and used it successfully in a number of studies, and discovered lots of things that were going on which I would never of thought of myself. Sticking a questionnaire under someone's nose does not guarantee that you will get true or all possible answers.

If you have any suggestions for an applied sociology course please email them to: joshuaspiers@gmail.com.

Communicating today: December 2012

There are 7000 distinct languages in use today. My computer offers 18 different forms of English. Translating from one language to another is often not easy and sometimes impossible. Yet without good communication, humanity is nothing. Each day millions of words are distributed face to face, phone to phone, mobile to mobile, computer to computer. Yet it seems we still cannot agree what is best for the country or the world. This is because what message our words transmit is not composed of the words. Each word is there to help put out an idea, an opinion, a request, a demand for action and so on. What has changed is the speed that this can be done, the distance the message can travel and the difficulty of controlling the process.

Newspapers no longer control what is 'news', religions can be undermined by never previously allowed facts, the flaws in ideologies can be exposed as quickly as the ideology. But what is being lost. The picture on the right above was titled 'Friends meeting for coffee.' As one illustration among many showing how the Internet can separate people as well as connect them.

One issue, raised in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (15 Dec 12), is the way work is being infiltrated into the home. Couples admit to being in bed with their partner and both working at their laptop but not talking to each other. A survey by Info-Security Europe, more than a third of people surveyed, and/or their partners, now continue their work, in bed, for at least two hours a night, and in New York, eight out of 10 young professionals feel compelled to do the same thing. Do they get paid for this?

The implications of these social changes have yet to be made clear. Whilst this trend underscores the operational needs of the profit based worldwide market, it does little or nothing for the inter-personal relationships that have always been important for humanity.

Perhaps, one research contribution applied sociologists can make, is to look at the impact of instant communication and social media in their workplace.

Work is part of life: January 2013

In the 1950's both Hannah Arendt and W. H. Auden analysed human activity as having three components, labour, work and play. 'Labour' was identified as an activity imposed by necessity and lacking any element of free choice. It is an activity you undertake to in order to stay alive. This activity has no personal significance or interest for you, and if you did not have to earn your living, you would not do it. As a labourer you are a slave of society.

At the opposite extreme is play. 'Play' is a completely gratuitous activity. You are free to play or not, as you choose, and you only reason for playing is that you enjoy it for its own sake. But this absolute sovereignty necessarily implies that your 'play' is of no concern to others and has no consequences beyond itself.

Between these two extremes comes the 'worker'. You are a 'worker' if what you do is, like play, something you enjoy doing for its own sake but, like labour, it is of importance to others, so that you can earn my living by doing what you enjoy doing. Auden estimates that not more than 16% of the population are workers. This analysis did seem to make sense for me in the 50's.. However, thinking about it now, it seems that the society we live in has developed some other divisions which were not so evident in the 50's.

Now we have the 'jobless'. Those who find they cannot be 'workers' or 'labourers' and often have little opportunity for 'play'. Last December 656,400 members of the community fell into this category. That left 9,692,676 'labourers' and 1,846,224 'workers' (if we take Auden's 16%). However, I am inclined to think that the percentage of workers has decreased since Auden's time.

Of Auden's three groups, the 'labours' and the 'players' are relatively easy to identify in the mind's eye. Factories, offices and sports fields, readily spring to mind. Perhaps the 'workers and the 'jobless' being more diffuse, are more difficult to picture. Then again, is the 'jobless' really one group? There are others who are without paid employment that are not counted in the labour statistics. For instance, retirees, women or men who do not seek paid employment, those with a disability for whom no 'labour' or 'work' has been identified and these total 11,081,700.

As the total of these groups represents the Australian community, I would like to see some sociological modelling, similar to the economic models but using an integrationist model by which we would be able to readily identify the effect of changes on the society as a whole. The detail to be produced would be like that of Young and Willmott or Henry Mayhew, that it shows what changes in the structure is like for individuals, rather than simply giving us categories of big numbers.

Anyone looking for a basic textbook for an Applied Sociology Course could do well to look at "Applied Sociology -Terms, Topics, Tools and Tasks" by Stephen Steele and Jammie Price, Published by Thompson - Wadsworth. Some of the US content may need translating into the Australian context, but generally it is a good approach.

The background: February 2013

Deb King, our Immediate Past President, has indicated that our Association's Executive is keen to learn how/what TASA could do to provide better support for people who work outside of academia and has asked me to get from all of you any or all the unmet needs you have as a sociology practitioner (to use a term we talked about a while ago) that would make your professional life easier. The day before this request from Deb I had a discussion with Nick Osbaldiston, one of the editors of *Nexus*, about how we might get more written material from those outside of universities to balance the material from universities.

What I want to do in this email is to set out something of the background to our thematic group, because we are not a homogeneous group, and therefore what we each want from the association might be different. This will also give you time to collect your thoughts for me to get them from you in April and prepare a report for the Executive in June.

We have members whose full-time occupation is being a sociology practitioner. Some in private industry; some in government departments; some in welfare organisations and some in schools.

We have members who are part-time sociology practitioners and part-time academics and we have full-time academics who have an interest in sociology outside of the university.

In addition to this diversity, we have larger external issues that play a part in preparing and supporting sociology practitioners. These include:

1. Presenting how and why sociology is of benefit to the community. (One way to achieve this would be to have a media savvy sociologist, in each capital city, ready to respond on issues to and for the media.)
2. We need to ensure that those who choose to work outside academia are adequately trained and have ongoing professional development. This means we have a concern about how universities are training sociologists.
3. One wider issue is the absence of a professional sociology bachelor's degree. B.Soc. or B.A. (Soc). (Can we begin to get universities to acknowledge the value of a professional degree for sociology? Philosopher Alain de Botton, in a lecture in Sydney recently, said that the Arts degree was dead, because enrolments were at an all-time low. If the Arts degree goes, so does sociology, unless we can demonstrate to others that we have a value in our own right.
4. Another issue that becomes important at times, when support for a lone sociologist is needed, because they work in a professional team whose other members already have professional bodies to back them up, if needs be, as do sociologists in academia. Quite how this can best be done, I don't know, but a strong professional body, in addition to helping individuals, would help sociology have greater strength in the community at large.

Please begin to gather your thoughts ready to response to my April Contact email.

Getting social data to politicians: March 2013

The aim of this survey is to obtain some idea of things that TASA might do to help Sociologists working outside of the academic umbrella. The Executive ask for members from Applied Sociology Thematic Group to be canvassed for their reaction to what is already being done and their ideas of what could be done, and needs that are not being met. A short questionnaire was devised between Debra King and Alan Scott, and Sally Daly arranged for it to be posted on Survey Monkey for easy access and completion.

The first problem was that the questionnaire could not be sent to all members of the Thematic Group, via Campaign Monitor, because some have selected the 'not to receive' option for the e-list. So information about the study and details of the website were sent to 52 members via Campaign Monitor and 16 via emails on the 22nd April. On the 29th April a reminder email was sent to all members, but this only produced two further responses. By the 30th April, of the 52 members sent to questionnaire via Campaign Monitor, only 26 had opened their mail. Assuming a similar result could be expected from the email group it would appear that approximately half the members read the request to complete the questionnaire and only 23 actually responded. Which, to say the least, was disappointing.

The data was collected in two forms. The background data was collected quantitatively and the questions calling for information from members experience was collected qualitatively. The quantitative data is as follows:

Industries Employing TASA Members

Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	7
Health Care and Social Assistance	5
Education and Training	3
Other Services	3
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	2
Public Administration and Safety	2
Local Government	1

The industries listed above are the broad classifications and do not readily indicate the precise nature of the work referred to. For Instance, The Professional, Scientific and Technical Services classification includes:

- Group 691 Scientific Research Services
- Group 692 Architectural, Engineering and Technical Services
- Group 693 Legal and Accounting Services
- Group 694 Advertising Services
- Group 695 Market Research and Statistical Services
- Group 696 Management and Related Consulting Services
- Group 697 Veterinary Services
- Group 699 Other Professional, Scientific and Technical Services

Of these, Groups 691, 692, 694, 695 might employ a sociologist, as a sociologist, the rest are much more doubtful. However, the largest proportion of respondents chose this identification.

If we admit that these responses, do not give us the total picture of the membership's employment, they do give us indicators of industries into which we have already made inroads. This provides us with two possible courses of action. First, we could try to demonstrate to these industries, the advantages of employing a sociologist could bring to the productivity of their work. Second, we can do the same thing with those industries where we apparently have no representation. In both cases this could be directed towards full-time employment and /or consultancies

- Manufacturing
- Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services
- Construction
- Wholesale Trade
- Retail Trade
- Accommodation and Food Services
- Transport, Postal and Warehousing
- Information Media and Telecommunications
- Financial and Insurance Services
- Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services

I will come back to this question when we look at other data from later in the survey.

This next question gives a different perspective of the question above. This time ask who pays the wages rather than how the job is classified. It can be seen from the table below that the non-profit sector employs the largest group in the sample, followed by governments. Then we must consider that many non-profit organisations are funded by governments. This indicates that in taking up the issues in the first question, governments per se would need to be the largest target.

The next largest group is 'Universities'. Whilst it is obvious that we don't need to sell sociology to departments of sociology, we will come back later to issues about the teaching of sociology which may well mean we have some aspect of sociology to discuss with sociology departments. However, there is probably a task to sell sociology as a discipline in its own right, rather than as a minor segment of a bachelor's degree, or a soft humanities option, for bachelor degrees in other faculties.

What sector(s) do you work in?

Non-Profit	10
Government	9
University	8
Self-employed	5
For Profit / Commercial	1
Private Consultancy and full time PhD student	1

We now turn to the background of Applied sociologists who are members of TASA. It was surprising that more than half of the sample held a higher degree and that six did not have a sociology degree. That people from outside academic sociology, can feel enough affinity with the subject want to join the association may be a clue to spreading the value of sociology. It also relates to the interdisciplinary nature of employment that some members have noted. This will be explored further later in the survey.

What is the highest sociology qualification you hold?

Ph.D. in Sociology	10
Masters in Sociology	3
Honours in Sociology	3
Bachelor's Degree (Major in Sociology)	2

Qualifications not in sociology

Policy and social sciences	
Working toward a PhD	
Master of Public Relations	
Community services and policy studies	6
Social work	
Social Policy	

It is interesting to note that almost half the sample is not associated with a university. If this follows through to the total membership it points strongly to the need for continuing education or in service training or whatever you want to call ongoing study. Is it worth pushing for university based courses, or correspondence courses, or skype sessions be generated for applied sociologist to keep them abreast with new developments? In saying this, I have assumed that those with university affiliations will be involved in some way with ongoing education. However, because of these people's involvement with applied sociology they perhaps would also like to receive ongoing education from the applied perspective.

Are you affiliated with a University

No	11
Yes, as an employee (part-time / full-time)	5
Yes, other	5
Yes, as an adjunct	3

The last of the quantitative questions what of the TASA services currently provided, what do applied sociologists find useful. It seems to divide into two sections. As you will see from the table, there are five services which have double figure indications that the respondents find them useful. All of them have an information transferring base. These contrast with the post graduate, Facebook and advertising discounts in *Nexus* which no one was interested in. The rest of the services had minimal interest.

What current services of TASA do you appreciate most?

Journal of Sociology	16
<i>Nexus</i>	14
Thematic Group membership	13
Sage Sociology full-text collection (online)	12
e-list	10
TASA Conference discounts	7
Student member & conference discounts	4
Directory of Research Expertise	3
TASA Membership Directory	3
Free advertising in e-list	2
New Books web page	2
TASA Awards	2
Conference Scholarships	2
Annual PhD Workshop	1
Publisher bonus offers	1
Members-only section of TASAweb	1
Advertising discounts in <i>Nexus</i>	0
Postgraduate Facebook	0

TASA questionnaire: April 2013

As you can see, the April Contact Email is in the form of a questionnaire. The Association's Executive is keen to provide more or better services for those working outside of academia. Will you please take a few minutes to give us your views on the issues below. If we have left anything off that is important to you please add it at the end.

The, HOW CAN WE HELP YOU, Survey

To give us some idea of the industries employing Sociologists, please indicate the general code or if possible precise codes that cover the industry(s) you work in. (If you are not sure please consult the ABS classifications on line at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/5463F15A4D2FCBA0CA25711F00146D77?opendocument> and go to sub-classifications.)

ANZSIC Industry Codes and Titles:

- A. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing
- B. Mining
- C. Manufacturing
- D. Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services
- E. Construction
- F. Wholesale Trade
- G. Retail Trade
- H. Accommodation and Food Services
- I. Transport, Postal and Warehousing
- J. Information Media and Telecommunications
- K. Financial and Insurance Services
- L. Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services
- M. Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
- N. Administrative and Support Services
- O. Public Administration and Safety
- P. Education and Training
- Q. Health Care and Social Assistance
- R. Arts and Recreation Services
- S. Other Services

My code(s):

2. What sector(s) do you work in? (Please tick):

- Government
- University
- Non-Profit
- For Profit / commercial
- Self-employed
- Other

3. What is the highest sociology qualification you hold? (Please tick):

- Bachelor's Degree (major in sociology)
- Honours in sociology
- Masters in Sociology
- PhD in sociology
- Qualification is not in sociology, but in (please state discipline)
-
- None of the above

4. Are you affiliated with a University? (Please tick):

- Yes, as an adjunct
- Yes, as an employee (part-time / full-time)
- Yes, other
- No

5. What current services of TASA do you appreciate most?

1. Online access to the Sage Sociology full-text collection;
2. The Journal of Sociology (JoS) - four issues per year published by SAGE (not available for \$0-\$27, 999 income category - \$50 membership);
3. *Nexus*, TASA's Newsletter - three issues per year;
4. The choice to be listed on the TASA Directory of Research Expertise database for use by the media, government agencies and researchers who wish to locate sociologists with particular areas of expertise;
5. Thematic Group membership;
6. Having your book listed on the TASA New Books web page, Tweeted about and included in the e-list and *Nexus*;
7. Member conference registration discount of over \$100;
8. Postgraduate web site, Facebook, Annual PhD Workshop, Postgraduate Conference Scholarships, and Postgraduate representation on the TASA Executive Committee;

9. Substantial membership and conference discount rates for student membership;
10. Online TASA Directory listing members' research interests and contact details. The directory is a real-time, fully searchable and updatable database that is particularly useful for locating potential supervisors and examiners as well as for networking;
11. Members-only TASA Email list: access to the latest information on new jobs, scholarships, publications and conferences;
12. Members-only section of TASAweb: access to TASA publications such as current Refereed Conference Proceedings and the Online TASA Directory;
13. The option of being listed on TASA's publicly searchable database for use by the media, government agencies and researchers who wish to locate sociologists with particular areas of expertise;
14. Member discount rates for conference registration at the American, British, Irish and New Zealand sociological association annual conference;
15. Eligibility for TASA Awards: Jean Martin Award, Raewyn Connell Prize, Distinguished Service to Australian Sociology, Best Paper in the Journal of Sociology, Stephen Crook Memorial Prize, Jerzy Zubrzycki Postgraduate Conference Scholarship, TASA Postgraduate Conference Scholarship, TASA Conference Scholarship for Sociologists Outside Academe, Outstanding Service to TASA Award, Conference Scholarship for TASA Members with Disabilities, and the TASA Honours Student Award;
16. Free advertising in the TASA e-list;
17. Discounts on advertising in *Nexus* and TASAweb;
18. Access to publisher bonus offers exclusive to TASA members.

6. How does the Association currently help you as a sociologist?

7. How does the Association currently help you in your employment?

8. Did your training as a Sociologist sufficiently prepare you for working outside academia? If not, what other things should be included in sociology courses?

9. Do you see Sociology as the major skill you bring to your employment? If so, is this your sociological training as a whole or is it particular skills from your sociology training that you use?

Being Sociologically trained: Yes

Particular skills: (Please list:

10. What continuing education would you like to have access to?

11. What do you see as the basic skills required to be recognised as a Sociologist by

an employer?

12. What, from your experience as a sociologist, employed outside academia, can you suggest that would improve current Sociology courses?

13. Have you had any incident in the workplace where you wished you had some professional organisational backup? Please describe the incident.

Conversational analysis: May 2013

First, let me thank those of you who took the trouble to answer the questionnaire to suggest ways in which the executive can provide better services for the Sociology Practitioner. It was disappointing that those who replied were only about a quarter of our Thematic Group members. We know that half the members did not bother to open the email. If the executive is going to provide the kinds of things we want, we need to be prepared to give them something to work with. I am told that the executive has tried over a number of years to give us better service, but in the past we have not bothered to co-operate. Well this time our small group, have, at least, provided a range of suggestions which will go to the executive in July. For results: WATCH THIS SPACE.

Last week I went to help the local Rotary Club sort and assemble books for their annual 'Bookfest'. Over the years I have found this to be an opportunity to find books I would otherwise never discover. This year was no exception; I found a book called 'The Word Museum: the most remarkable English words ever forgotten' by Jeffrey Kacirk. In the introduction he writes: "I found that teachers and historians, because of their socially prescribed curricular, give attention toward larger social concepts, often bypassed the smaller and more personal expressions of custom and conduct." This reminded me of 'Ethnomethodology'. It was all the rage in sociology in the 1970s. One offshoot of it, I thought could be useful, was 'conversational analysis'. It brought sociology to the inter-personal level by identifying patterns of conversation such as: "Hello, how are you?" "I'm fine, thanks." Is a socially prescribed question and reply. It is a question of greeting which has its agreed response and nothing more. What interested me was its approach to conversations, interviews even questionnaires, and demonstrating how those who started the interaction controlled the results. One example I have is a verbatim of a psychiatrist/patient interview, where I can show that the psychiatrist had pre-determined what was wrong with the patient and structured his questions in such a way that the patients' answers would support his diagnosis, when it was clear that other questions would have produced a different result. I never had the opportunity to follow this line of study, but I thought it worth drawing your attention to the fact that every 'Big Picture' is developed from one or more 'conversations'. Which in turn means the big picture can be moulded by 'conversations' along the way. In my example, if this kind of interview was widespread, the statistics of psychiatric illness could be widely astray. When our concern is about a 'big picture', it is worth remembering that the 'big picture' may have been formed from only asking the questions that get the answer that someone wanted. The question you ask mostly gets you the answer you want.

One last thing, as the Annual Conference get closer the thematic groups will be asked to find members willing to review papers that come within their remit. I would like to hear from any of you who would be prepared review one or two papers that might come our way.

Political move to abolish social research: June 2013

In my last contact email, I mentioned the book I had discovered, Jeffrey Kacirk's 'The Word Museum: the most remarkable English words ever forgotten' so I looked to see if I could find a couple of words sociologists could reintroduce and claim as their own. I found two possible candidates. The first 'Trilemma', it comes from the late 19th century and it means, of course, 'A choice between three alternatives'. I am sure we find plenty of use for that. The second 'Faffle' comes from the north of England and is also from the late 19th century. It was used to describes 'Work that occupies much time and effort, but the results are not satisfactory or commensurate with time and effort put in.' Again, I think we can find times when we might want use it.

The discovery of this book has prompted me to think about how word use could be of value to sociology. For instance, vocabulary relates to education level, but it also relates to employment areas, and a particular social environment. This is usually called slang which is really an academic way of saying it is not proper English. The Oxford dictionary defines it as 'informal language that is more common in speech than in writing and is typically restricted to a particular context or group.' Whilst this might be true, knowledge of a particular slang, be it prison, army, politics, the stock exchange, etc., can identify the social milieu a person, has some contact with. It can even go to a much smaller group. I know of an army unit where one person generated, in the course of one conversation, a hyphenated word that was then used right across that group in normal conversation, but to the best of my knowledge it has never been used elsewhere. However, if I heard it today, I would immediately know that person had some connection with that unit. Dictionary writers and grammarians rely on the written word for authentication. Whereas much of the world relies on its patois for its communication. Spoken words are sociological clues.

Getting rid of sociology

For some time now, there have been efforts in the U.S. to marginalise and delegitimise the social sciences. One university in its general education requirements had required students to take one course in the natural science and one in the social science. In a revision of this curriculum, the social science course requirement was eliminated. A few months ago the Republican majority leader in Congress proposed that all federal funding for social science research should be eliminated. In Florida, there is a move to only have as stem courses, the physical sciences, engineering and maths. If you want to do major in any other subject you will have to pay much higher fees. In Australia, with cuts to university funding, I am sure administrators are looking for what or who they can get rid of and because the value of sociology is little appreciate I am sure, sociologists will be looked at very closely. One corollary of this is that if governments, commercial organisations', or the non-profit groups are not looking to employ sociologists; things could get very tight.

Work & social structure: July 2013

Cottage Industry

(A business or manufacturing activity carried on in people's homes. (OED))

The pre-cursor to the industrial revolution was cottage industry. In the Middle Ages it was the cottage industry that developed as mechanical assistance developed and that, in turn, began the move of the population from farming to mechanical skills and the development of the *Gesellschaft*. I have just noticed that what could mark the decline of the *Gesellschaft*, is the emergence of a new type of cottage industries. As the electronic technology develops, new products are developed or made widely available, some people at least, (the NBN proponents) are touting it as the means for people to work from home. The issue this raises is that, if this does become a dominant social structure, the resulting structure will not be the *Gemeinschaft*. I live in a community that can be defined as a village by population numbers, but it is nothing like a *Gemeinschaft*. There is no social cohesion or inter-relatedness about it, and it operates as a detached part of the *Gesellschaft*.

Tönnies argued that the *Gesellschaft* is built on big business profits and does not identify with the country where people live but with a world market where all are expected to buy. Sztompka adds to this that, the increasing dominance of the *Gesellschaft*, brings with it a state of constant crisis in which traumatogenic change is generated, with the result that cultural trauma is manifesting itself in the lives people who live in the *Gesellschaft*. He argues that the *Gemeinschaft*, as the cultural reservoir from which a community draws its heritage, traditions and its sense of continuity, has been undermined or destroyed by the *Gesellschaft*. This means that *Gesellschaft* dwellers are losing contact with their past and with each other.

Tönnies agrees with this when he points out that, with the coming of the *Gesellschaft*, the state, on behalf of the controllers of the *Gesellschaft*, will move to undermine the cohesiveness of the *Gemeinschaft* and impose the culture of individualism. National culture in the past has been made up of threads of tradition and knowledge that are common to the majority of people in a society where they know the same stories and share the same beliefs. Edwards picks up this same point when she argues that there is now no such thing as a homogeneous national culture in Australia.

Sztompka identifies social change as today's underlying and dominating social driving force that results in chronic social trauma. So if the social change that is taking place is to be a move away from *Gesellschaft*, what social structures are likely to develop?

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Crisis & politics: August 2013

This is not a political message on behalf of any side in the coming election, or any other. However, the idea does come from the headline for a recent *Sydney Morning Herald* political article. “When everything is a crisis, who should you believe?” The article reminded me of Alexander and Sztompka’s observation that the theme of ‘progress’ has been replaced by the new political, verbal weapon, of ‘crisis’. We are not going ‘forward’ any more, we are facing ‘crisis’ after ‘crisis’ and pessimistic views of social realities. People have become so accustomed to hearing of the current economic, political, or cultural ‘crises’, that is about to descend upon us, if we don’t listen to this or that political view.

Robert Holton has noted that: ‘Contemporary social thought has become dominated, if not obsessed by the idea of crisis’. He also argued that we are witnessing a curious normalisation of ‘crisis’. People have become so used to the idea of social crises, that they do not anticipate any future elimination. These sociologists were writing in the 1990s.

In 2006 Ian Mitroff was writing: ‘From product defects to environmental disasters - almost every day, a new corporate crisis hits the headlines. In the majority of cases, the results are disastrous, that require costly and time consuming efforts to re-establish a positive public image.’

In 2011, Pushan Dutt and V. Padmanabhan write: “The dramatic impact of the current ‘crisis’ on the performance of businesses across sectors and economies has been headlining the business press for the past several months.”

In 2013, the politicians have been telling us about the leadership crisis, the Medical Indemnity Insurance crisis, the asylum seeker crisis, the global financial crisis, and probably lots more.

‘Crisis’ was originally a medical term which defined a watershed where the outcomes would be either life or death. It’s a nice frightening word but does its current use, have any real meaning? Given the length of time the word has been in vogue, it would seem that ‘crisis’ is now the word used by politicians to signal a necessary change, that will allow them, journalists and others, to adapt their rhetoric to new conditions.

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How long should we work? September 2013

It seems my August topic brought a number of you to life. It was gratifying to get so many responses. Thank you, keep it up.

This month a paper by Prof. David Graeber, on “Nonsense Job” caught my eye. He starts out by pointing to, John Maynard Keynes, who, in 1930, predicted that by century’s end, technology would have advanced sufficiently that countries like Britain or the United States would have achieved a 15-hour working week.

I remember in the 1970s and 80s, there was still much talk in the journals about the two or three day working week. So, as we all know this has not happened, indeed there are many companies and even some government departments that demand longer hours from their workers than the 48hr week would suggest. I know people whose standard working hours are 8am to 6pm with in a white collar job that demands frequent extra hours from with no extra pay.

Graeber points out that ‘huge swathes of people in the Western world spend their entire working lives performing tasks they secretly believe do not really need to be performed’. So what are these new jobs? Over the last 100 years, the number of workers employed as domestic servants, in industry, and on the farm have dropped dramatically. At the same time, “professional, managerial, clerical, sales, and service workers” tripled, growing “from one-quarter to three-quarters of total employment”. In other words, productive jobs have, just as predicted, been largely automated away. Even the toiling masses in India and China are not nearly as large a percentage of the world population as they used to be.

BUT, as Graeber goes on to suggest that “rather than allowing a massive reduction of working hours to free the world’s population to pursue their own projects, pleasures, visions and ideas, we have seen the ballooning not so much the “service” sector as of the administrative sector, up to and including the creation of whole new industries such as financial services or telemarketing, or the unprecedented expansion of sectors such as corporate law, academic and health administration, human resources and public relations. And these numbers do not even reflect on all those people whose job is to provide administrative, technical or security support for these industries, or for that matter the whole host of ancillary industries (dog-washers, all-night pizza-delivery drivers) that only exist because everyone else is spending so much of their time working in all the other ones. These are what I propose to call “bullshit jobs”.”

So what is happening? It seems to me that today’s management thinking has embraces Marx’s insistence that everyone should be a worker. I once wrote a paper titled ‘Could Marx accept the idea of a non-working class?’ I concluded that although he came close once or twice, in the end he could not accept it. The other issue that comes more from the right, is why are workers paid? That is, is it for the number of hours they attend a workplace or the skills that they bring to the employer? In many industries we now have the technologies that enable the product of an organisation to be completed in a much shorter time than previously. This is Keynes argument, if the work can be done quicker, then the worker should have more time to themselves.

My conclusion is that because work is part of population control for both Marx and the Corporations, there is a fear that if people are not obliged to work to exist, they will bring down their Gemeinschaft constructions and lose power.

If someone had designed a work regime perfectly suited to maintaining the power of finance capital, it’s hard to see how they could have done a better job. Real, productive workers are

relentlessly squeezed and exploited. The remainder are divided between a terrorised stratum of the, universally reviled, unemployed and a larger stratum who are basically paid to do nothing, in positions designed to make them identify with the perspectives and sensibilities of the ruling class

What do you think?

Further reading: Read more: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/public-service/the-modern-phenomenon-of-nonsense-jobs-20130831-2sy3j.html#ixzz2dmQfe14T>

Ethics: October 2013

Next month is the TASA Conference in Melbourne (Monash, Caulfield) Applied Sociology is assisting with Post Grad. Day's Theme of 'Becoming a Sociology Practitioner', in addition, there will be an Applied Sociology Thematic Group meeting at some time during the Conference (No date or time yet available but will let you know). If you are in Melbourne and available it would be great for us all to meet.

The Australia Institute, largely an economic and political think tank, (although they do employ one sociologist,) (that seems largely to present their data in pictorial demographic form,) have just released some data on work generated stress. Stress, is usually defined as a state of tension produced by pressures or conflicting demands with which the person cannot adequately cope. This is usually approached through the medical route or the psychiatrist/psychologist route. The A.I. study tells us that 3.8 million worker don't take a lunch break. But 3 million workers do. What they don't tell us is what is determined by the employer.

What I have been more conscious of is that a lot of people have a written contracts which requires them to be present at work from 9am to 5pm, but the culture of the company expects them to be present from 7 or 8 am to 6 or 7 pm, in addition, 3.4 million Australian workers continue working whilst eating their lunch and 1 in 4 worker either check emails or take work phone call out of working hours. The A.I. reports that Australian Workers donate \$110 billion in unpaid overtime to their employers.

Central to all this is the old dichotomy, which is more important for a person 'work' or 'home and family'? For some work is all enthralling, and home is a place of noise, argument tedious labour. For others work is a tedious bore necessary to provide resources for the family which is a joyful, loving place. Or any combinations in between. In terms of stress both places can become the source of stress or a release from it. So what is the sociologist's connection to stress at work? Jary & Jary define Sociology as "the systematic study of the functioning, organization, development, and types of human societies". Abercrombie, Hill & Turner define Sociology as "the study of the bases of social membership. Or technically, as the analysis of the structure of social relationships as constituted by social interaction." What is lacking in the A.I. or the other descriptions is, what is to be done when the analysis has been made. Where is the applied sociology? The problem with applied sociology that it raises the question of ethics. There are sociologists who believe sociology should not occupy itself with ethical concerns. Right and wrong are said not to be sociological questions. However, when it comes to applied sociology the question ought to become real. Is it right that employers can sanction an organisation that defrauds their employees to increase its profits? Is it right for employers to demand a person gives extra time to its organisation rather than to the family? The generation of stress comes from the dichotomies that people are confronted with. Stress reduces the ability of people to perform at their best at home and at work. It seems to me that applied sociology must be prepared to challenge the misapplication of a social process.

Conference results: December 2013

Well the conference has come and gone, together with the Annual Meeting, The Thematic Groups Convenors meeting, and the Applied Sociology Group meeting. The conference had its usual highs and lows. Raewyn Connell took us through our 50 year history, Celia Lury (UK), told us about Enacting Methods of Change and a range of other papers were given, some to large and some to very small audiences.

I helped Karen Soldatic to put together the Graduates Day programme on 'Becoming a Sociology Practitioner' with a number of our members taking part. There were over 130 new graduates who were at least looking at the possibility of work outside of University.

With the institution of the Three Year Rule, imposed by the executive, no convenor can serve for more than three years and all terms end with the conference. There was plenty to say about this at the Group Convenors meeting but nothing has so far been changed. This means that I must finish up as your convenor, and Lyndal Thompson from UNE has taken over as our Convenor. However, at the thematic group meeting it was unanimously agreed that I should continue to produce the monthly contact email under the title of Continuing Education Officer, which I agreed to do. This move has been endorsed by both by Lyndal and by Grazyna Zajdow, the Thematic Group Convenor.

So we will move forward with new ideas as well as old, in order to make TASA relevant to Sociologists beyond the walls of academia.

My little sociology note for this month is about that special development from ethnomethodology, 'Conversational Analysis'. I discovered that the graduates had never heard of it. Thirty or more years ago in sociology, you could not avoid it. I have always found it a useful tool. Its basic premise is that verbal interaction is not ad lib but governed by socially identifiable rules is important. Understanding what actually taking place in a conversation with your boss, at an interview, with a solicitor, medical practitioner or in any other 'turn-taking' formal conversation is important. You need to recognise that you can be manipulated, misled, or used. The person who begins the conversation controls it. You can take control back, but the subtleties may seem so bland that you can find yourself agreeing to put yourself in a place that you do not want to be and wonder afterwards how you ever got there. Learn to identify what is going on in formal and informal situations, it might make life more bearable.

The Independent Scholar: January 2014

A Happy New Year to you all. Behind this greeting is the question, “Can we have one?” On June the eleventh last year *The Age* ran this headline:

“Why sociologists don’t dare investigate”

It appeared on an article by Raymond Orr, a lecturer at the School of Social and Political Sciences at The University of Melbourne. His topic was the treatment of migrants, not just in Australia but around the world. His question in the headline related to the dependence of university researchers on funding and that the universities are now averse to what they see as risky research and have enacted ethical protocols that in effect restrict controversial studies. Bad press is still bad press to universities.

One of his examples was the report that in March, East Asian tourists were verbally abused by a white Australian on a Sydney bus. This quote took me back to a time when I was verbally abused by a white American school teacher, on a train in the US, at the top of her voice, because I was from that terrible country Australia that had refused her application for an exchange teaching appointment. Glaring at me she told the carriage about this terrible country, that its teachers were badly trained, and she thought she would be able help this backward country come closer to a good American education. I never found out how she identified me as an Australian, nor what she thought I could do about it. The incident still rankles, when I am reminded of it. However, my question is: was it a racial taunt?

In the broader scene is research being censored by Universities? But for our members the question might be; is community research being censored by employers or funding bodies when we suggest asking question that might produce politically incorrect answers?

Orr suggests that researchers do not pursue these types of questions because the answers might be unflattering and that few scholars would expose themselves to possible career-ending criticisms that they have fuelled racial-hatred or led to policies that favoured one group over another. Yet if that is the state of the community, we need to know, to be able to something about it. Without genuine research we only have opinions and prejudices.

Is the practice of sociology dependent on the perception of political correctness current at any particular time? As political situation change so do ideas of political correctness. During World War II, things were said about Germans and Japan, with full political blessing that would not be acceptable now. For me sociological research cannot or should not be biased in order to support one view or another. It should be research that looks at what is and tells it without fear or favour. But we have to eat and if our funding source wants to build in a bias, what does it do to our personal integrity?

Where Sociologists stand in society: February 2014

Soap box again

The ABS [reports](#) that “There is growing recognition of the importance of human capital in shaping Australia’s future prosperity. A recent report for the Australian Council of Learned Academies claimed that building capacity particularly in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) is pivotal to competitiveness in the global economy (Marginson, Tyler, Freeman & Roberts, 2013).”

They go on to report that an increasing the number of people with STEM qualifications has become a key focus of policy makers around the world. While a STEM education equips people with specific skills required for research and technical roles, it also fosters a range of generic skills, knowledge and ways of thinking that are relevant to a wide range of occupations. These include problem solving, critical thinking, and communication skills, among others (Harris, 2012).

The *Sydney Morning Herald* on the 24/2/14 published an interview Laszlo Bock, the senior vice president of people operations for Google. This is the man in charge of hiring for one of the world’s most successful companies. One of the points he made was that Google had determined that academic results weren’t very important.

He goes on to say:

“For every job, the No. 1 thing we look for is general cognitive ability, and it’s not IQ. It’s learning ability. It’s the ability to process on the fly. It’s the ability to pull together disparate bits of information. We assess that using structured behavioural interviews that we validate to make sure they’re predictive.”

Talent can come in so many different forms and be built in so many non-traditional ways today, hiring officers have to be alive to every one - besides brand-name universities.” Because “when you look at people who don’t go to school and make their way in the world, those are exceptional human beings. And we should do everything we can to find those people.” Too many universities, he added, “don’t deliver on what they promise. You generate a tonne of debt, you don’t learn the most useful things for your life. It’s [just] an extended adolescence.”

Do I hear a cry from Sociologists? Have we given up? Is it all too hard to persuade people that we have something important to offer? Someone has invented STEM, employers around the world are looking people with stem qualifications. Google thinks universities are more or less a waste of time, and that people without a tertiary education are better employees.

No one it seems is looking for Sociologists. Yet we have the skills that these people are on about and one very important skill that is not part of the other skills on offer. We can not only contribute to “problem solving, critical thinking, and communication skills, and a range of generic skills, knowledge and ways of thinking that are relevant to a wide range of occupations” We can add the dimension of what all these decision will do to humanity. That is what we are about. As the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* puts it. A sociologist is a person who deals with the “development, structure, and functioning of human society” and its associate social problems. This is what these people are looking for, but sociology has not been presented to the wider community in way that will signal this.

Quotes from the past: March 2014

I have been preparing an article on the value of sociological studies and observations from the past, which I have not yet completed. However, there are some quotes that I think some of you, at least, might find of interest as comments on current situations. I have taken the Concise Oxford Dictionary's definition of Sociology: "the study of the development, structure, and functioning of human society" as a yard stick and looked for observations from the past that in some way meet these criteria and may resonate with people today. Confucius (c. 551 – 479 BC). Tells us to: "Study the past if you would define the future." Another author, Thucydides (c. 460 – 395 BCE) tells us that "My work is not a piece of writing designed to meet the needs of an immediate public, but is done to last for ever." Surprisingly he seems to have achieved it:

"Some legislators only wish for vengeance against a particular enemy. Others only look out for themselves. They devote very little time on the consideration of any public issue. They think that no harm will come from their neglect. They act as if it is always the business of somebody else to look after this or that. When this selfish notion is entertained by all, the commonwealth slowly begins to decay."

"If it had not been for the pernicious power of envy, men would not so have exalted vengeance above innocence and profit above justice... in these acts of revenge on others, men take it upon themselves to begin the process of repealing those general laws of humanity which are there to give a hope of salvation to all who are in distress."

"When one is deprived of one's liberty, one is right in blaming not so much the man who puts the shackles on as the one who had the power to prevent him, but did not use it."

"War is a matter not so much of arms as of money."

"Most people, in fact, will not take the trouble in finding out the truth, but are much more inclined to accept the first story they hear."

Others who have left their observations for us to ponder include:

Confucius (c. 551 – 479 BCE) suggests: "What you do not want done to yourself, you do not do to others."

Aristotle (c. 384 – 322 BCE) observes: "To avoid criticism, say nothing, do nothing, be nothing."

And one much more modern one that might also ring a bell:

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) "All truths that are kept silent become poisonous."

It seems that whilst the setting of humanity may change through the years, the behaviour of humanity changes little. So maybe what was learnt in the past may still be relevant in the present.

Sociology boundaries: April 2014

An article in the 5 April 2014 *'New Scientist'* on how various communities around the world not only believe in climate change, they are actually dealing with it. One quote in the article particular caught my attention. It was from Kirstin Dow from the University of South Carolina:

“Predicting the future isn't the solution. Society always makes decisions under uncertainty. We're perfectly capable of it. We do it for the stock market with billions of dollars. The key is to find out what is at risk, what people are doing to buffer that 'risk, and what else could be done.”

It seems to me that this quote is basically a sociological approach but perhaps not in the way we usually think about it.

A lot of effort goes into predicting the future, often ignoring the uncertainty principle and where does it get us? I have heard several people recently reviewing recent history and adding the comment that what actually happened could not have been foreseen.

Predicting there will be climate change in the future tells us nothing. When it happens it will affect different areas in different ways. The detail will need to be dealt with at the local level.

Our ideas about the future usually expect the future to be the same as the past, more or less. The world has built bigger and bigger fishing boats because the world need a never ending supply of fish. But suddenly, the vast stocks of fish are not there any more. I am getting old but I still think I can carry on as I have always done. The suddenly the uncertainty principle raises its head. Yesterday I was told I must have a 'pace-maker' inserted at the end of the month. Until then I cannot drive, which means that a lot of the things I do are beyond me at the moment. Last week the future did not contemplate such a situation. Now I must deal with what is.

When we do sociological research that is to inform future action I think Kirstin Dow is right.

The key is, there is a constant shifting of the possibilities that might occur in the future. To understand the future is a matter of risk management. It is a matter of constant vigilance to identify possible risks and what can be done to meet them. This need not be from a long term view. I had not given any thought to the possibility of needing a pace-maker. How many people had expected the resignation of the NSW Premier? Many businesses failed to understand on-line sales.

These changes to the expected future have significant effect. What is required is the ability to deal with the unexpected. The world moves on and if we are to stay with it, we must always be able to effect change in ourselves to cope with it. This needs to be understood by every person, every business, every association, every organisation of any sort and by every government. The future is never a fixture.

Using the Sociology Community: May 2014

Today is the 31st so I am only just making it. My pacemaker operation went smoothly, so that is not my excuse. What is not going smoothly is my desktop computer which even though it has been to the technician who claimed it was fixed, it still does not work and will go back again on Monday. My laptop is only marginally better, keys are sticking and programmes may or may not start. Even in these few lines I keep having to go back to fix missing letters.

I was going to raise with you some interesting topic that are being debated online by the American Sociological Association, but all the details are on my desktop and I cannot get to them.

So in lieu of all that I thought I would raise the issue of the boundaries of sociology.

Comte's definition of Sociology was the positivistic and scientific study of society. We have moved away from this approach to a range of approaches that may or may not use any reference to the physical sciences. Sociology today faces the idea that it is not a distinct science and can be incorporated with a range of approaches under the wider title of social science. I support the approach that sociology should not be judged against the physical sciences. If for no other reason than societies and individuals are not made up of fixed entities. In chemistry an oxygen or an iron atom is always an oxygen or an iron atom no matter what combination it may be in and will always have the same characteristics. Whereas the subject matter of sociology is never fixed. i.e. what someone believes today they may not believe tomorrow or as Thucydides (c. 460 – 395 BCE) has noted: "Most people, in fact, will not take the trouble to find out the truth, but are much more inclined to accept the first version of any story they hear." and I don't think things have changed much. Therefore although they may be constant in believing something to be true, it may not be true, so that the people who provide sociological data are never fixed in the way physical science's data is fixed.

If sociology is to hold its own it has got to demonstrate that what it has to offer are methods and solutions that come from the use of tried and tested theories that can be replicated, but at the same time show that what can be shown to be the case in one place does not mean that a repeat in another would provide the same answer. But this would not negate the study. Not because sociology is not an exact science, rather because it understands that the nature of its data sources that will never be the same.

At the same time, the idea that the physical sciences are value free has been shown to be wrong by Karl Popper and others. Popper also argued that 'scientific theory, and human knowledge generally, is irreducibly conjectural or hypothetical, and is generated by the creative imagination in order to solve problems that have arisen in specific historico-cultural settings.'

I would like to see more, from those engaged in applied sociology, provide to wider audiences, arguments and examples as to why sociology is every bit as valuable to society as the physical sciences and just as reliable.

Is the monthly email worth it? June 2014

Last month I mentioned the email debates that were going on between members of the American Sociological Association. It all started from an email early asking whether retired sociologists were occupying their time in a sociologically productive way. From the response to this came further exploration of what retired sociologists might do, part of this discussion splintered off on the question of volunteer teaching in university departments and more generally mentoring students. Then Judith Blau, Professor of Sociology at the University of North Carolina, then brought in the idea of developing a group based on the 'Elders':

The Elders are a group of international leaders who in retirement speak out on matters of concern to the global community (say on matters of human freedom, climate change, or racism). Their mandate is global. <http://theelders.org/>

Are we not the elders in the sociological community? We probably have mature and nuanced views about, say high incarceration rates in the U.S., high poverty levels in America, the U.S.'s punitive policies regarding migrants.

Which got taken up by a large number of people. It also got quite a few people asking to be removed from the ASA's Retirees mailing list. This then brought suggestions for a book about the work being done by retired sociologists, session for retirees at the Annual Meeting, ASA regional groups for retirees to look at issues in their particular area, and so on. The debate continues.

What Judith asks of the U.S. could just as easily be asked of Australia. I know the Applied Sociology Group, is not all retirees, but some will be getting ever closer. What will you do?

Last week I was also concerned at the small number of people that google groups registered as having looked at my May contact email. For a long time only one person only was recorded, today it stand at only six. I don't know if you can read it without getting registered, but with the small response I wonder if the Contact email is worth the effort.

The popular opinion is that social media has the power to transform. Therefore do my efforts serve any useful purpose? If they do, am I using the right medium? If only six out of the eighty odd members of the Applied Sociology group will even read this month's effort, will that signify that I am wasting my time.

On that cheery note, I will leave it. If you do get this far. Please give an opinion, even if it's only an email with Yes or No.

The monthly email is worth it: July 2014

Wow! The responses to my June email was most uplifting. They came from round Australia and from overseas, wherever our members find themselves. Like Dragica Wes who is working in Moldova on the Ukrainian border. Christine Walker, holidaying in New York, and Jim ... who now lives and works in Thailand. It seems I am still doing something that others find helpful. At my age, that is most gratifying. However, it is also a point that I want to emphasise. i.e. Retirement is not the end of life, you can go on using your skills. If you look to retirement as the eternal holiday you will soon find it palls. As Christine Walker notes in her email "I am of retirement age but after five weeks holiday I want to return to work." To live a long and happy life you need to keep the brain active and keep doing things which are meaningful and contributing to the community. I started work in 1946 at the age of 14 and my jobs since have been many and varied. I started as office boy, moved on to being a clerk. Then to the British army's navy, and then to laboratory work. All the time doing study at night. Eventually, to my delight I discovered sociology and went on to lead an applied sociology research team for 30 years. Today I still go to work every day. I have written one small book. I work with Marines Rescue NSW. I do research for the local museum, and I do things for TASA, and at 82 I'm still going strong.

I do appreciate that many of you who do read my monthly emails are not able to respond. What I needed to know was that I was being helpful. That seems to be the case. There were also a few things in your responses that I think I need to address. First, 'Am I a sociologist?' If you have looked at Anthony Hogan's post on G-mail you will have seen his declaration "I am a sociologist and proud of it." As far as I am concerned, if you have studied sociology, if you do sociology, or if you do other work but still have your sociology background to feed into it, or if you are interested enough to be part of the sociological family: You are a sociologist. We do not have a professional association which sets standards for sociologists. I wish we did and in time this may come. While we are waiting for this to happen, we need to declare to anyone who listen that we are sociologists and proud of it. We have a skill which the community needs, but does not know or understand. It will only be when we are proud enough of our discipline to tell the community what we can do, that a wider recognition of our discipline can be achieved.

Another issue that has been raised, asks the question, "Where can I get sociological support when I am a lone sociologist and no one to talk to about my work." First let me offer myself. Email me with your problem and include your phone number if you would like to talk. Second, if you would like a broader response to your concern. Send me the details and I can circulate it to everyone in our group. But also remember that many of our members may not have time to respond. However, if you don't try you don't know what you can get. Another possibility is to make contact with your local university (if they have sociology) and see if they can help. (My nearest university with a sociology department is 210km away, so if you have the same sort of distance, the university option may not be appropriate.) For me, it is important that applied sociologists, especially when they are the sole one in an organisation, have somewhere to turn for professional assistance.

One last thought for this month. How is Liberal Party policy and budget affecting where you work? Are their programmes good or bad or not affecting where you work? Think about these questions as a sociologists for your own sake and if you feel like it share your thoughts with the rest of us.

Learning from history: August 2014

My July Email seems to have got several hares running which is good so long as we keep them going. This month I have been reading anthropology and in particular about the Minoans on the island of Crete. We are talking about a people who lived between 2700 to 1450 BCE. What caught my eye was the domestic things they were able to take for granted.

They had tables and chairs, baths of virtually the same design as us. Jugs and vases decorated in much the same way as those in our shops. They had vegetables like cress, lettuce, celery, asparagus, carrots, peas and beans. Their fruits, a little more limited with a choice between pears, quinces and dates. They had roads that spoked wheeled chariots could use for speedy transport and four wheeled wagons for the heavy work. They ploughed the land and grew the staple grains. They raised cattle for beef and milk. They kept goats, pigs and a surviving list credits one farmer as having 25,000 sheep. Their tradesmen had axes, adzes, sickles, knives, hammers, chisels, saws, drills, awls, engraving tools and sea going ships. People had tweezers, razors, combs, mirrors, writing materials, and fish hooks which would not look out of place in your local fishing store. Then perhaps most interesting of all, their towns had no defensive walls around them and they made no attempt to create colonies beholden to their power. Their end came when volcano on the island of Thera exploded and devastated the north of their island, this was followed by the Mycenaean invasion in 1450BCE. and soon Minoan ways were eroded in favour of Greek ways and the Minoans were no more.

All this was 3,500 or so years ago, but I can't help thinking how modern it all feels despite the fact that they had no electricity or electronics. Someone has said (I don't know who) that "History repeats itself". Karl Marx, writing about Louis Bonaparte notes: "Hegel says somewhere that all great events and personalities in world history reappear in one fashion or another. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce."

Perhaps the sociologist's task is to expose the farce that those in modern society perpetrate and remind people of the tragedy it really is. There is so much tragedy around us someone has to do something about it. Other commentaries on life and politics from the past perhaps give clues as to where we could start.

Confucius (551 - 479 BCE) said: "Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated." "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others". "The superior man understands what is right; the inferior man understands what will sell". "Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous." "In a country well governed, poverty is something to be ashamed of". "In a country badly governed, wealth is something to be ashamed of".

Mencius (371 - 289 BCE) said: "It is not difficult to govern. All one has to do is not offend the rich families."

Thucydides (460 – c. 395 BCE) said: "Most people, in fact, will not take the trouble to find out the truth, but are much more inclined to accept the first version of any account that they hear". "Some legislators only wish for vengeance against a particular enemy. Others only look out for themselves. They devote very little time on the consideration of any public issue. They think that no harm will come from their neglect. They act as if it is always the business of somebody else to look after this or that. When this selfish notion is entertained by all, the commonwealth slowly begins to decay".

All these connections with the past, get to me. Societies never seem to learn.

What people think, not what researchers thinks they said: September 2014

September It's the last day of the month, my mind is blank, my computer will only print in blue, it's a lovely day outside and I am stuck indoors trying to finish this email. I started by thinking about words and how what one person understands them to mean may not be the same as someone else. This can be a problem for interviews and questionnaires. Then there is the problem of academics not accepting someone's work because they haven't used the 'right' words or the right theory. Take the work of Henry Mayhew, who lived over 200 years ago. He was an investigative journalist who was commissioned by the 'Morning Chronicle' to be its Metropolitan reporter for its national investigation into "Labour and the Poor". Having started on this work, he discovered there was much more to the investigation than could be published in his newspaper. So he went on to publish his findings in book form called 'London Labour and the London Poor' He used an ethnographical approach, in which he interviewed numerous people in a range of employment groups. These groups often lived in the same area. These were the same people that Dickens and later Charles Booth wrote about.

Mayhew used ethnography as his method, but ethnography is not the same as participant observation as is often stated. Participant observation requires that you live and work as part of a community surreptitiously noting what goes on. Ethnography, as Mayhew and I have used it, is to go into a community and carefully note what people in the community say, in their own words. In other words letting them tell their story without processing it through a particular theoretical model and reporting what they mean rather than what they say.

'Mathew's economic analysis', writes Professor Gareth Stedman Jones, 'consisted largely of antinomies. "That is: a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that may in fact be true, or an apparently sound statement or proposition which leads to a logically unacceptable conclusion." This epitomises the gap that exists between academia and the lower levels of society. If you ask people with no academic background about the reality in which they live, they will most likely describe it in terms which make no sense to academic theory. Today, the communities that existed in the 19th century don't exist. But they could well re-emerge. Mayhew's major division was between the unproductive itinerant population, and the stable and productive urban population. The urban population we understand but the itinerant population he identified has long gone from our experience. His description runs: "The nomadic poor are likened to primeval savages, who are ruled by brute passions and animal appetites, and live without structure and restraint. They are dangerous and depraved, restless and indulgent, improvident, licentious and lewd. These people, unknown to the census enumerators, supplied the recruits to the vagabond hordes that were said to be roaming the country." Describing life as it really is, in its many forms, in the words of the people who live the life, is an important part of the sociological contribution.

The importance of Sociology: October 2014

In 1981, Praeger published a “Handbook of Applied Sociology” edited by Marvin Olsen and Michael Micklin. In its Preface it tells us that “The frontiers of applied sociology are vast and raw, and the wilderness beyond is virtually unknown.” That alone would probably have put many people off of applied sociology. People coming new to a subject don’t want to be told that what they hope to study is an area that is “virtually unknown”. In the prologue it further identifies failures of sociology. “Major policy debates and decisions dealing with race over the last two decades have proceeded in the absence of really adequate evidence. Technical and methodological deficiencies, and the lack of sufficient research, disables sociology in achieving legitimacy as a guide to public policy.” Further, “the resistances of established social institutions and political pressures generated on significant issues can also undermine this legitimacy... All or almost all policy-oriented researchers are in some way flawed or limited by their own methodology, or their implications are debated on these grounds.” This down putting of sociology pervades the rest of the book.

In 1981 I was a busy applied sociologist and had been since 1969, so I went back and looked at the sociology I had applied over that period. I found I had:

- Conducted research for the Royal Commissions on the Australian Government Administration.

- Conducted research for the Royal Commission on Human Relationships

- Conducted research for the Western Melbourne Community Relations Committee. (With this study I produced the first ethnographical maps of Melbourne, setting out the population distribution, by place of birth, of the major migrant groups.)

- Conducted research for the Gladstone Area Social Development Board.

- Conducted research in every State on the Social Effects of Major Industrial Accidents. Funded by ARGC. (This study was the trigger that led to enquiries in each State and the establishment of Work Cover.)

- Conducted research on the employment of the disabled.

- Presented two submissions to Senate Enquiries.

- Presented two papers at an OECD conference.

- Presented papers to SAANZS in Melbourne, Canberra, and Sydney.

- Presented two papers each to Sociology Departments in Melbourne, Boston

- Presented paper to the Royal Society of Arts, Melbourne.

- Presented paper to Australian Health Commission, Adelaide.

- Presented paper to the South Australian Trade and Labour Council.

- Presented paper presented to Rehabilitation staff from Rehabilitation Centers in Victoria.

- Chapter in book published by the OECD

- Chapters in two books published by The Commonwealth Schools Commission.

- Chapter in book published by the Canberra CAE.

Wrote book on ways of assessing abilities of the disabled or injured. Publish by David Syme & Co.. (Used as a text in at least two Universities and the work assessment design was later incorporated into the Victoria Work Cover legislation.)

Published fourteen results of research undertaken by ITIM Research.

Article published in the 1976 Military Review Journal. (Won prize for the best article of the year.)

Gave four interviews on the ABC radio and two on the international service.

Gave one interview on Channel 10 television.

As you can see, the work covered federal government and local government requests, research for trade unions, international presentations and publications. Plenty of work in an environment not at all like the one Olsen and Micklin painted. Twenty three of the thirty contributors to their book were in academic positions. In 2008 two more academics Stephen Steele and Jammie Price published 'Applied Sociology' the difference is a positive introduction the tools available to the applied sociologist and how to use them. Applied Sociology is a relatively recent name for studies going back thousands of years. See Mayhew in the 19th century, Ibn Khaldun in the 14th century, the Romans in the 4th century, the Greeks in the 3rd century BCE, the Chinese in the 4th century BCE, and many others in between. Since that time things have changed. For economic and political reasons convincing people of the value of sociological research may be difficult but now is a time when we are needed. Politics and economics are not the answer. Social studies are not the answer.

Positive and indeed aggressive SOCIOLOGY is more than ever needed.

Doing sociology: November 2014

Sociology Matters

The big event for sociologists this month is the Annual Conference. For many, it will not be possible for you to attend. This is a pity, you will be missing the opportunity of mixing with other sociologists, making new friends, forming new networks and so on. The one thing the conference brings before all of us is that “Sociology matters”. This quote comes from the headline of an article in the latest edition of the ASA’s journal ‘Footnotes’. The article explains the functioning of the National Science Board (NSB), set up in 1950, which is the governing body of the National Science Foundation (NSF) which, in turn, is the official policy advisor to the President and Congress with authority to “recommend and encourage the pursuit of national policies for the promotion of Frontiers in Innovation, Research, Science, and Technology which included Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences. Congress added the mission to promote the progress of science; to advance national health, prosperity, and welfare; to secure the national defense.” Like in Australia there are those in congress who now ask what will the profit be from all this research.

With growing opposition from some republican congressmen and the threat of a 22% cut in funding, the board was asked, why should it remain essential for the US federal government to support nation’s basic research infrastructure. Joanne Tornow, the Assistant Director, challenged the critics in a stirring address: “Why study human behavior and social organizations? Because it matters.” She went on to say, “On the most elemental level, the Social, Behavioral and Economic sciences explain why you comprehend what I am saying. On a day-to-day level, it helps us navigate familiar and professional relationships, build stronger and safer communities and to run businesses efficiently and effectively. On a macro level, they enable us to better understand and address the vexing political, social, and economic challenges that dominate newspaper headlines.” Tornow then explained that the social sciences are sciences just like astronomy, astrophysics, chemistry, or biology. Social sciences work with “observational data and measurements;’ emphasizing objective intent. She noted that simply because examining human beings and their motivations may not be the same as dealing with some physical science inputs, does not mean the social sciences methods are less scientific.

Another Board member Kelvin Droegemeier, Professor of Meteorology at the University of Oklahoma, explained that the physical sciences need the input of the social sciences. He illustrated his point by reminding the Congressmen that the same number of people die today from tornadoes as they did in 1959. Even though we have made enormous scientific, engineering, and technological advances, what we do not yet have a large enough scientific knowledge base that will tell us how people react and understand. Without more social science research, he said, the benefits of other sciences and technologies cannot be translated into the meaningful enhancement of public wellbeing that is needed.

If you cannot get to the Conference, continue to stimulate yourself by keeping up your reading of sociology, both ancient and modern, across the wide spectrum that it covers, so that you can remind your employer, be they government, industry, service industry or welfare organisations or what ever, that they need the insights of sociology to achieve better outcomes. We need to continue the sociological study of human behavior and social organizations, because it matters.

There will be an Applied Sociology Thematic Group meeting during the Conference, Lyndal is not able to be with us and has asked me to chair the meeting. I look forward to seeing at least some of you there.

Economic effects on society: December 2014

The 2014 TASA Conference in Adelaide proved to be one of the best I have been to. I heard some very interesting papers and met up with a host of people, old friends and new. Sixteen papers were presented in the Applied Sociology sessions, however, only one person (apart from me) turned up for the Applied Sociology Thematic Group meeting. So no discussion was had this year. However, one other person arrived half an hour or so after we had gone. She came and asked the person standing next to me where Alan Scott and the Applied Sociology group were meeting. So I was able to introduce myself and we went and had a worthwhile discussion about sociology in the work place just between the two of us. However, there was discussion about Applied Sociology at the Annual Meeting, led by Eileen Clark. The executive, predominately made up of university based people, again decided that applied sociology did not warrant a permanent position on the executive, and if there was an issue anyone elected to the executive could be detailed to look after Applied Sociology.

At the final session we heard three papers on the concerns of those in academia about the attacks on sociology. At question time I again pointed out that sociology did not belong solely to the Universities. That sociology was the day to day work of nearly 100 members of TASA and the universities need to recognise their responsibility to train people in sociology to work outside Universities. What I didn't do, and could have kicked myself for it afterwards, was to raise again the need for a Bachelor of Sociology, that would give those outside academia some academic and professional standing as sociologists. If psychologists can do it, so can sociologists. Opportunity lost.

Sandra Polaski, the ILO's deputy director for policy, quoted by Tom Miles, in an article in the Melbourne 'Age', argues that it is not cheap labour competition that is causing wages to stagnate in more advanced economies: "If productivity levels are increasing you can accommodate the competition, because the productivity of your firm will allow you to continue to pay good wages and still be able to compete. Profits have recovered since the global financial crisis but that income was not being reinvested at the rate seen previously, It's [companies] sitting on this retained profitability that's not producing good results for the global economy. Those on lower incomes in these advanced economies are reducing household demand which is decreasing overall aggregate demand." Is this just an economic issue or does sociology have a component to which we should respond? Much of the political approach to social issues is seen through economic eyes. The article suggests that it is the economic approach by industry is the cause of the lack of services provided to the community. Henry Mayhew, in "London Labour and the London Poor", a masterpiece of social observation and analysis, published in 1862, had this to say to a critic:

The national income, which is estimated at £300,000,000 sterling per annum, may be said to consist of three equal parts: £100,000,000 going to replace capital; £100,000,000 being the gross amount of profits accruing to the capitalists; and £100,000,000 the gross amount of wages received by the labourers. The latter, or wage fund, constitutes the great purchasing fund of the country, for the whole of this is (with the most trifling exceptions) consumed; whereas the profit fund mainly (perhaps more than half) is saved with a view of increasing the capital of the capitalists. Hence, to decrease the wage fund is consequently to decrease the purchasing fund of the community.

How to move on in sociology: January 2015

The American Sociological Association, under the banner of their equivalent to our Applied Sociology, have a penchant for online email debates about sociology in all its various aspects. Currently they are debating underemployment and unemployment, government employment, the discipline of sociology, and retirement.

Extracts from one contributor, Dr Hans Bakker, points to Rural Sociology as a regular employer of sociologist despite academic sociologists regard it as of no importance.

“Many rural sociologists have been employed outside of academia in practical settings, both in their own countries and abroad. Many U.S. rural sociologists have worked all over the world. I feel that general sociology often has an urban and even metropolitan bias. Many rural sociologists know a great deal about general sociology but few general sociologists know all that much about rural sociology.

I know that for some general sociologists, mainstream or heterodox, the notion of “applied sociology” can mean either a kind of Neo-Marxian “public sociology” (political economic health) or a kind of Neo-Freudian “therapeutic sociology” (mental health). Then there is applied sociology related to demographic research (e.g. The Census).”

In answer to the above Dr. Tom Scheff points to his article:

In the American Sociologist [article](#), I propose that our discipline is badly in need of fundamental reform. Like most other disciplines, it is ruled by an out of date doctrine.

Dr Elinore Lurie suggests: I think we’re engaging, on behalf of the discipline, self-correction and adaptation to contemporary times and conditions. Disciplines and organizations that don’t do these things lose their relevance and begin to be outmoded. Certain types of change are necessary for survival.

If you join ASA you can get all the contributions to these debates. What I get out of it is how close we are to the same situations. Limited interest by academics to the sociology that is being done beyond their borders. Kudos for the academic comes from having published refereed papers, and book. Both of which have little or no value for the applied sociologist.

What enhances the Applied Sociologist’s reputation is the usefulness, accuracy and cost effectiveness of the material he provides for his employer. Much of which is not publishable in the academic sense, because of copyright, commercial in confidence, or its format is different to that which a publisher is looking for.

Academic and Applied sociologists are both sociologists they work in different environments; the Applied sociologist in many different environments. They need to appreciate each other’s work, as being equal in applying

From my personal perspective one impediment is that ASA views itself as a disciplinary rather than a professional organization. The American



“That’s the gist of what I want to say. Now get me some statistics to base it on.”

Harry Perlstadt comments that the Psychological Association and American Economic Association are both disciplinary and professionally oriented with sections/divisions for non-academics and support for those inside and outside academia. The same is true for TASA.

What data is all about: February 2015

I have on my bookshelves several books which seek to tell us how sociology should be seen and understood. Lewis Coser in his 'Masters of Sociological Thought' (1977) sets out for the reader what Auguste Comte, (who coined the term 'sociology') saw sociology to be, and perhaps more importantly the environment in which he struggled. He reminds us that Comte saw a hierarchy of sciences: Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, then Sociology. Note that Mathematics, Economics and Psychology didn't get a look in. His view was that only those willing to submit themselves to the rigorous constraints of scientific methodology and to the canons of scientific evidence can presume to have a say in the guidance of human affairs. Comte praised Adam Smith but rejected Smith's and his successors, belief in the self-regulating character of the market. Laissez faire, Comte declared, was "systematizes anarchy" that set up as dogma "the absence of all regulating intervention whatever".

Sociology moved away from Comte's position by saying its methods are rigorous but different from the methods of physics and chemistry. Which takes me on to my next book, "The Uncertain Sciences' by Bruce Mazlish (1998) where he looks at the study of humanity and challenges what some people at least, see as not having the certainty of the physical sciences. He finished his book with a great quote from Susan Buck-Morss about economics that points out that since its invention, the economy is now seen to act in the world: It causes events, and creates effects. She suggests that for economics to reach this status it had to take up representational mapping which allows people to see the whole as if from the outside, in a way that allows them, from a specific position inside, to find their bearings. Navigational maps were the prototypes, mapping the economy was an outgrowth of this technique. Sociology has not found such a dominant way to present its findings to the world, so we are seen by many as one of the uncertain sciences.

The third book is a new book I have been reading, 'The Science of Disk World IV, Judgement Day' (2014) written by three authors Sir Terence "Terry" Pratchett, OBE, an English author. He is best known for his Disk World series of about 40 volumes. Prof. Ian Stewart FRS is Emeritus Professor of Mathematics at the University of Warwick, and a widely known popular-science and science-fiction writer; and Dr. Jack Cohen, is a widely known British reproductive biologist. If you don't know the Disk World series, you may find parts of this book rather strange, however the rest is very good science. The point I want to draw out from the real science parts of this book is; that science is often thought to be a collection of 'facts' which make unequivocal statements about the world. Science does not deal in unchangeable facts. All scientific facts are provisional and to prove this they boldly mention that facts that they gave in earlier volumes of this series have now been superseded by new facts.

Far from being an uncertain science, sociology when it can provide rigorously tested data it is no different to the data on which other sciences understand their data, it is always provisional. Politicians hate this. How can anyone trust scientists? If new evidence comes along, they change their minds. However, it is the new evidence which provides new opportunities. Let's not be frightened of our data. Let us find a way for others to grasp what discover, to make the world a better place, knowing what we present is a step towards the next opportunity.

Book reviews: March 2015

A Master's Degree in Applied Sociology

One University, albeit, an American University, is offering online Master's Degree in Sociology which is designed for Applied Sociologists. The University of Alabama, Birmingham are running the programme and estimate that if you have the time to take the 10 online course you could have the degree. However, they suggest a more realistic trajectory part-time students would be 5 semesters. The degree does not require a thesis and the faculty assists students in undertaking a six-hour applied/community capstone project in your area of interest as a concluding exercise. I don't know if they accept non-Americans but as it is online it should not present a problem. So, if you feel like broadening your background, give it a go.

I mentioned Terry Pratchett in my last letter and last week he died. The media describe Pratchett as a fantasy author, which misses the point of his stories. What he did in his Diskworld series, was to create a world and a cast of characters that were representative of people and institutions in this world. He could then examine social issues in this world, without actually referring to or groups or individuals in this world and without upsetting individuals or groups that are. The ideas and people he uses in the main are taken from the folklore and mythology of various communities around the world and he makes them deal with issues from this world. (See "The Folklore of Diskworld" that he wrote with Jacqueline Simpson to see how earth bound Diskworld is.) He made stories about religion, race relations, migrants or other social issues on Diskworld, which can make us uncomfortable about our social issues. If you start with the early books you will get to know the characters who make the whole thing real. I don't see him as a fantasy writer but a sociologist with a unique twist to his presentation.

Whilst I was at the annual Conference, I took the opportunity to visit the University bookshop.

Browsing through the shelves I came across a book called "30 – Second Economics" Edited by Donald Marron. This seemed a novel approach. On examination I discovered it offered an explanation of 50 economic theories that could be read in 30 seconds plus other bits of relevant information. It is divided into eight sections, with a glossary relevant to each section and a profile of the leading exponent. If you need to refer to economic theory it give you a quick picture of what it is about and the variations that have arisen around it. If one or more Sociologists had the energy, a similar version for sociology would be a valuable tool.

My venture into another Bookshop, this time a very large second hand, brought me to several interesting books. The load was so heavy, I thought they might not let me on plane.

However, they didn't ask to weigh them so that was no problem. One of the books caught my eye because it was edited by a friend from the past. The book, "Social Psychology" published in 1981, made me think again of the connection between psychology and sociology. Looking up social psychology in the Collins Dictionary of Sociology, I found it had an each way bet. It identifies is as 'a sub-field of both psychology and sociology'. As sociologists I wonder how much we consider or report any psychological issues that are raised by our research. Do we recognise them if they are there. I will have a read of the book and get back to you on where I think Social Psychology fits.

Topics for sociological study: April 2015

This month I have been reading archaeology, mostly about the Minoans. The first thing that struck me was that we are 2,015 years into the Common Era, whereas those who commentate on the Minoans are talking about that, and other eastern Mediterranean civilisations, with peoples going back up to 6,000 years before the Common Era. With this in mind we can only wonder at the exquisite, yet relatively mass produced pottery and metal work that they could produce. My mind then turned to the succession of events in our news media, which is full of murder, rape, bullying, military invasions, and natural catastrophes and the fact that these events were just as common for them, as for us, and the impact of such events would have been just as horrifying for those embroiled in such events 2015 years or more before the Common Era as for those 2015 years after.

It seems to me there is a sociological aspect to all of these issues, so I turned to the Collins *Dictionary of Sociology* to see what the general view of these issues might be. The results were as follows:

Murder - Nothing

Rape - Nothing

Bullying - Nothing

Natural catastrophes – Nothing

The only one that got a mention was Military invasions, under the heading of warfare. There it tells me that warfare and the preparation for warfare is often regarded as a near universal feature of human society. This (it adds) is sometimes explained by the presence of innate human aggression as well as by the operation of a territorial imperative in human society.

I then turned to the Penguin *Dictionary of sociology* for an alternate view, but found that it did not refer to any of these issues.

It seems to me that all of these issues have a sociological content, if, for no other reason that they occur in the social environment and impact on the social environment. What have we got to say about Bullying, even rape in the work place? And perhaps a related issue of promotion through sexual favours. There have been murders by disgruntle former employees, do we have no comment on its effect on the social environment?

Or is it that we see all these issues as belonging to others. Murder is a police issue. Rape is a police issue. Bullying is a management issue. Natural catastrophes – no one can do anything about that, except clear up the mess, and warfare comes from our innate aggression and we cannot do anything about that.

The Collins Dictionary declares that “No aspect of society is excluded from consideration by sociology.” If this is so, why is there no discussion of the issues I have raised? Durkheim took a similar issue, ‘suicide’ and said this is more than a religious issue, a moral issue, or a police issue, it is a social issue, even though he has his critics and new studies have come to different conclusion about some issues, it took a Sociologist to say, this is a social issue and we have something to say about it.

Getting a Convenor: May 2015

You will have noted, I hope, that Lyndal-Joy Thompson has relinquished the position of Convenor for this Thematic Group, because of her imminent departure for the U.S. and that I have agreed to act as Convenor until the next Conference in November. I don't intend to continue after that time so all of you other members have 6 months to seriously consider whether you can, given your other commitments, take on leadership of our group.

In the first instance for the remainder of her appointment. Then if you wish, you can nominate for a further 3-year appointment. The job is largely what you make of it, but in many ways it is one of the most important positions in TASA. Those in Applied Sociology do not live in a fellowship of reasonably like-minded sociologists. They are more likely to meet some hostility or people who have no idea what sociology is about or have had a bad experience of sociology when doing their BA. I heard a woman being interviewed on the radio about her degree course. She listed the subjects and finished by saying, "and Sociology which was a complete waste of time". When I was convenor, I started these monthly contact emails so that once a month members would find that their professional Association acknowledged their membership and offered them something sociological to think about. After my three-year term as Convenor, I was asked to continue writing the contact email and save the incoming Convenor the task.

This arrangement has worked quite well, I think, and am happy to go on doing it. What we need now is a member willing to take on the leadership role and help TASA find ways for the Professional development of the Members and finding new ways to link our Applied Sociologists into an active fellowship of like-minded people. I'm sure there is more than one of you who could take on the job. Please give it serious thought and let me know if you would like your name to be put forward. If you would like to talk to me about it, I am available on Skype, email (sjaicb@midcoast.com.au) or phone (02 6656 2587).

An Article in *Sociological Theory* (Vol. 32(4) 283–306, 2014) by David Gibson, has an interesting article on "Enduring Illusions: The Social Organization of Secrecy and Deception". In it he draws attention to Sociologists like Goffman and Simmel, who have theorize that people comply with the dictates of states and other organizations out of self-interest or because of the perceived legitimacy of those in authority. Gibson argues that some organizations, however, are based on lies, or secrets, and it would seem that these should be very short-lived, given how easy it is for the truth to escape. Yet points out there are many organization built on lies and secrets that successfully maintain their lies for years or even decades. He therefore suggests that sociologists ought to be able to develop a sociology of political, corporate and organisational deception and the part it plays in the lives of ordinary people.

The objective of his article is to develop the groundwork for a theory of long-term secrets and lies of the sort that reside at the heart of many organizations, including national governments, religious organisations and commercial concerns. His examples include the Catholic Church's cover-up of the scope of sexual abuse of children by priests, the Big Tobacco Companies cover-up of the health consequences of smoking, the doping epidemic in professional cycling, and the regime in North Korea.

He suggests ways that allow organisations to get away with lies, even when many people still believe the lies even though they are being challenged. What insights do we sociologists bring these social scenarios?

Jobs and Ph.D's: June 2015

We have passed the winter solstice which gave us the longest night of the year. The aurora australis has been seen as far north as Newcastle. Rain is reaching drought ravaged country and time will get out of sync with nature by a 'leap second' at a minute to midnight on Tuesday, 30th June. What have these events to do with sociology? They concern sociology because they can move from an event to an interpretation that affect people. People call the 21st June the shortest day, but really it is the longest night. The 21st and 22nd days are the same length. A social myth in Britain was that, when the aurora was visible as far south as London, war, was coming. That is the equivalent of seeing it in Newcastle. The fear or reality of drought is a constant on the Australian mind but the relieving rain can be just as damaging. A farmer I knew in a drought ravaged area, went to the local minister and asked him to pray for rain. The next day it started to rain. By the follow Saturday it was still raining and the farmer was banging on the minister's door, yelling "For goodness sake tell him to turn it off." Lastly what do we make of leap seconds? We have heard of leap years, but seconds??? A leap second will occur between 23.59hrs Tuesday, 30th June and 00.00hrs on the 1st July. Last year a committee to oversee the world's first public consultation about leap seconds was held. (For details see Wikipedia or *New Scientist* issue 3027). My point with all this is, the connection of people, with the workings of the universe. The massive events in the universe don't just happen out there. Some, at least, can impinge on our lives for good or ill, whether we like it or not or whether what we make of them is true or not. Some people have woven meaning for humanity into these events from their imagination rather than understanding the science. Sociology and science have not made good bedfellows. Some people are still arguing about whether sociology is scientific or not. What we must be prepared to do is to draw a line between what is fanciful imagination and what is real in our interaction with the universe.

I am pleased to say that quite a few of our members responded to my email about information that might help sociological job seekers at least find a place to look for work. One thing that became clear as we looked at your responses was the issue of whether going for a Ph.D. would get you a good job outside university. The clear answer seems to be that it won't. The Ph.D. is the requirement for getting a university job. The reaction in the commercial and not-for-profit worlds seems to be that it is a liability. We have had reports that the ASA has advised its members that the U.S. Public Service will not employ Ph.D.'s. Later we heard that in Australia, Ph.D. applications to Public Service go straight to the no thank you pile without any consideration.

The issue in all this comes back to how and where do we train sociologists for a working life outside of Universities? There have been some warm if not heated discussions about this, but what is suggested by several people is that universities do not have the capacity to train sociologists for non-academic work. Universities instill sociological theory very well, as an academic subject, but are not equipped to train people for applied sociology. It seems we are starting a debate on where and how we should train applied Sociologists. If you would like to join the discussion please feel free to send your comment to me and I will collate to report the results in due course.

Historical data, a new approach: July 2015

I have just published what is perhaps a new kind of publication. I do research for the local regional museum and one of its collections was the “Occurrence Books”, i.e. Log Books, of the local fire brigade from its inception in 1912 to 1965 when it change from a volunteer to a professional brigade. One problem museums have is they want to give people access to the material in their collection but they cannot allow people to constantly finger the material. The old solution was to provide cotton gloves, this has given way, to some extent, to the digitalisation of their collections. There is still much that has to be copied.

How you tackle this problem, depends on the kind of material to be made available. My solution, after assessing these log books, was that most people would use them for one or more items of particular information. These were where the fires were, who the firemen were, what fire engines they used and other historical information which was not directly related to fire brigade, but provided general historical information.

I extracted from these log books the information under these headings and this is now available in print at the museum, the local library, the local fire station and the NSW Fire Service Museum in Sydney and the State and National Libraries. The next stage is to put this information on the internet. Which I hope will be completed in the next month or so. People looking for information recorded by the Fire Brigade will have it available to them, without the need for them to have access to the original books.

One question I have raised with myself is, have I been doing sociology, social history, just history or some other academic classification? My conclusion is that I am a Sociologist, I have been doing applied sociology, because I have not provided a theoretical base for the information, I have not tried to interpret the information. What I have done is put the information contained in the material into an easily accessible form that safeguard's the original. I believe I was able to do this because of my applied sociological background. The objective of applied sociology is to enable the community to look at itself, it objectives, and concerns and make informed decisions about the issues it faces. What I have done is give easy access to the information so that others may use it as they tackle issues in the society.

Who does sociology? August 2015

My reading this month has been focused on the Elizabethan era. Two books have caught my attention. One is a small and overpriced book of quotes from John Donne which has 16 pages with one or even half a sentence on most of the pages with an illustration on the facing page. It should also be said that there was much more useful information on the dust cover than in the book. The other book is the 'Elizabethan Underworld' by Gamini Salgado that gives a very vivid account of London's underbelly in the 1600's. It describes how the London underworld was far more highly organised and efficient than the forces of Law and Order. They were organised with a clear division of labour, ridged demarcation of their area of operation, they had a training school for recruits and a quicker than the internet, means of disposing of stolen goods. Interestingly it describes how St Paul's Cathedral was the epicentre of much of the criminal activity. One contemporary description of what went on there gives this picture of the cathedral: "The south aisle is for usury, the north aisle for simony and the middle aisle is for the horse fair and all around it goes, bargaining, meetings, brawlings, murders, and conspiracies. Then, at the font, is where ordinary payments of can be made." The Elizabethan St Paul's was as much a den of thieves as a house of prayer. From 1621 to 1631 John Donne was the Dean of St Paul's cathedral where he had to preside over these goings on, and King Charles regularly came there for services, yet both of them seem to have been able to ignore the criminal activity going on around them. John Donne's famous words "No man is an island" (today read person) is perhaps the closes he got to understanding what was going on around him, and perhaps his other famous words "Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." Was an observation for the underworld, where the death sentence was waiting for those who got caught doing crimes we would consider minor today? For stealing anything worth more than 5 pence, stealing bird's eggs, poaching at night, even begging, could all result in a death sentence.

Would you say these authors were doing sociology? They remind us that, however much we feel independent, we are always part of the community. So as David and Julia Jary point out in their Dictionary of Sociology, that sociology is "the systematic study of the functioning, organisation, development and types of human societies". Do you have to have a Ph.D. in sociologist to write sociology? One of these authors had a D.Theol., the other a Professor of English. People have been writing sociology since ancient China, ancient Greece, ancient Rome, and the medieval Islamic world without ever knowing they were doing Sociology.

People who have not studied sociology can produce work that is sociological, and we can applaud that. But if you profess to being a sociologist it behoves you to make a contribution to the social needs of the day and be prepared to convince others of the value of sociology for groups, organisations, communities and nations. The applied sociologist is at the heart of these happenings but also needs to contribute informing the whole society of our work and our worth.

Violence: September 2015

Next month we come to the TASA Annual Conference. I intend to be there, but the only member who responded to my August request for some idea of our members who would be going, was to tell me that they could not. So it looks as if it will be a lonely conference. There will be papers presented under the Applied Sociology banner. 1. 'The impact of neo-liberalism on principles of equity and reciprocity in International Student Exchange.' 2. 'Through a lens, Brightly: How Analysis of 20th Century Science Fiction can inspire Authentic Research Outcomes.' 3. 'Bouncers and 'Dirty Work' in a Neoliberal Society.' There is a blank spot in the time allocation, which I am taking up, to run a discussion on the poor quality of online questionnaire. I want to do this because I feel that this poor quality gives the methodology a bad name to one of our research tools. So, are they designed by people calling themselves Sociologists? If yes, then how were they taught. If no, then TASA should be questioning their validity.

The coming conference has reminded me of an article in *New Scientist* (19 Sept 2015 p 41ff) by Tiffany Watt Smith, (from the University of London, Centre for the History of Emotions) on how language does not just communicate emotion, it also help to shape it. There will be a lot of words spoken at the conference, but do we always think about the impact they may have on people quite apart from the meaning of the words. Even then can we assume that listeners will always understand what we think we said. The sociology of language or Sociolinguistics, and especially Harold Garfinkel's 'ethnomethodology' and Erving Goffman's conception of 'the interaction order' gave sociology a new tool for social analysis'. I am not up with what is being taught in sociology these days, but I see little reference to their use. Back in the 1970s-80s, 'conversational analysis', was all the rage. But after that it seemed to fall out of favour. I always thought it was a valuable tool, because it could demonstrate, for instance, how a professional interviewer could argue the evidence in the conversation or a questionnaire, round to get a predetermined result. It enabled you to identify, in a conversation, what were conventional words, having little meaning or a particular social meaning, and what was really original data. People like Chomsky, Wittgenstein, Habermas, Adato, Psathas, Schwartz, as well as Garfinkel and Goffman etc. all contributed to researching and explaining it use. Advertisers still give a lot of attention to words and their emotive impact, even if they don't understand how its importance was developed. Most people assume that what they say will be understood cognitively by those to whom we address our remarks but rarely test whether we are understood in the way we intend or test whether our words have any emotional implications.

I don't want to put you off the Conference, what I do want is to encourage you to discuss what is said, analyse what is said, see what other people heard or interpreted. That way we will produce better research and a better understanding of Sociology.

Words make a difference: October 2015

Next month we come to the TASA Annual Conference. I intend to be there, but the only member who responded to my August request for some idea of our members who would be going, was to tell me that they could not. So it looks as if it will be a lonely conference. There will be papers presented under the Applied Sociology banner. 1. 'The impact of neo-liberalism on principles of equity and reciprocity in International Student Exchange.' 2. 'Through a lens, Brightly: How Analysis of 20th Century Science Fiction can inspire Authentic Research Outcomes.' 3. 'Bouncers and 'Dirty Work' in a Neoliberal Society.' There is a blank spot in the time allocation, which I am taking up, to run a discussion on the poor quality of on line questionnaire. I want to do this because I feel that this poor quality gives the methodology a bad name to one of our research tools. So, are they designed by people calling themselves Sociologists? If yes, then how were they taught. If no, then TASA should be questioning their validity.

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Living in the world: November 2015

An article in the *New Scientist* for the 31st October, (pp. 8-9). The opening paragraph has this to say: “The curtain at the edge of the universe may be ripping, hinting that there may be more backstage. Data from the European Space Agency’s Planck telescope could be giving us our first glimpse of another universe, with different physics, bumping up against our own.” I’m not sure that their ‘different physics’ logically follows, but the thought of us on our small planet, moving in a small galaxy, in a universe we cannot comprehend, with all our troubles, makes us so insignificant in what is now an understanding of a reality that we cannot fully grasp. Where do our theories of sociology fit in a universe that is banging into another universe? I will leave the issue there, and move on to issues in our small part of our small planet.

In response to the ‘Becoming More Professional’ material that Mitzi prepared, there has been a massive 36 responses posted. Mitzi has asked for permission to make a 20 minute presentation to the Executive at the Conference next week and I will be there in support. She has also got the issues on the Annual Meeting agenda for debate. Any of our members who will be present at the Conference please make sure you are at the Annual Meeting. If any of you who cannot be there have anything you would like to be presented at the Annual Meeting, please send it to me before Thursday (19th).

Whilst we are on our Group’s matters, I would remind you that I agreed to be Acting Convener until the Group Meeting at the Annual Meeting. I did not want things to fall in a heap and have tried to keep things going. However, I am getting too old, and the group needs someone a bit younger to see to the running of things. The position is: there is one year left of Lyndal Thompson’s three years which needs to be filled, then if that person wants (and the rest of us agree) they can continue in a three year term in their own right. If one person is not prepared to commit for four years we will need one person for one year then another person beginning a three year term starting in 2017. For the moment I am willing to continue being the Continuing Education Officer, and produce the monthly Contact email, it keeps my mind ticking over.

I will finish off this month with something else from ‘*New Scientist*’ (17th November, p. 22). This article concerns new digital technology which can search millions of papers to identify for you every paper that has been published on the particular topic you are interested in. It makes the point that of all the papers published each year only half will be read by more than three people. This has started with The Allen Institute in Seattle. A second organisation, Meta Science, has opened up in Toronto to do the same thing. The U.S. Defense Advanced Research Agency is working on a similar search engine. This article was written with the natural sciences in mind, but it would be just as useful for the social science. I don’t know if these programs are available to search for sociology or whether there is niche opportunity for someone to develop a new one.

Social reality: December 2015

The year has almost gone, yet it only seems a few weeks ago that it started. When you are young things take forever to arrive. The older you get, life seems to quicken up. One of the things sociology should understand is, that the living of life is not experienced through chronology, or by the calendar. Life cannot be reduced to a category, as beloved by public servants and statisticians. You cannot say that people over 70 cannot do this or that. You cannot say that people over 80 should not be allowed to do this or that. You could change those figures to: 14 and 18, 30 or 40, 50 to 69, and the statement would be just as true. Humanity cannot be classified by numbers. I am reminded of a comment by Leach, from a long time ago. (Leach, E. (1967), 'An Anthropologist's Reflections on a Social Survey', in *Anthropologists in the Field*, eds D. Jongmans, and P. Gutkind, Van Gorcum, Assen, Netherlands.) In citing an earlier study, he observes that 'the numerical apparatus, in which their conclusions are embedded, is very largely, a complicated piece of self-deception'. Trying to reduce life to numbers fits the same description.

Sociological research stands at the intersection of a number of disciplines that include: economics, politics, psychology, history and geography as well as medicine, biochemistry, physiology, education, language development, marketing, housing, regional development, employment and more. This position requires sociology to try to ground individuals, and the events that affect them, into the broader social context of humanity. In the work of these disciplines, the question of social impact is not always recognised or investigated. The inter-relationship of the single event and the total phenomenon need to be part of any interpretation to have lasting significance. As Habermas, one of the most perceptive writers around today, has pointed out:

Life histories constitute themselves not only in the vertical dimension as a temporal connection of the cumulative experiences of an individual. They are also formed at every moment horizontally at the level of the inter-subjectivity of communication common to different subjects. (1972, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. J. Shapiro, Heinemann, Portsmouth, pp 155-156).

Dilthey (1961, *Pattern & Meaning in History*, Harper & Row, New York.) makes the same point when he suggests that each individual is, at the same time, at a point of intersection of structures that are part of their life in one way and exist outside them in another. The validity of sociological research lies not so much in its mathematical correctness but in its ability to identify how an individual understands their particular experience of being human and how this is related to what is happening to humanity as a whole.

We are always shocked to discover that others do not see social reality in the same way as we do. In research, it is important to try to understand what a participant recognizes as their social reality, rather than judging them by the reality of the researcher or policy maker. We need to try to understand the evidence they have that makes them believe their understanding of social reality is the right one. Research needs to recognise that people have a 'vertical' and a 'horizontal' dimension and that their understanding of it is unique to themselves. All this doesn't do much for quantitative research. Some quotes from research on ageing I did a few years ago may illustrate the point:

"There is much I have yet to do, to witness, to taste, to share. I do not think actuarial tables, or my doctor, should fix the parameters of my life expectancy or usefulness. Only I can define old, or elderly, or used up, as it applies to me. I will make the call; and until then, I have a lot of living to do."

“Society in general needs to be informed that retirees are an integral part of the community and have earned their right to live out this phase of their life and to contribute to the society in other ways than earning a salary.”

Both of these quotes could be applied to any age group, but finally one about collecting real data:

Given the time, you allowed us to write our answers, I'm not going to write down something off the top of my head. I need time to consider the questions. If you want a serious answer you should give us these questions separately and a week to think about them, then you might get sensible answers.

The Independent Scholar: January 2016

This month I want to report on two finds. I have been an independent scholar, that is not attached to any academic institution, for 46 year and it was only a couple of weeks ago that I discovered there, not one but two organisations that provided services for scholars outside academia. The first, was the U.S. group calling itself The National Coalition of Independent Scholars. (NCIS) What they offer is:

The National Coalition of Independent Scholars is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation organized in 1989 to support independent scholars. Basic to many of the goals of NCIS is providing a sense of community in which independent scholars can interact and address issues we have traditionally encountered. NCIS has also responded to the increasing numbers and changing demographic of independent scholars.

We have identified some of our largest constituent groups. First and foremost are those who have not or never wished to enter academia, or those who have left it, preferring instead the life of the independent scholar.

Another group of NCIS members is that of academics who are peripheral and marginal to their institutions. They continue to grow in numbers as academia no longer provides a stable position or income for much of its faculty, relying instead upon part-timers and adjuncts who are offered little or nothing in the way of benefits or jobs security.

Newly emerging is the second or new career scholar who has decided, for various reasons, to forgo previous pursuits and enter a field of scholarship (s)he has long dreamed of pursuing.

And, of course, there are numerous others who have chosen this route for their own individual reasons. Regardless who or when the decision to pursue scholarship has been undertaken and what degree, if any, has been sought, NCIS welcomes those independents who qualify for membership. We also welcome other groups of organized scholars to join us as Affiliate members.

Today, NCIS is an international organization whose members hail from many continents and pursue diverse fields of study in a variety of disciplines. This is the population NCIS proudly serves.

For more information see their [website](#).

Having signed up, I was looking at their web site and discovered there was a similar Australian organisation, The Independent Scholars Association of Australia, so I signed up with them as well. What they offer is:

The purpose of ISAA is to encourage and support individuals who undertake independent scholarly work outside the nation's formal institutes of education and research; to promote such scholarship; and to stimulate public debate in Australia. It does so by:

- bringing such individuals together to share interests and expertise
- sponsoring conferences and lectures for both members and the public
- offering informed opinion on matters of public interest and concern
- creating a collective voice on issues affecting the practice of scholarship
- representing the interests of independent scholars in the public arena
- supporting knowledgeable dissent and independent opinion

As an organisation ISAA takes no position on matters of party politics. ISAA supports the right of its members to take an individual stand on matters of public concern but their statements should not be presented as reflecting the view of the Association or other members.

See their [web site](#).

Soon after I joined, the American crowd sent me an offer to submit an abstract for consideration to publish an article in their journal. I am working on an abstract, so we will see what happens.

If you do sociology, you do scholarly work. I think the connections will be useful both for issues that concern us and new contacts we might make with people doing similar work, Have a look at the web sites and see what you think.

Thinking Sociology: February 2016

I have wondered where my mischievous character came from, now I know - I'm a Monkey, at least in the Chinese tradition, I was born in a year of the monkey. It seems to work.

This month, I want to draw your attention to the new book, ECONOBABBLE, with the sub title "How to decode political spin and economic nonsense". It is written by Dr. Richard Dennis, a prominent Australian economist, author and public policy commentator, currently Chief Economist and former Executive Director of The Australia Institute. Earlier he was Adjunct Associate Professor in the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University. He has been described as being a constant thorn in the side of politicians on both sides due to his habit of exposing dodgy economic justifications for policy. My economic insights must be good, as I have found that he agrees with much of what I have been saying about politicians and their economic for a long time. Take a look and see what you think. Whilst reading I began to get the feeling that much about the way politicians treat economics might also be true about sociology, even when they don't even justify statement by pretending they know something about sociology. Perhaps we should take a serious look at SOCIOBABBLE and begin to challenge it.

The American Sociological Association, in conjunction with The New Yorker, have published 'The Sociologists Book of Cartoons'. Copyright allows for embodiment of examples, in reviews. So I found this appropriate for recommending the book to Applied Sociologists. This cartoon may well ring a bell with sociologists working for government or big business, What would come out, if this situation was real may very well be the SOCIOBABBLE mentioned above.

I thought I might review the book from time to time.

I have always been impressed by the work of Charles Booth and this week received two volumes of part of his great work on the 'Life and Labour of the People in London'. It has been seen as one of the founding texts of British sociology, drawing on both quantitative (statistical) methods and qualitative methods (particularly ethnography). His research was into three areas, 'Poverty', 'Industry' and 'Religious influences' with a final volume on 'Social Influences' and 'Conclusions'. I have been impressed by his approach to this study. He didn't go around with his predetermined questions, he let the people tell it how it was. In the religion section, he doesn't rate one against another, he gets the ministers and priests, to tell it how it is. Who the people are that come or don't come, what gets done and by whom and lots of other details. If you want to take a look, The London School of Economics keeps his work on an online searchable database.

Sociology and the Law: March 2016

I have just started reading the 4 volume *Notable Historical Trials* edited by Justin Lovill, with an introduction by Sir John Mortimer, CBE, QC, (1923-2009), who was an English barrister, dramatist, screenwriter, and author. Sir John, in it his introduction, suggests “There are three kinds of legal trials. Political trials, when the legal proceedings are merely a weapon by which the state chooses to obliterate its opponents, and which are too often, a cloak for judicial murder. There are the trials when what are put in the dock are not the accused’s crimes but his or her ideas, or, frequently, ideals. Again, these are weapons with which the state has found it only too easy to stifle dissent. In such trials the law ventures into questions of morality, philosophy or the free expression of opinions, matters with which it is ill equipped to deal and where its clumsy attempts to capture abstract thought often lead to the same comic result as the spectacle of a policeman trying to arrest a sunbeam. These trials are usually a disaster for the law and, whatever the verdict, a moral victory for the person accused.”

“The third class of trial is the one that has the best chance of being fair -- the decision as to the guilt or innocence of a citizen; accused of such matters as burglary or arson or murder, in which a jury can hear the arguments well presented on both sides and come, with a fair wind and a little bit of luck, to a just Verdict.” The books run to over 500 pages in each volume and covers 43 trials, so I can’t quote too much.

I have never thought much about Sociology and Law, and my Dictionary of Sociology suggests there is a place for such studies, but also suggests that the sociological input has been diluted by the rise in academia of socio-legal studies. Be this as it may, on reading the trial of Socrates I am inclined to suggest he was one of the first Sociologists. Socrates was charge with three things; he didn’t believe in the City’s gods and worships others, he corrupts the youth, and does evil. This apparently was a stock charge against philosophers. When Socrates begins his defence, we discover that what is annoying the upper classes, is that he has been doing research and by so doing is seen as meddling in forbidden things. This attitude that research, whether scientific or sociological, is still seen today, by some at least, as meddling in forbidden things, such as challenging political views, or religious ideas. At least youth seem to be able, in part at last, to corrupt themselves and researchers no longer get the blame.

However, there is a danger in some research presentation, where numbers are seen as the definitive answer to everything. Percentages of who people will vote for whom, or the people who answered yes to a question. I have always been sceptical of questionnaires that add up the numbers and see this as a definitive result.

Leach, in a critique (1967) of another study, suggested that some of the interpretation of an apparently, unproblematic survey data, collected a few years earlier, was convincing only because the main researchers, already familiar with the region, arrived inadvertently at their conclusions by intuitive methods. The numerical apparatus in which these conclusions are embedded seems to Leach to be very largely a complicated piece of self-deception’

Plato, who was at Socrates trial, has left us this observation: A good decision is based on knowledge and not on numbers. What does sociology say about law where you work?

Thinking about politics: April 2016

Over the next few weeks we are going to face a barrage of politics spin. One Dictionary of Sociology tell us that both political sociology and political science insist that political institutions must be treated as fully implicated in society not as a system that can be understood in isolation. That sounds nice and academic but then as Scottish physicist John C. Maxwell, once remarked “People may hear your words, but they feel your attitude.” Having started looking at quotes I found some others that are perhaps appropriate to the present time.

“Men enter politics solely as a result of being unhappily married.” (Cecil Northcote Parkinson)

“Politicians have no leisure, because they are always aiming at something beyond political life itself, power and glory, or happiness.” (Aristotle)

“Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people”. (Eleanor Roosevelt)

“Whatever you do in life, surround yourself with smart people who’ll argue with you.” (John Wooden)

Then there is one quote which will sound very familiar. It is one of the Neoliberals favourite quotes:

“The Budget should be balanced, the Treasury should be refilled, public debt should be reduced, the arrogance of officialdom should be tempered and controlled, and the assistance to foreign lands should be curtailed, lest we will become bankrupt. People must again learn to work instead of living on public assistance.”

However, the words really come from the Roman Politician, Cicero, from around 55 BC.

Then one final quote from the Greek philosopher Socrates.

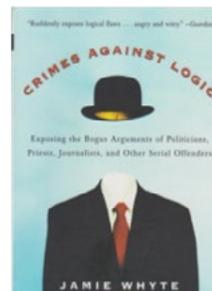
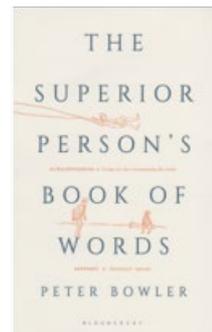
“False words are not only evil in themselves, but they infect the soul with evil.”

One new book that is worth a read, especially at this time, is “ECONOBABBLE - How to decode political spin and economic nonsense” by Dr Richard Dennis, now Chief Economist of the Australian Institute. One reviewer, Ross Gittens has commented: “The best guide you’ll find to the literal non-sense that usually passes for economic debate in this country.”

Sorry to start the political debate so early, but as has been said, Sociology cannot be contained, it looks at the consequences of life.

One final quote of justification for me that comes from Confucius:

“Old age, believe me, is a good and pleasant thing. It is true you are gently shouldered off the stage, but then you are given such a comfortable front stall as spectator.”

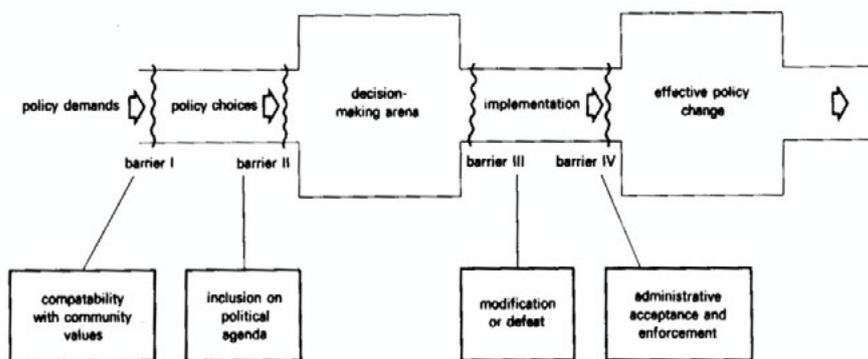


New Convenor/Secrecy: May 2016

Sociology is good for you. The oldest person in the U.S. is 113-year-old Goldie Michelson, who has a master's degree in sociology from Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. Her thesis was titled "A Citizenship Survey of Worcester Jewry" and examined why many of the city's older Jewish immigrant residents did not pursue American citizenship or learn English.

I hope those of you who live in Melbourne (and anyone else of course) will try to come to at least some events of the Annual Conference in November (28 Nov-1 Dec). I have decided to present a paper there this year on an issue which seems to overlap what is taught in Universities and its commercial application. The issue is the poor quality of questionnaires. I see a lot of questionnaires particularly on line, which cannot, with any certainty, deliver what they promise. I don't know how questionnaire design is taught these days but if some of the designers are products of universities, they have not been taught the consequences of what they do. They offer mismatch of alternatives, a limited number of possible answers, ask for your assessment of a range of organisations that you have no knowledge of, and so on. I hope this will enable a good discussion on questionnaire design and a look at whether people designing commercial questionnaires have had appropriate training. The questionnaire is an important research tool and it is important that questionnaires should be of the highest quality. If you have any comments on the subject you would like to pass on, I will be glad to receive them.

I note that the John Wiley & Sons (Publishers) Polity Books Series catalogue does not have a section on Applied Sociology. Whether this is because Applied Sociologists don't have the time to write books or because Wiley's have never heard of Applied Sociology. The Catalogue does have some titles that may be of interest. 'The Sociology of Consumption', by Joel Stillerman, (A global study), 'Labour Movements' by Stephanie Luce (Unions against Neoliberalism), 'Overworked and Underpaid' by Trebor Scholz (How workers are disrupting the digital economy), 'The Night Cleaner' by Florence Aubenas (The problems of the West's postindustrial economy and getting a living from part-time or temporary jobs.), 'The Causes of Structural Unemployment' by Janoski, Luke & Oliver. (Factor keeping people from jobs), 'The Sociology of Work' by Grant & Nixon, (A comprehensive overview of the world of work.), 'Globalization and Work' by Williams, Bradley, Devadason & Erickson. (Deals with synthesis between Work & Globalization), 'Civic Capitalism'



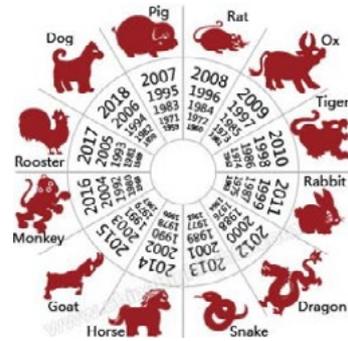
by Colin Hay & Anthony Payne, (Suggests a way to a sustainable and environmentally friendly society.), 'Can financial Markets be Controlled?' by Howard Davies, (Does control of financial organisations work?), and finally 'Homo Economicus, the lost prophet of modern times' by Daniel

Cohen. (Argues a rebalance between competition and co-operation. Now there is a nice lot of books I haven't read but may get round to in time.

I discovered today that at least one person lists their occupation as "Inventiologist, Psychologist and Executive Coach." I can't imagine what an inventiologist does, and it seems to me that people in executive position should not need a coach unless they are the relations of the boss or in jobs for the boys straight for being nothing. Now I think about it, I was in the position many years ago of trying to tell the managing director what he had to do (He was an English forester, but the family said it was his turn to take over the Australian operation). At the same time, in the same company, I was also trying to tell the shop steward how to be a shop steward. The previous one had left and the Union rep had pick one woman and said you are the Shop Steward and walk out. Ain't life interesting?

Employment & the future: June 2016

Some thoughts for those in the workplace to consider. *New Scientist* for the 21 June 2016 has raised a question which we ought to be thinking about. Whilst the politicians are raving about the jobs they are going to create, and the terrible payment of social welfare, there is no word as to what these jobs are or where they might be or what will happen when there are no jobs for 50% of the potential workforce. All this, when many jobs are being outsourced overseas because that is cheaper. Others are disappearing because of new technology. Both of these issues are important but it is the last one I want to concentrate on today. How susceptible are our jobs to computerisation? The question isn't new. Fear of machines taking jobs dates back at least to the Luddites in 1811, when British weavers who went on a mill-burning rampage when power looms made them redundant. The economist, John Maynard Keynes in 1930 assumed that robots would take our jobs. He thought that by 2030 the working week would shrink to 15 hours and the rest of our time would be spent trying to live "wisely, agreeably and well". However, that is not going to happen. I once wrote a paper on the question of whether Karl Marx could accept the idea of a non-working class. I came to the conclusion that he had almost got there but was not game to put it in writing. We however, may have to face this question. In 2013 Frey & Osborne, from the Oxford University's Martin Programme on the Impacts of Future Technology, looked at 702 types of work and ranked them according to how easy it would be to automate them. They examined the expected impacts of computerisation on the US labour market, analysing the number of jobs at risk and the relationship between an occupation's probability of computerisation, wages and educational attainment. According to their estimates, about 47% of US employees are at risk. Many people are working more than they used to. Others have told me that in many white collar jobs people find that the contracted hours bear little resemblance to the hours they actually work. Large numbers of workers have already been displaced by computerisation but to date many have been able to find employment elsewhere. The question now is how long can this continue, now that artificial intelligence is being devised to tackle many tasks beyond the mundane and repetitive.



At this point I remembered I had made a submission to the Federal Government's Inquiry into Technological Change in Australia, in 1979. Looking through it, I found I had spent pages showing the arguments from 850BC to the present day that people, for religious and economic reasons, had to work. I pointed out that, in economic terms, the real issue that has to be faced in the coming years is not unemployment but employment. The decreasing need for human employment, is not being caused by economic depression but by the fact that the gross domestic product can be increasingly maintained without the need to deploy the amount of labour previously used to maintain it. What we must be concerned with is how people can equably share in the continued wealth of the nation and how they can satisfyingly occupy their time. A second problem is that those released from the need to labour will fall unevenly across the range of jobs that currently exist. This will require us to devise some new means of balancing work and other activities, remuneration or income, and the way status is achieved. I must have got something right because I was called to give further evidence in person. But the chance of beginning the process to do something was lost.

Sociology and/or action: July 2016

We are Sociologists, whether we work in the community or in academia. However, are sociologists simply observers of the world or do our observations lead to action and if it does, do we or who decides what that action should be and can we still remain sociologists and take real action?

I must admit that much of my work, over the years, has tended to report what was wrong and suggest how it could be remedied. Mostly because the power to change things was in other people's hands, not mine, and that may be our problem. It is not enough just to present a report or publish a paper, then move on to the next job hoping that something will be done. Certainly, in many situations, something was done, but that still leaves issues that attack the actions of the powerful or the rich or criminals or a culture in a particular environment, can we act to change these? See the news today about the treatment in youth detention centres and the cover-ups that have occurred?

The skill of the sociologist is in understanding the social results of a particular group of humans who are brought together in a particular situation. Such as a village, an urban setting, an office, a factory, a military unit, a police force, or by a political policy. People say there are always winners and losers, but that only brings up another sociological question of "Why?"

Given all that, I still listen to the news every morning, and every morning, it seems I am being told of attacks on crowds of people going about their normal life, followed by the number of shootings in Sydney or Melbourne, the increasing road toll, and people being cheated out of their savings.

What can a sociologist do? We have the skills to uncover the social process that is taking place even if it doesn't fit academic or political theories. But what do we do with it when this is done. What we must learn to do is to get close to those with the skills to inaugurate change; print journalists, media presenter, people in the political system, (not necessarily the politicians) and anyone else who can influence bad social situations to make it at least better.

Dominant Theories: August 2016

As a follow up to the great discussion started by my last email, I thought it worth pushing the envelope a bit more. I did put a reference to Michael Higgins, the President of Ireland, who, among other things, is a Sociologist, who became President with far more votes than any Irish politician in the history of the republic. One of the points he made was:

Universities needed to be allowed to flourish as spaces with the intellectual courage to reject dominant ideologies and encourage the seeking of truth from fact. We must first recognise that we live at a time when the language and rhetoric of the speculative market has become embedded in the educational culture and has brought some university practices down a precarious road. That reductive view has brought us, I believe, to a time of great questioning about the purpose of the university – much of which has been corrosive – and perhaps even to a moment of intellectual crisis.....Any abandoning or relegation of the humanities in our academic institutions would be seen by future generations as a “betrayal of the purpose of education”, “If we wish to develop independent thinkers and questioning, engaged citizens, our universities must, while providing excellence in professional training, avoid an emphasis that is solely or exclusivity on that which is measurable and is demanded by short-term outcomes.

I entirely agree, but I don't think politicians would like his last point.

New Scientist (6/8/16 p42) reviews' two new publications (one by two public health experts and one by a sociologist), looking at the question of why people refuse to accept scientific facts. This again is part of the dominant theory problem. Dominant theories need not be those of academia, they can be accepted uncritically by people with no background in the subject. One book points out that one in five people in the US will die from heart disease. Yet the chance of contracting Ebola from Thomas Duncan, the only person to die of Ebola in the US, is one in 13.3 million. Yet it was the second issue that caused mass public hysteria.

The problem with dominant theories is that people are prepared to believe them, whatever the evidence against them is produced. Succinctly put in the title of the public health book “Denying to the Grave”. Exploring the psychology, neurobiology and evolutionary roots that are behind our decision making, conclude that they work by first activating the brains emotional centre, the amygdala, using inflammatory and emotional words and images, (see Donald Trump) which also trigger strong hippocampal memory. This will inhibit the prefrontal cortex, which deals with reason and emotional control of the brain. The first one to get an idea in someone's head in this way, is the idea that sticks. The problem for science, sociology and any other data based knowledge is that data by itself does not resonate with most people, and if the anti-data mob get there first your chance of your data being accepted is considerably diminished.

Dogma or the dominant theory, wherever it is found; be it in physics, anthropology, religion, sociology, politics or anywhere else, has in the past and no doubt will in the future, cause death, hostility, loss of employment and misery.

The saving grace is that when someone asks you to do research for them, it means they have not got a dominant theory about the situation, so whether you give them a positive solution or a negative one you have a good chance of your results being accepted.

Finding Utopia: September 2016

In 1516 Sir Thomas More, an English lawyer, social philosopher, author, statesman and noted Renaissance humanist, wrote a book describing a fictional island society in the Atlantic Ocean called Utopia (from the Greek meaning: a good place). Where people live, what he conceives as the perfect life. This is all well and good, but no one believes that this ever happened. There have always been wars to dominate, to squash conflicting ideas or gain wealth. Yet evidence is now emerging that suggests that such a place did exist, not in the Atlantic but in the Indus river valley in what is now Pakistan.

From 2600 to 1900 BC, what appears to have been a peaceful society existed. It extended over at least 800,000 square kilometres, in which there were two major cities, Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro and more than a 1,000 other towns and villages. They had what we would consider to be modern Town Planning. There were no defensive city walls, or castles, and a sewage system as good as ours today. They traded internationally, particularly with the middle east. They had the written word to record their transactions and probably their history. The problem with their writing is that no one knows how to translate it. I have been fascinated with this place for many years and the one thing that sticks in my craw is that a 19th century English railway engineer, had many of their buildings pulled down for the brick to be crushed and used as ballast for his railway track.

So it seems there was one a place and time when people did not solve disagreements by fighting, where people could live in peace, undisturbed by conflicting political, religious or commercial ideas. What does Sociology make of such a place? Most of our major theories have concentrated on what is happening now, and a few have added this is where it will lead. It seems to me that we have usually left it to others if anything is to be done about a situation. I know in one research situation I was asked to tackle, was where two conflicting professional ideas were causing confusion and harm to the people they were supposed to be helping. I came up with a solution which would solve the situation, but I didn't stick around to see if it would work, or be available to assist the transition. I thought that was someone else's job.

I agree with George Herbert Mead's point that "The behaviour of an individual can only be understood in terms of the behaviour of the whole social group of which he is a member, since his individual acts are involved in larger social acts, which go beyond himself and which implicate the other members of that group" Sociologists look to describe the social actions of their immediate vicinity and to some extent the larger amorphous group that is the realities for the world population. The President of Ireland, as I have mentioned before is a Sociologist, and he has recently said that "the role of the university lies in enabling citizens to develop the tools to address the great challenges of our time." It seems the only tools we have available to us at the moment are conflicting political, religious and commercial ideologies which are to be used to destroy all the others.

Utopia may not be impossible, as has been shown 4,000 years ago. However, if we are to achieve it today we have to find new ways getting rid of the ways of conflict we have devised and find new ways of living together. This is a social problem, what can we do about it?

Old ideas, are not all bad: October 2016

Yesterday I went to see my doctor who told me that the latest thing in medicine is “Descripting” that is checking a patients scripts to see whether they are being over medicated. I came home and read an article in this week’s *New Scientist* about Seshat (the Egyptian goddess of knowledge) but not her so much as the new data base which is using her name to create a social history data base. The compilers say their goal is to test rival social scientific hypotheses with historical and archaeological data. Therefore, the Databank is systematically compiled with information about polities from around the globe. Specify the main theoretical positions and identify empirical patterns in aspects of human history that need to be explained -e.g. the evolution of cooperation among large groups of people, the persistence of certain types of ritual activity, how improvements in people’s material well-being occur, etc.. You can read the details at <http://seshatdatabank.info/methods/>. I think it a pity that they are not including Sociological data.

What I got from both of these events is that we ought constantly to look back from where we are, to see how we got where we are, but more importantly let go of thing that might be holding us back. This takes me to Steven Poole’s new book, *Rethink, The surprising History of New Ideas*, among other things he points out how an old idea can become relevant again with the discovery of a new piece of the puzzle.

How often in sociology do we pile new theories on top of old ones and assume that we have made progress when in fact we may have lost a great new insight. After I had given a lecture one time, I was asked the dates of my references, when I gave them, I was told “This is rubbish if you can get any new references it not worth listening to.” I believe that rather than being rubbish, if you don’t review the theories of the past and see what they have to offer, or you don’t check that the theories we have now don’t contradict each other, then we fail as scholars. The methodology for my Ph.D. I carefully tied back to Ferdinand Tönnies and showed how his ideas could so easily be developed to fit modern research. Not one of my examiners commented on my methodology chapter. I think they were too scared to, because they had never read Tönnies. The best one examiner could do, was to rant that I had used the word ‘data’ as both singular and plural and didn’t I know that datum was the singular. Well I did, in Latin, but English, American and Australian dictionaries since the 1950 had agreed that data could be use as singular or plural which apparently that examiner didn’t know.

This all takes me back to my grumbles about the danger of dominant theories. Atomic theory was developed in India in the 6th century BC and again in Greece in the 5th century BC and in both cases the idea was rubbished by holders of the dominant theory. So it wasn’t until recent times that the necessary equipment was devised to demonstrate that the theory was true. There are always dominant theories around that need to be challenged.

Next month,(which begins next week), is our annual Conference. I think the Conference does two things for us: first it reminds us that we are not alone and there are many other people, new and old, who we can swap ideas and have a great time, with. Second, it enables us to become aware of the presentation of new work being done across Australia.

The only problem is that one paper you find in a session clashes with another one you want hear at the same time. But then you can go to one then find the presenter of the other one for a chat later. I hope to see you all at my paper on the Thursday afternoon.

Post Truth: November 2016

The Oxford Dictionary Word of the year: post-truth

DEFINITION: (Adjective) Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief: 'in this era of post-truth politics, it's easy to cherry-pick data and come to whatever conclusion you desire' 'some commentators have observed that we are living in a post-truth age'

I was certainly not up with politics, as I had never before heard the word and nor had people around me. However, when I saw the definition I knew what it was all about, even if I still don't think it's a good word to use.

Now that our attention has been drawn to it, what does it mean for sociology? Sociology sets out to gather the real facts of particular social issues but if we are not going to be believed, what is the point? But then emotions are short lived and personal beliefs can change at any moment. Francis Bacon in the 16th century pointed out that human understanding, once it adopts a theory, tends to interpret everything else as supporting it. Even though there is far more evidence against it, which is ignored, or rejected, so their ideology remains inviolate. We can see this in the way some of our politicians behave. However, my research experience tells me that most people don't have a dominant theory and they are open to changing their position after they have been asked a question in a questionnaire that they have never thought about previously. Their initial response is to answer with what they think the questionnaire writer wants but if given the chance they will tell you that having thought about it their first answer is not what they think. (See the Group Attitudinal Threshold Exchange Research Method that allows this response to be made.) I will mention this in my presentation on questionnaires at the Conference (Next Week).

For sociology, the idea of "post-truth" diminishes the whole idea of Truth. If people are going to be stirred to actions by ideas or explanations that are untrue, even impossible and dismiss real truths, how do we deal with that? I think it gets credence in the political sphere because traditional politics has not seen issues as other people have seen them. Take our local politicians response to Climate Change, Refugees, and Indigenous peoples. Many in the population see these issues differently and look for different actions. Responding emotionally is one way of rejecting old fashion politics. But if neither side wants to understand the real truth, the future looks bleak.

At the Conference session on Speed Dating for Sociological Researcher, I will be taking up the issue of the dangers of dominant theories, which is also about the rejection of the truth in favour of following someone's immovable, usually wrong, idea. See you there.

Taking note of Science: December 2016

Another year is drawing to a close. A lot of things have happened that will be of interest to Sociologists and perhaps other people. Our Annual Conference provided a lot of new information and the Applied Sociology Thematic Group gathered more members than usual. My discovery of the Conference was not at the Conference but in the Streets of Melbourne. I found several Book Shops where every book, large or small cost just \$10. This was pleasing because I live in a city that now has no Book Shops. I bought one \$10 book, which I showed to someone else at the Conference, who said, I have that book and it cost me \$40. You can win some of the time.

Sociologists tend to be concerned with the minutiae of life but the book I bought was about bigger things. It was called “A Universe from Nothing” and provides an introduction to the current state of cosmology. It deals with the big questions of What are we?, Why are we? and Where are we? Lawrence Krauss writes:

The spontaneous genesis of something out of nothing happened in a big way at the beginning of space and time, in the singularity known as the Big Bang followed by the inflationary period, when the universe, and everything in it, took a fraction a second to grow through twenty-eight orders of magnitude (that’s a 1 in twenty-eight zeroes after it - think about it).

What a bizarre, ridiculous notion! Really, these scientists! They’re as bad as medieval Schoolmen counting angels on pinheads or debating the “mystery” of the transubstantiation.

No, not so with a vengeance and in spades. There is much that science still doesn’t know (and it is working on it with rolled-up sleeves). But some of what we do know, we know not just approximately (the universe is not just thousands but billions of years old): we know it with confidence and with stupefying accuracy.

To start thinking about the universe and its age and size makes humans something other than the mighty people we think we are. But what are we? Krauss again has a very surprising answer:

One of the most poetic facts I know about the universe is that essentially every atom in your body was once inside a star that exploded. Moreover, the atoms your left hand probably came from a different star than did those in your right. We are all, literally, star children, and our bodies made of stardust.

Last month I drew your attention to the Oxford Dictionary’s “Word of the Year” ‘post-truth’, meaning that objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. What can sociology do with the idea that we are made of star dust? One thing it does highlight is that despite apparent differences we are all basically the same if you look deep enough.

Democracy and politics: January 2017

Last week I wandered around the local market. There I found a book by H.G. Wells (21 September 1866 – 13 August 1946) that I didn't know existed. For those who don't know him, he was a prolific English writer. He is remembered today, mostly for his science fiction stories. However, the book I found, published in 1928, shows he also wrote articles for newspapers in both England and the U.S. In the introduction he rails against the editors who cut his articles to pieces, and assures the present readers that the content of this book is what he originally wrote. The title is *The Way the World is Going* and, from what I have read so far, could have been written yesterday.

Much of what he writes is political sociology, taking things a lot closer to the bone than perhaps others would today. For example:

“We find in all the great democratic countries that the direction of all affairs has passed into the hands of men who are great merely as politicians, and who are otherwise neither remarkably intelligent, creative, nor noble beings.

There are, indeed, in a great number of cases, conspicuously shifty and ambiguous, strategic, and practically ineffective. Let the reader try to name a single man of first-class moral and intellectual quality in British, French, American, or German politics to-day. With a sort of baffled dismay we look to these men we have elected to make the world anew for us, and we see leaders who do not lead and representatives who, at best, impress us as acutely humiliating caricatures of the struggling soul of our race. We realise that the real working out of our human destiny is going on, so far as it is going on, independently of, or partially hampered by our ostensible public life.

In America, France, and Great Britain, for example, where democracy has had the longest run, we see that the democratic method has brought about practically the same situation. A number of politicians have secured the confidence and support of the main groups of prosperous people, who do not want the world changed to any great extent. These politicians of the right and centre form so solid, well alimented, and effective a constellation that they are generally in power, albeit not always in an electoral majority. Naturally these politicians of conservation have the support of all the great selling businesses which advertise in the Press and influence the Press.” (20 March 1927.)

Much of his book seems to be about Democracy and whether it is a form of government that works. Most of us make the assumption that it does and is the best form of government, but is it? Winston Churchill once said: “The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter.” Plato concluded that democracy was a corrupt and unjust form of government. Emma Marriott, in her book “Bad History”, points out that the American constant cry of “democracy” is not what the Constitution or the founding fathers wanted. Benjamin Franklin & George Washington were united in their opposition to, and mistrust of, democracy. For them, and for many of their contemporaries, democracy equalled mob rule, anarchy, and the world itself had somewhat grubby associations. The fifty-five delegates who devised and worded the U.S. Constitution were largely members of the gentry and lawyers. Delegate Edmund Randolph spoke of the ‘follies and turbulence of democracy’, while Roger Sherman said that ‘the people should have as little to do as possible about Government.’ I had not realised how controversial democratic government has been. I will have to think about it

Sociology of the past: February 2017

The November 2016 issue of *Contemporary Sociology* (American Sociological Association), has a review by Michael Strand of a book with the title “Sociological Amnesia: Cross-currents in Disciplinary History”, edited by Alex Law & Eric Royal Lybeck. The book suggests that contemporary Sociologists suffer from amnesia as a kind of selective forgetfulness of the work of our predecessors. I have dwelled on this subject several times over the years. Whilst Michael Strand is not that impressed by the book, I think the subject is worth another look.

Lewis Coser’s 1977 book *Masters of Sociological Thought - Ideas in Historical and Social Context* in which he reviewed the work of 15 Sociologists from Comte to Florian Znaniecki. I find his work very useful, yet his review does not include one sociologist that I regard as one of the greats of sociology (Ferdinand Tönnies). Ferdinand’s 19th century work, I think, has value for sociology in the 21st century. However, sociological theory and methodology is not restricted to the 19th century practitioners or even the 20th century. Many people have made a contribution to theory and methodology, some have been popular for a while whilst others have been ignored altogether. Me being one of the latter.

At the heart of not getting a picture of the sweep of sociological thought and methodology, is a subject I have written on and gave a paper on at the last Conference; the danger of dominant theories. Dominant theories exist in the professions, academia, politics, religion and industry, and in many powerful individuals. “I am right, everyone else is wrong”. “There is no such thing as global warming, its only academics trying to get more funding”. “The ideology of a political party”, which we will standby because we are the only ones who know how to govern.” and so on. You can make your own list. The danger in a dominant theory is that it cannot accept new or different ideas. The connection is emotional not logical. Emotion does not require evidence or put another way: Scottish physicist John C. Maxwell once remarked “People may hear your words, but they feel your attitude.”

Science and social science does need evidence, but evidence can be rejected when it clashes with our emotional based ideas, and when these are pressed for evidence all sorts of post-truth explanations can be added. Any idea can become a dominant theory in one place and a different idea may become dominant in another. When they clash they are reviewed by those who do not support either of them and who come to their own conclusion as to their value.

Over the years there have been a lot of dominant ideas in sociology. One University will have one central idea, another university will have another. So how can the situation be lightened. Perhaps one way is something I witnessed at a science conference many years ago. Two people who had been having a slanging match for a year or more in the journals, had both registered for the conference. The organisers were on tenterhooks about what would happen when they met. One of the men had registered and was talking to officials in the registration area, when the second man arrived. He got his badge then walked over to where his protagonist was, and said, “good to see you Bill, lets go and get a beer”, and they walked away chatting happily. Look for dominant theories and present a wider view of the world and who knows, you might change the world.

The value of Sociology: March 2017

Earlier in the month, Melanie drew our attention to the New York Times article: “What if Sociologists Had as Much Influence as Economists?” So if we had as much influence, what would we do with it? Economics basically says that an interaction only has any merit when it has a monetary component. This means that the voluntary jobs that I work at have no real value. Yet the organisations are State, and Local government run, and the services that the volunteers run could not be run without them at great expense. Dr Lisel O’Dwyer, a Senior Research Associate in the University of Adelaide’s School of Social Sciences, has pointed out that there are more than 6.4 million people who volunteer their time in Australia, and in doing so contribute more than \$200 billion a year to the national economy. This is more than the mining industry. However, not one dollar of this contribution is recorded on any balance sheet. Important as this study is, I have not seen or heard any discussion about its findings.

But do economists really have much to contribute, even though they have the ear of governments? I would draw your attention to the book by Richard Denniss, “Econobabble, How to decode political spin and economic nonsense.” (Published by Redbach Quarterly 223 Drummond Street, Carlton, Victoria.) One reviewer writes: The best guide you’ll find to the literal non-sense that usually passes for economic debate in this country.

A second complementary book worth a read, is *The News* by Alain De Botton, published by Penguin Books. The London Times reviewer writes: De Botton’s gift is to prompt us to think about how we live and how we might change things.

There are people out there doing sociology and making an impression, but they are not members of the Association, they don’t call themselves Sociologists, because in some quarters Sociologists have a bad name. What we have to do is to find people who are sociologists, who are of the same calibre, who can get out there with books with wide appeal, with articles that speak to ordinary people and politicians and be in a position to influence what happens in the community. It can be done, I know, because I have done it. I have done studies that have made Australia a better place. I have been called to Canberra by a cabinet minister, whose greeting was “I can’t trust anyone round here, tell me what I should do about this.”

We need to believe in Sociology. We need to believe it is strong enough to get the attention of the whole community, including politicians. Neither Economics nor Psychology have all the answers and a lot of their answers can make things worse. As I said at the Conference we have got to challenge dominant theories that chain people to one view of life which then is used to control them. We also need to get out of the universities with their restrictions and become a real source betterment for everybody and not like those who simply want to control us. Have a think about what we could be.

Using the right language: April 2017

On the ABC's AM program Dr John Hewson said: "Politicians are getting away with flagrant dishonesty as a shift from fact to opinion colours the political debate around climate change. There's a lack of evidence in public debate. Politicians either ignore climate change or attempt to use the issue to score points, and Australia has reached a point where facts are of lesser value than opinions. I think science is probably more useful and more relevant to society today than it's ever been. But there's been a widening gap between science and the public."

Widen it from the climate issue. Take out 'science' put in 'sociology' and we have the same problem. I have just finished an article for the Coffs Harbour Museum about a local man who probably flew before the Wright brothers. At the time neither people nor the media were particularly interested in flying, as David Craddock said in his Presidential Address to the Royal Society of New South Wales, 9th April 2003, entitled "Publish and Perish", that often when you publish the truth, all you get is opposition or disinterest. One occasion, he cites is that the media had no real interest in the Wright brothers' flight. It took prodding by Lawrence Hargrave before an article about the flight was published, on page 9 of the Sydney Daily Telegraph, 2 months after the event. So a flight by a potato farmer in remote outback NSW in the late 1800's would be of interest to no one. Just another crank.

Many years ago now, I ran a conference at Melbourne University, on the subject of getting your research to the public. The conference attracted people from science, social science and humanities, as well as members of the ABC Science Show. I had people from each academic area to present a paper, and I got Graham Perkin, the famous editor of the Melbourne Age, to sit through the papers, then take the last session and say how publishable they were. I, as the Chairman, introduced him and then said, "Now what would you publish?" His answer was: "Nothing!". The silence was palpable. He then went on to say that, "if you want me understand what you are getting at, you have got to put it in my language. A lot of what was said was gibberish to me. You do your research and then deliver it to people in academia who have the same background as you. If you want the world to know what you are doing you have got to learn how to make them understand, only then will you make a mark in the world."

Politicians and others can deny the value of science and social science because they know that a large proportion of the voting public have no background in science or social science. You will know this if you have ever tried to get an employer to employ a sociologist when they have never heard of it. Sociology? What's that? They will also be thinking: "How will that improve my budget?" As I have said before, Sociology stayed in universities. It didn't want a large organisation of community based sociologists, who might want to do things differently, as economics and psychology have done, because it was safe in universities, you didn't have to talk to people who didn't understand. Unless we can get out there and get sociology understood I don't see much future for us.

Where does sociology meet with individuals?

May 2017

“They say a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, but it is not one half so bad as a lot of ignorance.” Terry Pratchett. I have just been reading Dean Burnett’s book, *The Idiot Brain*. It’s worth a read. It’s a book about how the brain works. This, it transpires, is not how most of us think about it. One section I thought ought to be of particular concern to Sociologists is the section on how the brain is influenced by other people. This is our territory, not the psychologists’. It deals with: how we can be conned. How the brain reacts to being part of a group and lots of other situations.

Sociologists are usually concerned with the big picture, so where does sociology meet with individuals? Dictionaries of Sociology devote parts of their space to this question. Pointing out that movements, like “The New Right”, are characterised by “a commitment to individualism, enterprise culture, laissez-faire, populism, the ideology of capitalism, and displays elements of the authoritarian personality”. Another Dictionary of Sociology tells us that “individualism is a ramifying collection of philosophical, political, economic and religious doctrines, underlying which is a recognition of the autonomy of the individual human being, in social action and affairs.”

This is all very well, but our concern is what happens when the individuals come together and are faced with making the joint decisions required for the operation of committees, organisations, or government. I was once asked to sort out an organisation problem, where two parts of the organisation were virtually at war because they had to apply a particular approach to their patients. Both sides thought that their approach was the one that mattered and that the proposed change would upset the programme by demanding access to the patients in the institution in the same time slot. I was able to sort that out without too much trouble in a way that allowed both sides to have equal access to the patient at different times.

However, when an individual joins a particular organisation they are required to conform to the corporate decisions. Like when you can take a meal break, or what the advertising really means. In a political organisation you must vote with the organisational decision, even if you do not agree with it. It can be argued that your view should be accepted or that the corporate decision should be accepted but both have consequences for the individual.

This could mean that sociological proposals are based on the expectations of the dominant theory rather than any assessment of a problem which lies behind that approach.

Another book I have read this month is both a delight to read and a rather inventive way of serious teaching. The book is called “Plato and a Platypus walked into a Bar... Understanding Philosophy through Jokes” written by Daniel Klein and Thomas Cathcart. Published by *Oneworld* in 2016. I am sure that with a little effort someone could write a similar teaching device for Sociology, which might get over the seemingly general impression of University students that Sociology is a waste of time.

Training is sociology: June 2017

For the Terry Pratchett enthusiasts, I have just finished re-reading 'Thud'. If there is a book for today then this is it. It deals with two different groups of beings living in the same community who have a past history of being in conflict and what could be about to happen. In Discworld fashion Terry shows a way to sort the conflict out. One short sentence in this book stood out for me: "What kind of creature defines itself by hatred?" Despite its fictitious presentation this book is about sociology at work.

I have previously mentioned my concern that people have been telling the world that Sociology is a waste of time. This week I was talking with two former nurses who had done Sociology for their degree, they told me that it was the most boring subject that they had ever done and they could see no practical application for it. It's many years since I was in touch with university sociology, but I don't remember much emphasis being put on application outside of university requirements. One lecturer told me recently that they had never had a lesson on questionnaire design.

Today I looked at the *Journal of Sociology* to see if there was anything to jog my mind for something I could write about. What struck me was the inside front cover listing the editorial staff. Every single one of them was from a university. Then I checked the contributors, every single one of them was from a university. My conclusion is that this publication has nothing to do with sociology per se, rather it deigned to meet the university requirement of being published in a refereed journal, or perish. In addition to the expectation that you will be able to publish a book, or two, that will mark you for promotion. It also helps to maintain the dominant theory of the department. That is how a university works and if you want that system you must conform to it because it applies not just to Sociology but to every department. However, if doing sociology is your aim you will have to think about what the community wants from you and how you can present it to them in a way they can understand and act upon, which is not easily found in academic journals.

Apart from two part-time stints at Monash University and one longer one in a major U.S. University, the biggest portion of my life (before superannuation was invented) has been spent using sociology to meet problems in society, mostly in Australia and some in the U.S. In both places, I was the initiator of change in the society but the public credit of course goes not to me but those who employed me. For instance, I did work for two Royal Commissions and I am in the list of consultants, quoted in the text of the document, but the credit goes to the Chairperson of the Commission.

I have 48 publications listed in the National Library. I did the first study in the world on the social effects of industrial accidents. (Confirmed by the Australian Grants Commission.) My work was recognised by TASA when I received the inaugural Sociology in Action Award but what impression did this make on the teaching of Sociology? Whilst keeping within the university system, did departments say we must teach people how to do Questionnaires? However, given the poorly produced questionnaires being circulated by professional researchers, that produce more desired outcomes, rather than real outcomes, who is going to teach them? Everyone thinks they can write a questionnaire, but to collect real data it takes a lot more knowledge and understanding to produce a questionnaire that will collect real, usable data. Do they tell students how to deal with community problems in a way that the community will understand? Who would teach them?

The Applied Sociology leadership team has been in contact with the Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology (AACCS), in the USA, who publish the *Journal of Applied Social Science*. James Lee, the editor, would be happy to receive submissions from Australia. Please encourage

the Applied Sociologists you know to consider having a look at the journal and, where possible, submitting something for publication. See their [website](#).

Sociology and Law: July 2017

I have never thought much about Sociology and Law (criminal or common). My dictionary of Sociology tells me that Sociology stands in a critical relationship with orthodox legal theory and implies that in academia it clashes with the subjects of other departments and is somewhat frowned upon. What turned my thoughts to the law was an article on Terms and Conditions, which tells about the traps we can fall into by not reading them, and that many are written by the legal system to totally put us off reading them. As someone has remarked if you want a new programme for your computer you are much more interested in downloading and using it than reading the terms and conditions. Another area where people often fall into traps is with insurance policies. Recently, people have found that the Commonwealth Bank would not pay out on claims because some clever person worked out that if they used old definitions for a number of things, they could argue that the claimant could be told, they were not covered, thus saving the bank lots of money and probably getting quick promotion. As far as I know no one has been sacked or charged when the process was challenged.

Sociology, we are told is the “systematic study of the functioning, organisation, development and types of human societies.” What do we have to say when the functioning of society is being thwarted by a legal system that is supposed to protect us? The politicians keep telling us that one of our great assets is the rule of law, but it seems that we must ask “who benefits from the rule of law?” There are various impolite comments about the legal system: “the law is an ass”, “law is not about justice”, but no one seems to be challenging the present system of laws with any success.

I am not sure where I am going with this email. As I said at the beginning I have never thought much about it. Now I am thinking there is a great deal that needs to be done about it and much of it ought to be coming from sociologists. At my age, and where I live leaves me in no position to do much about it. I tried once to talk to the local MP about a sociological issue, a questionnaire they had circulated, and I discovered that the member had a minder who, in front of me, said I will sit in on this one. When I tried to point out the flaws in the questionnaire I was told by the minder, not the Member, that the party have paid a lot of money to have the questionnaire prepared, and who was I to challenge what the party did. The member now has a senior position in the party but I don't know if he still has the same minder.

When it comes to the Applied Sociologist, what can we do? Probably very little. We usually don't have the freedom of being able to write about issues we think are important. We don't have students in whom we can instil a challenge to do something about it. We are beholden to our employer. I wonder if there are any Sociologists employed in a legal team. I suspect not. Lawyers and economists often seem to believe they have enough knowledge of society, without any contribution from sociology.

So where do we go with this issue? I don't know. Perhaps some of you will have ideas, if so please share them with us.

Any Terry Pratchett fans who followed my suggestion last month, might like to read his follow up on the subject by rereading “Raising Steam”.

Economic rationalism: August 2017

I was impressed by an article in the *Journal of Sociology* (Vol.53 No. 1 March 2017) by Val Colic-Peisker from RMIT, under the title of “Ideology and Utopia: Historic crisis of economic rationalism and the role of public sociology”. Despite the fact that I have problems with the term “public sociology”, she raises the issue of the danger that dominant theories have on society, which I have been on about for some while. She acknowledges its place in neoliberalism, but suggests it has wider implications than that. She suggests that the power of economic rationalism stems from the belief that numbers have more authority than words. “In practice, economic rationality assuming that money is a calculus of the utility maximiser seeking profit through optimizing the cost-benefit ratio”. She concludes that “Countering the totalitarian tendency of economic rationality is difficult in the context of the crisis of Western democracy. Many have argued that democracy ‘peaked’ in the late 1960 and since then simultaneously with and partly due to globalization, market fundamentalism, and the increase inequality. At this point in history it seems hard to envisage a social force or movement that would be able to seriously challenge economic rationality from within the system.”

I have been on about the dangers of dominant theories for some while now; I raised the issue at last year’s conference, and in other bits that I wrote. Where you have a dominant theory you have a closed mind. It can be anything. That neoliberalism is the only way forward for Australia, or that graphite is not what pencils are made with because they are called lead pencils. People will defend their dominant theory because they have invested so much emotion into their belief.

I have also been critical of economists and accountants because of the public works they have damaged by refusing to fund what a designer stresses is essential. One example is the construction of the harbour at Coffs Harbour. The original survey by the Royal Navy on the feasibility of making a harbour, and the second assessment made by an expert brought by the government from Britain in the 1930’s, both had their professional designs, (which were much the same) altered by public servants in Sydney, on the grounds of cost. Both reports emphasised that if their plans were not followed, the harbour would silt up. What do you know? The harbour silts up and there is a continuous cost on the local people to have it dredged. But for the original money people in Sydney, they had cut costs, and if it silted up, it wasn’t on their budget.

The equivalent of increasing profits, for governments, is to cut costs but it is still part of economic rationalism. However, there is also a sting in the tail with her statement that economic rationalism stems from the belief that numbers have more authority than words. Sociologists also put great faith in numbers, rather than words. ‘Questionnaires usually produce their result from numbers, often generated by their choice of words rather than those of the people who complete their survey. Many years ago now, I published a survey approach that actually allowed people to work through the questions in their own way, and then tell the people doing the survey things they could never have discovered, because the usual way was to write a survey to prove a particular point rather than discover what people really think and do.

The dominance of economics in political ideology is not the solution to world affairs but the danger. Neoliberalism believes that giving money to the rich will eventually provide miniscule effects to filter down to those who are not so rich. Back in the 70’s when similar arguments were going on, I remember Lois Bryson (sometime President of SAANZ) telling the politicians that if they wanted the economy to grow, they should increase the wages of the poor, because they would spend it. The rich would only invest it.

Sociology and capitalism: September 2017

Here is a quotation from Yuval Noah Harari's book, *Sapiens - A brief History of Human Kind*

“Capitalism began as a theory about how the economy functions. It was both descriptive and prescriptive - It offered an account of how money worked and promoted the idea that reinvesting profits in production leads to fast economic growth. But capitalism gradually became far more than just an economic doctrine. It now encompasses an ethic - a set of teachings about how people should behave, educate their children and even think. Its principal tenet is that economic growth is the supreme good, or at least a proxy for the supreme good, because justice, freedom and even happiness all depend on economic growth.” This new religion has had a decisive influence on the development of modern science, too. Scientific research is usually funded by either governments or private businesses. When capitalist governments and businesses consider investing in a particular scientific project, the first questions are usually ‘Will this project enable us to increase production and profits? Will it produce economic growth? A project that can't clear these hurdles has little chance of finding a sponsor. No history of modern science (or Social Science) can leave capitalism out of the picture.”

This would be especially true for Applied Sociology. This means that neither physical science nor social science has much chance of presenting a view of the world that is independent of the dominant theory that supreme good only comes from financial profit.

I am amazed at the number of politicians who wholly support the above theory yet also claim to be practicing Christians, when the expected Christian position is:

“Those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away and pierced themselves with many pains”. 1 Tim. 6v9-10

Can or should Applied Sociology offer an approach that could provide humanity a way to the 'supreme good' that does not depend on financial profit? Many people in the world can never expect to reach the supposed 'supreme good' by financial means. Sociology usually tries to work outside of society. It observes then says: this is how this community, business, department, family etc., works but the consequences of what sociology research uncovers is usually left to others to do something about it. Drawing from Weber, it has been suggested that many economic decisions may be based simply on tradition. This has translated in the catch cry of the neo-liberals. Sociology should not just say; this is how it works, it needs to be able to also say these should be considered as the possible consequences for this studied community.

Sociology and language: October 2017

My thoughts this month turn to what we write, the language we use and what we try to sell in our reports, or the questionnaires we write. To “sell” doesn’t necessarily mean a cash transaction; it can also mean to get over a different idea. One book where you can find words that can both make reports that read knowledgeable, when they really aren’t; or find words that seem to be praise but certainly do not. One such word is “fabulist” which looks to the ignorant to mean something like fabulous. Whereas it is actually a fancy way of saying you’re a “liar”. On the other hand it is worth remembering the word “battology” when you are writing in response to someone else’s report, or having to reply to a speech or a paper. The word refers to the continual reiteration of the same word or phrases in speech or writing which politicians always use.

The second book I want to draw to your attention is one that that ought to be compulsory reading for Applied Sociologists, Academics, Consultants and all those listed on the front of this book. As the ‘Times’ reviewer puts it:

“The author [a New Zealander and former Cambridge lecturer], whets a long knife of ultra-rationalism on the cold stone of logic, and death by a thousand cuts is inflicted on prejudice, statistics, morality, religion, weasel words, and seductive sirens such as politicians, New Agers, advertising executives, and, of course, journalists who expect you to be persuaded by anything other than facts.”

The author’s brief go at Sociologists is: “It is a strength, not a weakness, of an attempted refutation that it draws on the mundanely familiar. Yet in the academic humanities (literary studies, sociology, and the like), where being sexy is the fashion, refutations are often dismissed on precisely this ground. For example, most humanities students and many academics claim that truth is culturally relative, so that what is true depends on what is the generally held view in the culture concerned. This relativism about truth is inconsistent with some very well known facts, such as the fact that the earth orbited the sun in A.D. 900. Cultural relativism entails, on the contrary, that in A.D. 900 the sun orbited the earth. This is what people then believed, so it was then true.” If this is true about sociology, then I don’t know about it. However, if it is true, then I am with the author. However, I don’t always agree with the author, but that is a good thing because above all else he makes you think about what you say and write and draws to your attention to the way other people misuse language to convince you about the right of their dominant theory.

I have commented on the language used in questionnaires before, but here is a book that goes much further. The applied Sociologist must be a report writer; this is not the same as being an essay writer. Reports must be in the simplest form possible, with no use of jargon words from sociology or any other discipline, except they can be used if necessary, only if they are commonplace in the world of the report recipients.

Language to change dominant theories: November 2017

Hooray. We seem to have found a way for the continuing education to work even better. We started the last webinar on issues relating to my last contact email on language. However the discussion soon turned into a cry for ways to present sociology so that it will counter and win over procedures and solutions based on dominant theories of psychology and economics, firmly embedded in the management and culture of an organisation? We didn't find a way at the webinar, but I feel it incumbent on me to take the issue to our wider audience.

Well, to put it in other words. Where there is a dominant theory, anyone who wants to challenge it or is thought not to support it, is probably seen as a 'heretic', but not usually by that word. However, the Oxford Dictionary gives a second definition of 'heretic' as a person "having an opinion profoundly at odds with what is generally accepted". So if you cannot get through the dominant theory, what you face is (Crucifixion or Beheading) rejection. However, what you really have to deal with is not so much what they hold as the only truth, but what they see as a challenge to their authority. In these modern times when the supervisor is now called the team leader (American psychology) but the hierarchy is still dominant, and things haven't changed very much.

People go to the team meetings with a new good idea, everyone agrees. The team leader takes it to the next level where it may or may not be accepted. If it is, it goes up one more level till someone wants to squash it. "It will be considered." "The budget cannot afford it." "It wasn't in the budget." "It does not conform to company policy" or any of many other creative rejections.

So how do you get people with the power to listen to an idea or a report that is different to what has become main stream thinking? First you must keep in mind how what you suggest affects authority and second how your idea affects the budget.

Another way to look at what it takes to get ideas through is shown in this diagram

Bachrach and Baratz model of decision making, 1970

It comes from the book *Applied Sociological Perspectives*, Edited by Anderson & Sharrock (1984) George Allen & Unwin. It's worth a read.

One way to beat their automatic rejection of Sociology is to present your idea without telling them that it is a sociological assessment and trying to fit their terminology as close as possible. If they know anything about sociology, as it is suggested that some say they have done sociology, then they will be able to identify it as such, and if it suits the argument raise the issue. However if they really know nothing or very little about sociology, you have found a way to get sociological into the dominant theory without their knowing.

Another problem is when a dominant idea cannot be solved on the spot. I gave a lecture once on organisational theory and during questions I was asked when several of the quotations were published. They were about 10 year old. I was then told I was wasting peoples' time if I didn't have quotes from people in the last year or so.

Their dominant theory was that everything old was useless. It was not worth arguing with them at that point, but philosophise and ideas going back to Roman, Greek, Egyptian or Chinese can be just as relevant today as they were thousands of years ago. I was once inveigled by my colleagues to go and listen to the latest psychological wonder from California, as was popular

then. After the lecture when a few others had asked questions, I asked a question. I have heard unreferenced quotes from ...(I named four or five older psychologists) but tell me what have you contributed? There was silence, then he said, I'm sorry I haven't time to answer your question now, I have a plane catch and must go. What surprised me more was when we got outside, my colleagues asked me who were all these people you were quoting. Older theorists had been dropped in universities in favour of more recent ones. The clever Californian had simply strung together bits from now forgotten ideas and bingo, he was the latest genius.

For the economists: from their own J.K. Galbraith, "Trickle-down theory - the less than elegant metaphor that if one feeds the horse enough oats, some pass through to the road for the sparrows."

For the psychologist: from Max Lerner, "There are almost no limits to the discoveries of how the human brain operates - in illness and health, in sleep and waking and dreaming, in calm and under tension. The question is: How far can these discoveries be used, without using them, not for cure, but for power."

New Year History: December 2017

So it's almost New Year and we will all have become a year older. There will be fireworks in Sydney harbour, and other illegal fireworks all over the place. Thousands will gather either by the harbour or in their home and around the world to see the show. Auld Lang Syne will be sung. People will shake hands and hug each other. Emotions will swell, memories will flood in, and tears may fall.

What is it really all about? The New Year has always been celebrated as a symbolic time of the renewal of life and human relationships but not always on the 1st of January. The Romans were the first to celebrate it on the 1st of January, which they started in 153 BC. Before that, the New Year had been celebrated on the 25th of March, because that date coincided with the vernal equinox, when day and night are of the same length. The new date no longer had any connection with the cycle of nature, like everything else politics took over the day to celebrate the newly elected consuls as they took their new office. Other European countries began to see significance in the 1st of January from 1582, but England and Wales and the British American colonies didn't join the celebrations until 1757. European Australia would have celebrated it from the start.

That is all very well but even today, the 1st of January will not be the first of the year for many people. For Orthodox Christians New Year will begin on Sunday January 14th.

For the Chinese their New Year falls on Friday, February 16th 2018, and will be known as the beginning of the year of the Dog.

The current Islamic year is 1439 AH. (Anno Hegirae, "in the year of the Hijra"), 1439 AH runs from approximately 21 September 2017 to 10 September 2018. The Islamic New Year 1440 will begin in the evening of Tuesday, 11 September 2018.

Then, of course, there is the Financial Year which began on the 1st July 2017 and will run till 30th June 2018.

Whatever New Year you acknowledge, I hope it will be Joyful, Harmonious, and Productive, for you, your family and those you work with.

The importance of social history: January 2018

Over the Christmas period I have been re-reading Terry Pratchett's "Dodger's Guide to London". It gives a description of London during the 19th century. My thoughts turned to my Parents who were born in 1892 and my grandparents who would have been born in the middle of the 19th century. Pratchett gives a good description of the plight of the poor in the late 19th century but I began to wonder what was happening during the life of my Grandparents. I don't know the exact dates of birth for them, but assuming they were 20 when my parents were born, they must have been born in 1872 or earlier. In that year the Adulteration of Food, Drink and Drugs Act made the adulteration of consumables a serious offence. The Licensing Act was passed that limited the hours during which alcoholic drinks could be sold. Brewers and publicans were defended by the Conservative Party which opposed the Liberal government's legislation. In Australia a telegraph line was opened that connected Adelaide with Darwin and was then extended to connect with lines through Asia to Europe. All this was taking place 40 odd years after Comte invented the word Sociology.

So looking back at what was going on in the mid 19th century I discovered some things that I thought were very modern, were not. For instance, the commercial firm 'Source Perrier' started to bottle the sparkling water emerging from a spring near Nimes, in the south of France in 1863. Cans and can openers were introduced in 1865. 1869 the Suez Canal was opened. In 1870 Charles Dickens, who provided at least some of the background for Pratchett's book, died, and Henry Mayhew, who provided much of the rest, died in 1887. Both were social researchers but did not identify themselves as Sociologists. My parents were born in the year the electric light bulb was invented. However, I can remember being asked by a man in the mid 1950's, who had gas lighting in his house, if I thought it was safe to have the electric light installed.

Having got this far, I suddenly realised that the London Pratchett was talking about was the square mile city, and where my parents were born was in the villages that surrounded the City. My Father in Chelsea, and my mother in Battersea, both around 5km from the City of London. Both my parents could read and write, but I know my mother only went to school when her mother had a spare penny to pay for the day's schooling.

A quote from Lewis Coser (*Masters of Sociological Thought*, p. 9 with quotes from Comte's Positive Philosophy), reminds us of the influence of social history and its importance for where we are going.

The social sciences, the most complex and the most dependent for their emergence on the development of all the others, are the "highest" in the hierarchy. "Social science offers the attributes of a completion of the positive method. All others are preparatory to it. Here alone can the general sense of natural law be decisively developed, by eliminating forever arbitrary wills and chimerical entities, in the most difficult case of all." Social science enjoys all the resources of the anterior sciences" but, in addition, it uses the historical method which "investigates, not by comparison, but by gradual filiation." "The chief phenomenon in sociology ... that is, the gradual and continuous influence of generations upon each other, would be disguised or unnoticed, for want of the necessary key historical analysis." A moving illustration of this was given in the "Who do you think you are" SBS programme, 30/1/18

The world is asking - 'is sociology worth anything?'

February 2018

In an article, published in *The American Sociologist* in 1979, Jack Gibbs wrote:

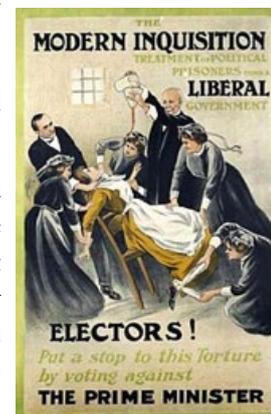
Unless sociology undergoes a radical change, the field will be deprived of the resources it now commands. Those resources now exceed our collective accomplishments, and sooner or later there will be an accounting. Directors of governmental agencies and officers of foundations will commence giving sociologists a medium hello, and the beginning of the end will be signaled when a tough dean puts this question to the head of a sociology department: "What have you people accomplished in over a century?" Even a glib head will have a difficult moment. This vision of doom is tempered by the promise of contingent salvation, in the form of another prophecy: Sociologists will avoid collective extinction only by pursuing theories and research that have policy implications. A theory has policy implications if it makes assertions about realizable means to goals sought by a group whose interests transcend scientific and scholarly activities. Correlatively, research has policy implications if it bears on the empirical validity of an assertion about such means. My plea for theory and research with policy implications reduces to this: do something or say something that someone might find both interesting and useful. (Gibbs, 1979:79-85)

In his and Michael Micklin's 1981 book *Handbook of Applied Sociology*, he repeats his earlier contentions and goes on to say:

These contrasting prophecies about the future of sociology, as envisioned by Jack Gibbs, pose a sharp challenge that applied sociologists cannot ignore. Confronting and responding to that challenge during the 1980's could be highly invigorating. To launch that quest, we must face a demand, surmount a dilemma, resolve a paradox, respond to an imperative, and answer an ultimate question. To carry out that quest we must also clarify our analytic perspective, select the kinds of roles we seek to enact as applied sociologists, and learn to communicate clearly with policy makers.

The outside world is much less tolerant of useless theorizing and data collecting, however, especially when it is paying the bill for those activities. It wants to know: "What can you, as a sociologist, tell me that will help solve this problem." The most insistent demand is that sociology be relevant to real problems. Hence, they are insisting that sociologists contribute directly to the attainment of an employer's goals, if they are to receive either a hearing or funding.

Although sociologists have made far fewer inroads into private business and industry than into government, sophisticated corporate managers are becoming aware that many of their problems—both inside and outside the firm—have social as well as technical and economic aspects. Going beyond traditional concerns with employee satisfaction and public image, in the U.S. at least, corporations have been known to hire sociologists to examine organizational structures, communication patterns, and changing life styles. Indeed, I was once given such a task. In business, however, the bottom line is always the final arbiter. Hence, sociologists must demonstrate that they can contribute to the positive side of that balance sheet or else go job hunting.



A 1910 poster by Alfred Pearce for the WSPU showing a Suffragette being force-fed. (Note the Liberal Party then bears no relationship to the Australian Liberal Party)

Another expanding employment opportunity for sociologists is private consulting and research firms, ranging from one-person operations to organizations employing a number of researchers from various disciplines. All such firms depend on the research contracts they can secure from public and private organizations. Those sponsors fund research to obtain answers to questions and problems with which they must deal. Hence, the research firm must be able to give the sponsor whatever information or advice it needs. The sponsor calls most of the shots in this process, and the target is research that is both relevant and useful and sometimes they demand it is self fulfilling.

We have moved on over 30 years since much of the above was written, so what has changed, Sociology has been absorbed into other faculties, and, as I hear it, is not being taught as an exciting approach to making the world a better place. Employment opportunities for Sociologists have not expanded and indeed hardly exist.

Are we at deaths door or can we still prove ourselves?

Using the right words: March 2018

The vocabulary of most people is relatively small and sometimes confusing with the use of regional dialect words or jargon words which are used in some English speaking communities but not understood in most others. For instance, did you know that when you use the noun 'skype' you are actually using a Scottish word meaning 'a worthless, lean person of disagreeable manner and temper?' Well, I know that since Microsoft took over Skype, it has become a disagreeable program that frequently infuriates me. Of course 'Skype' the program, is the name given to software that derived its name from "Sky peer-to-peer", which was then abbreviated to "Skyper". However, some of the domain names associated with "Skyper" were already taken so the final "r" was dropped leaving the current title "Skype". One word, arrived at from two entirely different circumstances, and giving entirely different meanings.

The problem with dialect and jargon words is that they are not universally known or are known by a few. Thus, if you are trying to get a message across, and you use jargon, for example, you may find that many people don't understand what you are saying or writing and give up on your message.

When I got notice of the theme of this year's conference I found it emblazoned as "Precarity, Rights and Resistance". Rights, I understood, Resistance I understood, but could not see the connections, but Precarity I had never seen or heard.

Many years ago I ran a conference at Melbourne University on presenting research to the community. I asked Graham Perkins, the then Editor of the 'Melbourne Age', to come and listen to the presentations then take the last session to talk about their impact and what he would publish. Papers were presented by Chemists, Physicists, Historians and Social Scientists. At the final session, I introduced him and then asked him what he would publish out of all the publications. He said "Nothing". I said "Nothing at all?" He said "No" so I said, "Can you tell us why?" He went on to say,

"If you want me to publish what you do, you have got to put it in my language and the people my paper is written for. Much of what was said today I did not understand. If you want people to go along with what you say, you have got to do it in their language, not in the jargon or invented words your group uses".

With Sally's assistance I discovered what the word 'Precarity' meant. "Precarity (also precariousness) is a precarious existence, lacking in predictability, job security, material or psychological welfare. The social class defined by this condition has been termed the precariat." I had looked in my dictionaries but none of them mentioned the word, but having been directed to on line dictionaries I found the definition, but my built in computer dictionary still does not mention it.

This morning's ABC Breakfast Show had someone talking about the popularity and adulation of sports people by the Australian community. The compare said sport provides heroes that draw crowds to games. It answers a psychological need that people have. You never see the same response to scientists. If we want people to understand what we are doing, we must provide it in their language. Academics usually write for other academics. The applied Sociologist writes for many people who have no academic background, or no understanding of the jargon used in sociology. To be understood outside of your cohort you must use language others will understand.

Repeating history: April 2018

How valued is the work that we do? This last week or so the employment of the disabled has been to the fore. With the death of Stephen Hawking, aged 76, who was written off when he was born but, with great determination and luck, was able to demonstrate that despite the medical model's view of his condition, he was one of the greatest thinkers of our times. The ABC ran its series on the employment of the disabled, and boasted how their new ideas were changing lives.

Yet, in 1976, I was commissioned by the Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration to undertake a study of the employment of the disabled (it was actually called "the Handicapped" back then) as part of its overall study of how the Australian Government did things. In the report of the commission, they have eight pages of quotes from my study, together with seventeen of my recommendations; much of which covered issues that the ABC Programme has put forward.

In 1977, together with Edwin Knight, I did a study of ways of helping employers assess the true abilities of disabled people so that they could be placed in satisfying and productive employment. This was followed up in 1980 with a book called "Square Pegs, Square Holes", which I know was used as a text book in at least two Australian Universities. At the suggestion of staff at one of these Universities, the assessment procedure set out in the book was incorporated in the Victorian Work Safe legislation, as the way to assess the ability of injured workers to return to work and the sort of work they would be able to do. Whether it is still there I don't know.

Yet it seems that all of this work has fallen from view, and people go on reinventing the wheel. Out of the thousands of research projects completed each year, how much of it is used and how much of it is remembered for use in the future?

Steven Poole's book *Rethink* (2016), examines how good ideas come and go. One illustration he uses is:

"The electric car was invented by Robert Davidson in 1837, by the end of the nineteenth century, fleets of electric taxis - known as 'hummingbirds' - were on the streets of London, Paris, Berlin, and New York, and by the turn of the century there were more than thirty thousand electric cars registered in the US. They were much more popular than gasoline-powered cars. They were less noisy and had no polluting exhaust. The twentieth century was obviously going to be the electric century. Yet in little more than a decade, the production of such vehicles stopped. The drivers of horse-drawn cabs had mounted vigorous campaigns pointing out breakdowns and accidents in their electrically powered rivals, in addition the price of petrol dropped and Ford produced its cheap cars and the effect all this had was to put the London Electric Cab Company and other electric car makers, out of business."

When I was growing up I had never heard or thought about an electric car. As the illustration above shows, one of the powerful brakes used to stop other ideas is not value but vested interests. So can we, should we or how can we, keep ideas alive so they can be used as and when they are needed? In most spheres, history is not a major focus. However, as it has been said by a number of people over the years, if you don't know your history you cannot really understand the present or predict the future. We will still need research on new issues, but can we stop the waste on repetitive studies?

Getting old: May 2018

Writer's BLOCK. I have made a couple of starts on this month's Email, only to get a few lines then say, 'Nah, I don't want to talk about that'. So I sit here with an empty page with nothing to fill it. I have been writing these emails since September 2011 and have always found something to say. Although looking at what I did say became embarrassing when I discovered how many times I have used the same illustrations.

This takes my mind back to my school days when my essays would be about as long as the above paragraph. But since going out into the world I have found that I have done nothing much beyond writing books, papers or lectures where I could sit down and produce them with relatively little effort. But not today! Is it because I am getting old? I will be 86 this year. I have been retired for 22 years and I am about to undertake a new study of retirement and ageing. Wow, I can tell you about that.

Over the years I have researched and written quite a bit about ageing and retirement and I am about to do some more research in this area. We all know retirement is what you do when you get old. Well, yes and no. In the past, many societies allowed men and women to decide when they were too old to continue working. What happened to them after that varied considerably. Nomadic tribes usually moved on leaving the retiree a poignant figure gradually disappearing in the distance, knowing they would soon die. Sedentary populations tended to allow the old to continue working until they were ready to stop. Then, with great respect, allowed them to retreat into the family home and do chores they were capable of. From the 16th to the 19th centuries, Europe generally followed this pattern. However, we need to remember that before the 20th century, in any population, a significant number died before the age of 20 so that only a small proportion of the births would reach 65.

If you lived past 20 you had a good chance to live past 65 but even then there were a lot who would not make it. War and plague brought a lot down, and there were diseases which could end your life before you made 65. So, even with bigger numbers going past 20 there were still a lot of hurdles which would prevent a lot of those who lived past the age of 20 from reaching 65. Thus, even though the number of people living past the age of 20 had increased, the number of those living beyond 65 was still small. Although significant improvements were made earlier, many things happened in the 20th century to allow a much greater number of people to live through childhood and continue living past 70.

However, we need to contrast this with the dichotomy that has grown up between the cultural expectations of the need for everyone to work and the fewer number of people required to do the work, and in some cases fewer people willing to do the work. The development of new technologies, from the 20th century on, has allowed the necessities of life and more to be produced with fewer and fewer members of the community being involved. This downsizing of the work force still continues. With these technologies came the fixed retirement age, (65 for Men, 60 for women) and the old age pension. Introduced in New South Wales and Victoria in 1900, Queensland in 1908, and throughout the rest of Australia in 1909. What continued on was an assumption that retirement brought the end of life. In Japan, the retirement age was 65 and life expectancy was 66. Since the end of the Second World War, life expectancy, in many countries, has drifted out to the 80's and 90's. So that retirement means release from the control of an employer, but signals that you may have 15, 20, 25 years or more to fill in somehow.

The degrading of sociology: June 2018

Quintus Tullius Cicero a Roman soldier and commentator, in the first century BC, commented that people should, “Avoid any specific discussion of public policy at public meetings.” He followed this up with a position statement which I would adopt for my contributions to the community:

Although you have all the accomplishments within the reach of human genius, experience, or acuteness, yet I thought it only consistent with my disposition to set down in writing what occurred to my mind while thinking, as I do, on the subject, not with the expectation that you would learn anything new from it, but that the considerations on a subject, which appeared to be disconnected and without system, might be brought under one view by a logical arrangement.

Over the years I have done a lot of that. I have 51 publications listed in the National Library Catalogue. Many of these come from taking what was already there and presenting it in a different way, often shocking people because I was able to show that what they thought was happening wasn't, and, with a few ideas of my own, what could happen.

It seems to me that this is basic sociology. We look at what is happening between people, in the community, in organisations, in government and say, “yes you have access to all the information in the world. However, if you will pause a moment and think about it in terms of the musings I have had on the subject, you too may see things differently, and hopefully in a way which will make things better”.

I am amazed at the way academia has been able to dismantle sociology, it almost no longer exists. I am concerned that academia thinks it is always right and that any so called research outside of academia must be suspect. When, in fact, the boot is on the other foot. Academia is beset by dominant theories. Its reliance on peer review is not to keep up standards but to ensure that the dominant theory is not challenged.

This is not a new idea, there are others who have shown the same scepticism. (See Philip Coppens's, *The Lost Civilization Enigma* (2013), Steven Poole's, *Rethink, The Surprising History of New Ideas* (2016) and others going back over the years.

Where the challenge comes is that, in academia your research has to be tied to a theory and others who have written on the same subject. Research done outside of academia cannot be tied to a theory but to the reality of the problem being researched. The outcome is not years of academic debate, but a solution to the problem for those who employed you. If you did solve the problem, you will likely get more work, if you didn't, life might get difficult.

Sociology ought to be the stand out application for making human interactions better. It is not a theoretical discipline, these are tied to the fixed elements in the universe. Whereas sociology is tied to human interaction, which is never a constant. If you want an example read Tönnies “Community and Society”. Not the Cambridge version by Jose Harris but the Michigan State University Press version by Charles Loomis. Few people have read the whole work. They used to teach about *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* but not very well. Give it a go, it will be worth it.

Ageing: July 2018

Progress in understanding ageing and the idea of retirement has not moved very much, over the past two millennium. As long ago as 44 BC, the Roman philosopher Cicero (106–43 B.C.) wrote an essay “Concerning Old Age” where he argued that old age is not a failing mind and illness. Rather, he suggested, an enlightened approach to old age would see it in terms of positive opportunities and productive possibilities because in old age it is finally possible for people to be freed from the pursuits of their earlier life and focus on the activities they find stimulating. Cicero also points out there is a distinction between “normal old” and the “sick old” and argues that we should not assume old age is automatically linked to illness. Illness is always something that is added to the life of a person and not a consequence of it. His understanding of psychology shows when he adds that to assume in the old an automatically failing mind is a fallacy and memory loss in older people is selective. Older people, he suggests, only forget the things they are no longer interested in and can't be bothered with in their everyday lives. As he quips: “I never yet heard of any veteran whose memory was so weakened by time as to forget where he had concealed his treasure”. Cicero reports his own experience that his fears about getting old have been replaced by a new enthusiasm for life.

All of that seems very modern. However, for a long time now the study of ‘ageing’ has been dominated by the ‘medical model’. Gerontology took off in the 1970's at a time when the end of life for many people was in their fifties or late sixties, preceded by periods of illness. The major change that has come with the advent of the 21st century is that the period of decline and death has been pushed on. People in their late sixties and seventies are no longer looking forward to death but to life. The situation that we have to get used to is that what was expected in people in their sixties and early seventies is now what is expected of people in their eighties and even nineties. People who retire in the 21st Century are expecting twenty to thirty years of living before they succumb to the end of life. Of course some people in this new age group will get sick, some will have heart attacks or get cancer. But then so do some people in their thirties, forties and fifties or even younger. This is a new period of life that societies around the world will have to come to terms with.

This change in the structure of society is not just a demographic phenomenon, it reaches out into a myriad of niches in life, some of which we would least expect. It touches language, marketing, housing, regional development, economics, education, work and much more. The future belongs, not to the young but the old and this understanding in itself will demand from us a major re-think of our society and its politics.

One way into this re-think is to take careful note of W. H. Auden's comments on the way we occupy ourselves in life. He observes there is an essential difference between work and labour and goes on to declare that for a person to be happy they must feel both free and important in their society's estimation. When a person is compelled by society to do what they do not enjoy doing and are treated by employers as having no intrinsic value or importance, except as an economic liability, the state of this person is in effect a slave. Auden declares that a person is ‘labourer’ if the job society offers him or her is of no interest but is compelled to take it by the necessity of earning a living and supporting his or her family. He sets against this, as its antithesis, ‘play’. Indicating that when we play a game, we enjoy what we are doing, otherwise we should not play it, but it is a purely private activity; and unless we become a professional at playing, society could not care less whether we play it or not. Between these two Auden declares there stands ‘work’. A person is a worker when they are personally interested in and enjoys the job which society pays them to

do and what from the point of view of an employer is necessary labour, from the person's point of view it is paid play.

This situation does not depend on the type of work but what the individual finds a satisfying occupation in their life. What retirement has come to mean in the 21st century is superannuation which provides the opportunity to be free of the compulsion of labour, and time to enjoy the freedom of 'work'; doing what the individual finds satisfying rather than labouring at a task for someone else's benefit.

Time to 'work' in this sense is the major difference in people's lives as they move into a long retirement. The changing demography is not the starting point of understanding our developing society it is a time when people can follow their own interests in ways that will benefit the whole society.

The literature in general has not understood this. Gubrium and Holstein's (2000) Reader on "Aging and Everyday Life" has 38% of its contributions originally published between the 1960's and 1980's, even one from the 90's had a paper dealing with conditions in the mid 1880's. This is not to say that there is no value in what these articles have to say, but in understanding them it is vital that we realise the conditions that pertain now were not accepted even in the 1980's or 90's. My attempt to draw attention to the developing situation in 1985 only met with political indifference.

Here again it is important that sociology understands the social implications of development in the medical model, and is able to get the same recognition for their contribution as their medical counter parts. We still have a lot of work to do to make this happen.

The past is still a commentary on today: August 2018

I find it amazing that despite the changes that have occurred over the past several thousand years, socially nothing much has changed; with some of the best commentaries on life today coming from the Greek and Roman philosophers, a hundred or more B.C. or other in the now distant past.

I was going to start this article with one that came up on my screen a week or so ago. I can remember the quote, but at the moment, I can't find who originally said it, though I am sure it was one of the Greeks. The quote was, "People go into politics for one of two reasons; to get revenge on someone or for what they can get out of it." That certainly rings bells today.

From Plato (427 to 347 BCE) we have these pearls of wisdom:

"We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light."

"The price good men pay for indifference to public affairs is to be ruled by evil men."

"Good people do not need laws to tell them to act responsibly, while bad people will find a way around the laws."

"Ignorance, the root and stem of every evil."

"If women are expected to do the same work as men, we must teach them the same things."

"In politics we presume that everyone who knows how to get votes knows how to administer a city or a state. When we are ill... we do not for the handsomest physician, or the most eloquent one."

"Knowledge without justice ought to be called cunning rather than wisdom."

From Aristotle (c384 - c322 BCE):

"Criticism is something we can avoid easily by saying nothing, doing nothing, and being nothing." Aristotle

"Teenagers these days are out of control. They eat like pigs, they are disrespectful of adults, they interrupt and contradict their parents, and they terrorize their teachers." Aristotle

"It is our choice of good or evil that determines our character, not our opinion about good or evil." Aristotle

And one relatively modern one for Luck. John Stuart Mill, Sociologist, (1806-1873)

"Conservatives are not necessarily stupid, but most stupid people are conservatives."

The good & bad of social change: September 2018

In 1981 Kurt Finsterbusch wrote about the use of *Social Impact Assessment in the Handbook of Applied Sociology*, (Ed. Marvin Olsen & Michael Micklin, 1981). It was a new idea then but I have not come across much use of it since. However, the idea had considerable merit. We hear people talking about taking action, but we do not hear much about considering the consequences. Yet, the consequences of any particular action often produce different outcomes to that expected by the originator.

In 2000, Piotr Sztompka had this to say in an article for The Berlin Centre for Social Science, (The Ambivalence of Social Change Triumph or Trauma?):

Sociological approaches to social change have evolved in three typical forms: the discourse of progress in the period of classical sociology, the discourse of crisis characteristic for the middle of the 20th century, and the discourse of trauma, which seems to emerge at the end of the 20th century. The concept of trauma, borrowed from medicine, suggests that change per se, irrespective of its content, but provided that it is sudden, comprehensive, fundamental and unexpected, may produce painful shock for the social and particularly cultural tissue of a society. Paradoxically, this applies also to changes which are otherwise progressive, welcome, and intended by the people. Cultural trauma begins with disorganization of cultural rules and accompanying personal disorientation, culminating even in the loss of identity. This condition is made more grave by the traumatizing events or situations which occur as the effect of major change in areas other than culture, and affect the whole "life world" of the people. The traumatic mood which spreads in a society is countered by various coping strategies. If they are successful, trauma turns out into mobilizing force for human agency, and stimulates creative social becoming.

Through the nineteenth century and much of the 20th century, the assumption of 'progress' was in people's minds. We would soon solve all problems and progress would get us to nirvana. Towards the end of the 20th century the expectation of crisis and the expectation of someone dropping the atom bomb together with the Cold War, had people living with fear, not about what was happening but what might happen. In the 21st century right wing populist ideas are gaining ground around the world, and what these people now anticipate is one of isolation from what is happening elsewhere, and nirvana is seen in nationalism rather than in progress.

Whether we consider constant social change or one particular change, an account of the results of these changes, both expected and not expected, need to be identified. For instance, could it be that 'progress', instead of reaching nirvana, has reached nationalism? How has this come about? Is there fear of people from other places, other religions, other languages? The Jewish scripture has the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11v6-9) where the people on earth were one, and all spoke the same language. God thought this was dangerous so God confused their language so that they could not understand each other and scattered them all over the world. What does this idea say to the hope people have had about everyone coming together?

Understanding how dominant theories hold us back: October 2018

The ABC Programme “All in the Mind” on the 3rd December 2017 raised the question, “Why we deny the science.” It began with the problem that:

Some parents refuse to vaccinate their children, even though the link with autism has been thoroughly debunked. And many still deny human-induced climate change despite solid scientific evidence. In this age of contested political issues and unchecked information, we examine the psychological tricks and the quirks of neuroscience which often lead us to believe untruths and ignore the facts.

The broadcast finished with this explanation:

One of the things I'd like to see is that we approach solutions to these problems with the same scientific rigour that we approach everything else in health and medicine science and social science, so that we don't just assume, for instance, that we are going to change people's minds by doing some kind of public service announcement or commercial that's scary, that says don't smoke or get your vaccines, but that are actually really committed to testing those ideas to see if they really do change people's minds, and that we are committed to testing them in a highly scientific way because that's really the essence of our profession, and we owe that to everyone and to ourselves as well.

I have written before about “Dominant Theories” and how they are maintained in academia, political parties, and in industrial operations. Their main function is to prevent change. The old saying, “If it was good enough for my father, it's good enough for me” is one way of putting it.

One of the problems with getting the rejection of an old or incorrect idea with the development of new data or a different approach is that it challenges the emotional investment, and any financial investment people have made in the one idea. When someone has formed a belief, it is very hard to change their mind. In some situations this can be a good thing but in others it can be very bad, not only for the rejecter but also for anyone in their care.

However, rejecters usually form hierarchical groups which keep any waverers in line. The reason social hierarchies exist in human societies is that they were necessary for survival of villages or nations during conflict over resources. The biggest example of this today is politics. Essentially, groups organised in hierarchies are more efficient at combat than groups who were organised in other ways, giving a competitive advantage to groups disposed towards social hierarchies.

Social Dominant Theory explains the mechanisms of group hierarchical oppression: with discrimination practised by individuals, (They are not our sort of people. We don't mix with those people.). Then there is discrimination by government, business organisations and some social institutions, which can be identified in the media daily. This gains momentum as status increases, legitimising and/or enhancing the strength of the current social hierarchy. Lastly, there is ideological dominance; as status increases so does the legitimising of their expounded beliefs. These can be paternalistic myths like “we give money to big business, which will bring higher wages,” or that “political parties serve society and look after incapable minorities”, or they can be sacred myths like “the Divine right of Kings” or any other religion-approved mandates for authority to govern. Understanding what dominant theories do as opposed to other ideas is one of sociology's tasks.

Further reading

Gorman, Sara and Gorman, Jack, M. (2016), *Denying to the grave*, Oxford University Press.

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The value of applied sociology: November 2018

The 19th century produced three new disciplines that dealt with aspects of life and society. Sociology, Psychology and Economics, the last 2 have massive organisations outside academia as well as inside. Sociology, at least in Australia, never wanted to grow an organisation of sociologists practicing outside academia. They told themselves they wanted to keep the subject pure. One conference when we were SAANZ, we had a guest speaker from the UK, who told us he was very proud that his University would only allow sociology to be studied by Ph.D. students because it was too dangerous for undergraduates.

What has happened in Australia has been that it only encourages those who might go on to study for a Ph.D. When I ask young graduates in the community about sociology, they tell me it is the most boring subject they had to study.

Which means there are no graduates eager to get out and set up a Sociology Business on the High Street. The consequence is that when governments decided that universities had to be profitable, Sociology was one of the easy department to reduce, because it was not seen as being profitable, nor did its graduates produce jobs.

What will make it difficult to introduce an applied curriculum is that you have got to teach people that what you do with your sociology outside of a University is very different to the way you approach things in a university.

When you write a report you do not follow the requirements of academia, they want to see plenty of citations, quotes and comments on previous work on the subject, and so on. The applied sociologist has been employed by someone in the business world or the public service. They have given you the opportunity to solve a problem for them. What they want from you is your assessment of the problem and one or more ways of solving it. They don't want citations, or quotes from other people. They have employed you, to write the report which will solve their problem. This may also involve telling them about one or more other problems which they didn't know or didn't want to know about.

However, what it also means is that you know your sociology to the extent that you don't have to look up what this or that popular scholar has said. You still keep an eye on the academic research. However, you have to explain from your study of the problem, how you, from your knowledge of sociology and other things in general, how you would solve the problem. It is your work, built up on how you understand your sociology and your experience and knowledge of the world. That is what being a professional is all about. You don't need to show who you have read, you will get no credit for quotations, they will only get in the way.

Universities tell their students to take no notice of research done outside of academia. However, they need to look at what happens to the forged data that originates in academia and real data that they don't want to hear about. But they don't want to talk about that.

Applied sociology is not an aberration; it is the only way forward, to help humanity live together, work together. We are needed in the community, every community so get out there and make sociology as strong and as powerful as Psychology and Economics so that you can show how communities can begin to work and live together in harmony.

Sociology and politics: December 2018

My December reading has been Terry Pratchett's *A slip of the keyboard*; a collection of his non-fiction writing. It is composed of the collected speeches, articles and other writings which reflect on his life, on being an author, and other occasions when he was expected to say something or write something.

I have found it a fascinating read and commend what he has told us about his life and things he felt would help other in theirs. For the purposes of this contact email, I have chosen one paragraph which stood out for me. What he said, not only applies to England, as well as to the Irish, to whom it was addressed, but it is just as true for Australia. This is a paragraph he wrote:

We live in a venal world run largely by men who count numbers and, because they can count people, they think people are numbers. We accept half-truths, we have learned to think that we must do what the government tells us, when in fact the truth of the matter is that the government should do what we tell it. Governments are scared. The government does not like to hold a referendum, because that would mean that stupid people, which is to say people who are not politicians, would make the decisions which are better left to stupid and, as we learn more and more, dishonest politicians instead. They despise us until an election comes around when they pretend that they do not.

Where does sociology stand in relation to politics? An early sociological study was Michel's 1911 study of Political Parties. He argued that whatever the differences in their political programmes and philosophy, political parties always tend to be dominated by elites. This still seems to exist in Australian politics, and essentially suggests that neither the voters nor party members are going to have much chance in determining what the part will do in government.

Political sociology is defined as being on four levels; 1) International relations, 2) the nature and role of the State in societies; 3) the nature and organisation of political movements and parties; 4) the participation of individuals in politics as shown, for example in voting behaviour. (*Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*)

So what sociology can we do? We can uncover the dirty tricks that are going on in both the political parties and the Public Service. We can provide answers to social issues for political parties. This one can be tricky because political parties have dominant theories, and if your research suggests the theory is wrong, you may have considerable problems in getting your work accepted. Lastly, we must try to stay independent of political identification. This can be hard when we have strong political beliefs of our own but it can, and should, be done.

Some years ago one political party had a questionnaire produced and had it circulated in the region where I lived. It was very badly prepared and I thought as a good citizen I should point out to my local member why it would not give the results they were claiming it would. I went to see my local member and he agreed to see me, but then his minder said: "I will sit in on this", and the member never said another word. I stated my case, then the minder shouted at me and said the party had paid a lot of money for this questionnaire, and we will not have you coming here trying to muck it up. So much for being a good citizen.

Uncertain sciences: January 2019

As we begin a new year, having made our resolutions and examined our hopes, and assumed what happens next? Often reality catches up and we find many of our hopes have moved beyond our reach. So, what are we left with? Well Bruce Mazlish, in 1998, published his book *The Uncertain Sciences*. In it he looks at the human sciences, i.e. Sociology, psychology, anthropology, geography, and economics. He begins his Introduction with the following two quotations.

Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed ... If the universe were to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which killed him, because he knows that he dies and the advantage which the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of this. -- Pascal

'My project, he told us, "is to learn where to go by discovering where I am by reviewing where I've been-where we've all been. There's a kind snail in the Maryland marshes-perhaps I invented him-that makes his shell as he goes along out of whatever he comes across, cementing it with his own juices, and at the same time makes his path instinctively towards the best available material for his shed; he carries his history on his back, living in it, adding new and larger spirals to it from the present as it grows." - John Barth

I like his second quote best because it is an illustration of what I believe, that who or what we are today is the sum total of our past. Our experiences in life, the words we use or don't use, the memories and even the forgotten events in our past, are still there making us who we are today

His first quote is also something that needs to be kept in the back of the mind. Most of us seem to believe that the universe is here for our benefit. What we are made for. We are something apart from it, and at various levels, we can do what we like to it. If that is how you think, go to a lightless high place and look at the stars and realise that it is more extensive than we can imagine. The light we see started the journey millions of years before we were born and will still be journeying millions of years after we are gone. The universe is constantly changing in time and ways we cannot understand. One day there will be a huge flying rock, or the enlargement of our Sun, and there will be nothing left of all the problems we worry about and no one will ever know we existed.

Well what does all that mean for Applied Sociologists? I believe it means that although the inevitable is out there, it is usually not the major thing facing us on a daily basis. We have to deal with issues at many different levels that our employer and employees have to deal with on a day-to-day basis too. The economist might be able to deal with a fraction if the issues facing people is financial. The Psychologist can help with the issues that have collected, and are cemented on their particular back, as they have progressed through life. However, it is the Sociologist who deals with the 'dunnage' and shows how to live with or reform the structures that people live with, that is all those things that they have no control over.

Dominant theories: February 2019

My February thoughts have been generated by reading Stephen Hawking's last publication, "Brief Answers to the Big Questions". I was somewhat surprised that it was so readable. In it he talks about the 'Big Questions' of science but also about his life.

Amongst all the science, there is at least one chapter which has the ring of Sociology about it. It has the title of "Can we predict the future? Let me quote:

"Laplace, (French scientist 1749-1827 and author of Celestial Mechanics) Hawking paraphrases him and interprets: "What he said was that if at one time we knew the positions and speeds of all the particles in the universe, then we would be able to calculate their behaviour at any other time in the past or future. The idea that the state of the universe at one time determines the state at all other times has been a central tenet of science ever since Laplace's time. It implies that we can predict the future, in principle at least. In practice, however, our ability to predict the future is severely limited by the complexity of the equations, and the fact that they often have a property called chaos. This means that a tiny disturbance in one place can cause a major change in another."

This comes into effect when politicians talk about what they will do in the future, and for sociology this comes into play when we write a report about what could or should be done. Predicting the future at whatever level, means we are dealing with the 'chaos factor'. The Collins Dictionary of Sociology, in its entry on chaos, makes the point that "traditionally, social and living systems have been regarded as 'open' systems, i.e. material can enter or leave them. Thus, they are more likely to become destabilised than enclosed systems."

It is also at this point that we face my other quibble about dominant theories, which occur in politics, academia, industry and individuals and can easily become part of the chaos. Dominant theories are not open to other ideas, unless a new idea can be slid into their major tenant without anyone noticing.

I don't want to suggest that you should stop making suggestions and predictions, but you must also take into consideration any dominant theories that exist in the minds of those who commissioned you, and, if possible, find a way around their objections. In addition, you must look around you at all that is happening, socially, politically, technically or more remotely, scientifically before you make your decisions on what the future holds.

As Sociologists it is at least part of our job to be constantly assessing what is happening in our society and where it might lead, then publish it in some form or other.

Unbound by borders: March 2019

In NSW we are one election down and another one to go, sometime soon. For the rest of you, you have just one. All this talk and argument has reminded me of the originator of “democracy”. Plato, the Greek philosopher used the name in his analysis of governments. Democracy was the fourth in his list, and he describes it as Democracy “a charming form of government, full of variety and disorder, and dispensing a sort of equality to equals and unequal alike.” He later goes on to say that democracy easily degenerates into dictatorship and the most aggravated form of tyranny and slavery.

It was announced on the ABC news that Thailand had been to the polls and in one region with a population of something like 30,000, it was recorded as having over 60,000 votes cast and the inference of the votes were for one party. Plato also made the observation that “A good decision is based on knowledge, not on numbers”. That “Good people do not need laws to tell them to act responsibly, while bad people will find a way around the laws that stop them doing what they want.” And just one more quote, “One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors.”

My reaction to all the commentaries and speeches of the past few weeks has been one of boredom and annoyance. However, I don't want to make this contact email another political analysis. For Sociologists, we have to consider not just the dominant theories of the left and right and those in between, our focus needs to be people. I was going to use the word community here, but the opening sentence in one dictionary of Sociology, under the term community, tells me that “The term community is one of the most elusive and vague words in sociology and is by now largely without specific meaning.” So, if we can no longer speak of ‘community’, how do we deal with the focus of our work that is to examine and explain how the various collections of people interact? Nineteenth century sociologists were able to distinguish between those living in an urban context and those in a rural one. Ferdinand Tönnies, a prominent German 19th century Sociologist, saw the world as being divided between people who lived in the *Gemeinschaft*, which is rural villages, and the people who lived in the *Gesellschaft*, which are urban areas. The point he makes is that people in one type of community, though entirely human, understand, do things, and see things, differently to those in the other community type. Although he has gone out of fashion with most Sociologists, I have always seen much value in his analysis of human interaction.

One of the things which has shown up in this last election has been that things are perceived differently by people living outside of major urban areas. In rural NSW the view of what is needed and what should be prioritised is different to how the politicians and public service gremlins in Sydney have seen things. However, at election time they suddenly suspect that Tönnies may be right and they charge round the rural areas handing out money left and right to persuade people that they should vote for them.

I encourage you to have a read of Tönnies, but read the Charles Loomis translation, rather than the Jose Harris version.

To finish, one last quote from Plato: “Honesty is for the most part less profitable than dishonesty”.

Connecting to the past: April 2019

Part of life is remembering. In the introduction to her book, *I Used to Know That* Caroline Taggart writes: “When I started to write this book, I realized that I did in fact remember lots of stuff. But I didn’t remember it completely or necessarily accurately.” This is the problem with our memories, when we think we remember something, we usually don’t or cannot check if what we remember is accurate. What do you remember, if anything, about the Sociological greats? What did Habermas write about? What did Tönnies write about? What did Plato write about?

Well, Jürgen Habermas wrote about the connection between thought and action and one good reason for reading it could be to provide you with insights about your thoughts and actions. Then also about the people you work with, and how the Bosses’ thoughts and actions work.

Ferdinand Tönnies wrote over 500 publications, but most of those who remember reading about him usually only remember just one book, or even just one idea, of his theory of Community and Society (*Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*). If you read it all you will see that he was able to set out where the world was going even though many people never got past his analysis of community and society.

I accept that Plato, (428 – 348 BC) is not usually regarded as a Sociologist, yet much of what he wrote about was the community and how it works and much of his findings could just as easily be found today.

So, what do the Applied Sociologists of today do with these and the works of other great sociologists? Well the thing is you don’t just pick one and go and try to apply their theory holus bolus. With the knowledge of what others have seen, you look at the issue before you and come to your own understanding of the present issue with any enlightenment from what others have given you, so that you may use it in arriving at your solution to the issue.

One job I had in America was to solve an organisation’s problem of attempts between the two main professional groups to make their professional ideology the most important for the organisation, to the detriment of their customers. I solved it quite easily by offering a sociological solution which they found both groups could accept. Consequently, the organisation was put back on an even keel.

Reading the greats of the past is how you get your professional background. Other people have put a great deal of effort to offer a description of how their particular focus on society seems to work. But most of it’s done in academia where you have to meet academic criteria and include a good sprinkling of quotes and criticisms of others’ work. The problem they face is meeting academic expectations. The Applied Sociologists’ problem is solving employers’ problems. That is, providing a viable solution to a particular problem in a specific setting.

This is what being a professional is all about. You bring the accumulated knowledge of your profession and, from within your understanding, you provide a solution that works. If you can’t find a solution that works, you find yourself looking for another job.

Social structures: May 2019

The social and economic order that the social scientist observes and describes is the spontaneous result of the inchoate, often contradictory beliefs, desires, and opinions people have at a given moment. The patterns are not created by objective qualities of the items involved. The patterns, if there are any, arise as an unintended consequence of each individual's conscious actions. The social sciences, unlike the natural sciences, cannot make generalizations that allow for precise predictions of future events. Economics can describe what choices people have made in the past, but the data about the beliefs and desires and shifting values of the agent are subjective, unique, and only knowable by an individual at the moment of choice. There is no objective data on which a social scientist could base a general rule that would allow an accurate prediction of future beliefs, desires, and values. Planning to satisfy someone's desires before he or she is in a position to choose is impossible. Any attempt to do so removes the freedom of the individual to make his or her own free choice at the moment.

The above quotation comes from the book *Philosophy & Terry Pratchett*, (Ed. J.M. Held & J.B. South, p118, 'Palgrave-MacMillan', 2014") in the chapter by Kevin Guilfooy. He makes the point, in an academic way, which I have been making for a long while. It speaks to me particularly, because I keep hearing mathematicians going on about algorithms, by which everything can be analysed. They seem to be trying to say we don't exist as thinking people and that they can produce an algorithm that will predetermine what we will do or say. In a totalitarian society this may be possible, because people's choices are limited to obey or be punished. In Australia and other democratic countries, the choices people have for dealing with any issue are usually more than two. Yet we must remember that Plato who invented the set of five names used for political social structures, suggested that these structures progressively degenerate from Aristocracy, through Timocracy, Oligarchy, Democracy, to the final step, from Democracy to Tyranny.

Mathematicians, together with a computer, want to believe that everything is fixed and you just turn things into numbers and the answer is a number. The whole point about humanity and much of animal life is that they live with choices and up until the choice is made, right or wrong, good or bad, there is no certainty in the options they will choose, as has been demonstrated by the recent federal election. However, there are other ways which can determine how we are divided from others in society. Stratification is one way which can be used. Stratification is where people are ranked hierarchically by separating them by their wealth. The very rich at the top and the very poor at the bottom. This does not tell us much about the life stories of individuals, only the distribution of wealth in a certain place at a certain time. Tönnies made the division between those who live in urban areas and those who lived in rural. He pointed out how they do things differently particularly in their inter-relationships. For instance, people living in a village would have gone to school with the others of the same age group and anything required more than one person to do or work at. If they went to the local shop, they would exchange what news there was about the health of people, what they had done and what might be happening in their family. In the urban community, the people serving in the shop only want to know what you want to buy. They don't usually know anything about your family and friends, or want to know. Country towns are somewhere in the middle. The important thing for the applied sociologist is, you can identify a person's possible options, but not what their choice will finally be.

The world we live in: June 2019

Ian Stewart, Jack Cohen and Terry Pratchett, in their book *The Science of Diskworld*, (really our world) suggest there are two ways that you can see yourself and your surroundings. They describe these ways of thinking as being “human centred” and “universe centred”. They suggest that in the “human centred” view we see the whole universe existing for our benefit. The sun to warm us, the stars to sparkle for us at night. The land and the seas to provide all our needs. However if you go into it a little deeper you discover that the world we walk on and everything we see around us is just a tiny part of a far bigger system that we are also living in.

We live in our village, town, city, and what they contain is our world. It took humanity thousands of year to realise that their village was part of something far larger. In recent years, I have known of people living in northern Tasmania that had never been as far as Launceston, Hobart or Melbourne. They could have seen pictures of these places in films or TV and could have easily believed, like people on the moon landing, that they were made in a movie studio. This is because when our immediate needs are met, the world is complete we don't feel the need for a bigger world.

It took thousands of years for people to realise that our world is round not flat and just how big the place we live on is. If you could walk round our world on dry land at 40 kilometres a day it would take you three years to do it. The moon is 10 times as far away, and the sun is 390 times as far away as the moon, the edge of the visible universe is 18,000 times as far away and that is 400,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 kilometres.

When you get that into your understanding, you have got to start thinking that the sun, moon and stars are not just decorations made for us. Our place in the universe is so small that a meteor, that was big enough, could someday blow our world apart and no one in the universe would miss us. Astronomers often see stars and worlds being blown apart.

Having got through to this in the book I began to ask myself, where does sociology fit in these world views? The universe centred view shows that all our fights, squabbles, politics etc. have little or no significance in the universe. However, though we exist in this bigger universe, we still have to live in a human centred universe. Although we find the discoveries, made by those working in the universe centred world, interesting, what they find does not put food on our table, it does not challenge the politics that rule us, or how rich or poor we are in this world.

Sociology is needed in the human world to tell us how the human world we live in, works. It provides the analysis of what happens if this is done or that is done in the situations people of this world have to face all through their life. Sociology helps by showing the consequences of choices to be made not only in the political scene but in everything that can happen in our lives. Although some people live under totalitarian rule, there are still choices that need to be made.

The Collins *Dictionary of Sociology* has an entry “world system” and describes it as

“a concept of the modern social world which views it as comprising one interlinked entity with an international division of labour unregulated by any one political structure.”

With that description of the world view, we have choices in some of the things that happen on the planet, but there are few ways they can have a say in its operation. In the universe centred world, they can have no say in how the universe works. Sociology has no place in the universe centred world. In the human centred world Sociology has the means to expose its workings and offer ways for a better existence.

Defining sociology: July 2019

I have on my bookshelf a volume entitled Ferdinand Tönnies, Selected Writings on Sociology: Pure, Applied and Empirical, written by Werner J. Cahnman & Rudolf Heberle. I was led to this by a social history blog I wrote for the local City Council.

When I presented my 3 page tome, the Editor said I like your introduction. All I had done was to make a list of the words, used by those who generate the subject matter, and point out that few take any notice of the definition of the titles they give.

So I thought it might be worth defining other titles, where perhaps some who use the various part names but does not look up their meaning.

Any Sociologist who knows their stuff, knows about Tönnies, or at least they did when I was learning, though I notice that little attention is paid to the greats of the past today and the universities still do not recognise research done outside their walls.

Anyway this book about him gives us three words which are used to divide up Sociology, so I thought it might be of help to look at the definitions.

Sociology

Pure, Applied, Empirical

Well what does the Lexicographer make of these words?

Pure: Not mixed or adulterated with other substances or materials.

Free of impurities.

Innocent or morally good.

Complete

Applied: Practical rather than theoretical.

Empirical: Based on observation or experience rather than theory or pure logic.

Well there you are, the definitions of what makes up Sociology. So where do we stand? I have mentioned before that I was once told, by someone at a Sociology Conference, that what I was doing by applying Sociology was destroying the purity of sociology which could only be maintained in a university. I don't know what he would have said today, but now dominant social sciences are an exact contradiction of not being mixed with other materials. However, I think we got it right, by seeing ourselves as Applying Sociology and we are equally good at adding the Empirical components of observation and experience.

What we contribute to the community are practical solutions rather than theoretical analysis. Much of our work is based on experience rather than theory. The Applied Sociology title will get us further in the community than the word "empirical" or "pure". However, what we must recognise is we still need to realise that we can only use our observation and experience, if we know contributions Sociologists have made over the years. We can look at material from the past and understand what they got right for their times and what they got wrong, and then ask the question, "What insights they made, might also relate to society today. However, what we must not do is leave the insights of sociologists down through the years in a book, but take them out, dust them off and see them as part of our experiences for looking at the world and apply solutions, where appropriate, to the sociology we do for our employers.

Social change: August 2019

Watching 'Insiders' on the ABC last Sunday morning, I was struck by the repeated comments about 'change'. It was almost as if change so rarely happened that we had never been required to meet and deal with change in the social structure. Piotr Sztompka, in the preface of his 1993 book, *The Sociology of change*, uses a quote from Haferkamp & Smelser (in their 1992 book *Social change and Modernity*) they make the point that the study of change is at the very core of sociology. The need to understand ongoing social change is acutely perceived by people in general and Sociologists alike. It was clear by the 1970's that the pace of change, was going so, fast that people often could not take it all in. Everything around them was changing: art, science, religion, morality, education, politics, the economy, even family life. I can identify in my lifetime many changes. Things that were emphasised when I was at school, are now recognised as being totally untrue.

One vivid example that fills our TV news these days, is one issue of social change. In Hong Kong and now the UK, people are prepared to risk their lives to show that governmental change clashes with the people's idea of the state they want to live in. They are prepared to face injury or even death to achieve it. Today in Australia, outside of ordered protests at election time, people are willing to protest about issues close to their heart, though mostly at little or no risk to themselves.

However, in the 19th and 20th century the social change that was always in question, was the social difference between the rich and the poor, or the aristocracy and the workers. Their perception was that the gaps between these divisions should be evened out. However, Australia does not have an aristocracy like Europe did before the First World War, so our division is more between the rich and the poor. However there have been a number of the poor, who have made it to being some of the richest of the rich, by doing things that have made social changes that previous generations had no conception of. The developer of Facebook, made has made his millions on the back of an earlier profitable idea. and is now very rich. One of the things that has thus changed, is that people in the working classes, can now develop things which have no connection to social class but transcend all so called structures. You can see pictures in news of people in what are still regarded of poor countries, have their mobile phones and they are used to organise demonstrations.

Most changes in how a society does things, today, are not based on class structure. Education has played a large part in this. In recent years, students from State High Schools have got higher marks in the NSW Higher School Certificate, than some of those from private schools.

Social change is an increasing difficult thing to identify by class. Technology, in particular has been given to all, so although there may be changes from the class systems of the past, they are not the main indicators of social change today. The best achievement of changing social conditions, I know of, came at the end of the Civil War, in England, 1603 -1714. Neither side wanted to pay their solders a pension for their service. So the troops from both sides, together, marched into parliament with swords drawn, and faced the members and demanded their pensions. A pension bill for all the troops was immediately passed, and the troops left.

Social movements and change: September 2019

The world seems to be beset by organisations making an attempt to achieve some social change. We have protests in Hong Kong, the UK, the U.S., Australia and some European countries. People in some of these places are even prepared to put their lives on the line to achieve their goal. Sometimes they win sometimes they don't.

In his his book *The sociology of social change* (1993), Piotr Sztompka has a chapter on Social movements as forces of change and deals in detail about what is involved in this approach to social change. In his final section he deals with the impact of social movements on the wider society. First, using a quote by Piven and Cloward, we are reminded that what is won must be judged by what was possible. In addition, even if those who were part of the struggle were fully aware of just what has been won, if anything, they might not be so aware of consequences that were unintended or unrecognised. In addition, short range effects must be distinguished from long term effects, which may only show up in the future.

One perhaps, off beat example, the coming of the electric car. Businesses and politicians are telling us the new thing is the electric car. Yet as usual they have not taken notice of the historical factors.

The electric car was invented in Scotland in 1837 by a chemist named Robert Davidson. By the end of the nineteenth century a fleet of electric taxis worked the streets of London, and the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police declared they took up less space than the horse driven vehicles and would help solve the traffic problem. At this time similar taxis were available in Paris, Berlin and New York. In the U.S. by 1900, there were more than 30 thousand electric cars registered and on the road. However, in the UK, there was social movement formed to oppose these dangerous electrical things by the horse drawn taxi drivers. They mounted a vigorous campaign against them with the government and won. The electric car was no more for 100 years. (See Steven Poole's book *Rethink* 2016, p1)

However, groups of people shouting for the imminent change that they want, usually are not asking if we get this, what might it also change, that we haven't thought about? For instance in Hong Kong, they may get their change from the Hong Kong Government, only to find that this leads to even more oppression from the Chinese Government. As Robert Lauer (1976) has noted, "When we deal with a social movement, we are dealing with two processes that intersect and interact with each other – the process of the movement itself and the processes of the larger society within which the movement is operative".

The sociology of social movements, is like any sub-field of sociology, encompassed by general theories of society. If you live in a *Gesellschaft* or a suburb whether it has been changed or has been destroyed in the previous social action, you are still likely to seek a place to live in a community that has that familiar feel.

Fake News: October 2019

Doubt

The Philosopher René Descartes, in his *Meditations (Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings, Penguin Books, 2003 p112)* starts one chapter with a very interesting but confronting statement. “Insofar as it is possible, everything should be doubted once in a lifetime by whoever is searching for the truth.” He suggests that we are “diverted from knowledge of the truth” from early in our existence by things like Father Christmas, the Easter bunny and the Tooth Fairy. In later life, many other things like dominant theories, advertisers and gossip that we accept to be true, without testing them. We can be liberated from these, if every now and then, we take a look at ourselves and ask is it true or are we holding on to some idea that really is not true.

Well what is doubt? The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines it as “a feeling of uncertainty or lack of conviction or when you feel uncertain about the truth or fact about something. In an era fake news we are beginning to suspect that, in some way or other, everything we see and hear has the possibility of being fake news of one sort or another. Politicians declare that the other parties politics, are either lies or not good enough. Other political figures try to keep truth from being circulated, particularly by the media. So there does seem to be something in the idea of doubting things that are presented to us, until we are able to get substantiating evidence. To doubt is not to say that something is wrong, simply that you don't have enough information to agree that it is undoubtedly true.

Scientists are often chastised by politicians for changing their mind on whether something is the absolute truth or not. But politicians and many other do not understand that science has the caveat that scientific research is true, but can only be provisionally because at some future time further research may develop a fuller understanding.

Fake News, fake ideas, versus Doubt? Exploring things we think are probably true are worth the trouble of exploring them from time to time. You never know something you have accepted but never really thought about might not be as solid as you think. You know that what you see with your eyes must be true, except that it is now being suggested that what we see is being generated by the brain from the information it already has and presents this picture to our consciousness.

NEWS (expected to be true)

TASA has decided that my monthly contact efforts, which I have been writing since 2011 are worth putting together as an online book. Roger Wilkinson is editing it and it will be launch at the Conference on Thursday 28th November, 12pm Room PC-01.7.65.

The Sociology of Protests: November 2019

When I was young, the folklore verse for November was:

Remember, remember
The fifth of November,
With gunpowder, treason and plot.

I later learnt there was also a slightly more polished version by the poet John Milton that goes:

Remember, remember the Fifth of November,
The Gunpowder Treason and Plot,
I know of no reason
Why the Gunpowder Treason
Should ever be forgot.

The 5th of November, also known as Guy Fawkes Day, was an annual commemoration observed on 5 November when Guy Fawkes, a member of the Catholic Gunpowder Plot, who was arrested while guarding explosives the plotters had placed beneath the House of Lords in 1605. This was turned into a celebration for the fact that Protestant King James I had survived the attempt of a Catholic group's attempt on his life. When it became known, people around London lit bonfires and a few months later, the Government introduced the 'Observance of 5th November Act' enforcing an annual public day of thanksgiving for the plot's failure, with fireworks and bonfires and an effigy of Guy Fawkes placed on the top. The public holiday was repealed 1859 but the bonfires and fireworks were still celebrating in my younger days with small parties in many homes and massive parties with huge bonfire in some rural places even if they didn't know what they were celebrating.

What has brought this to mind is the seeming constant mass protests, around the world, to try and change a government or to have certain policies stopped. Some seem to involve most of the population, others are often at logger heads with parts of the population.

So what is the Sociology going on here? I looked in my two Dictionaries of Sociology, but neither Demonstrations nor Protests are mentioned. I looked in ISAA Review for November, with the title of International Relations, no mention. I looked at a few prominent Sociologists but again, no mention of Protests or Demonstrations. Admittedly I don't see many of the papers that emerge around the world today, but I suppose some people are writing about it. However, I thought I might look at the sociology of it.

Sociology involves noting what is being done, what is not being done, where it is being done and who is doing it, both as individuals and as groups and why it is being done. Well as you can see the origins of Guy Fawkes Day were both political and religious, with the group's hope of changing the government to change the religious ideas fostered by the king. The response to the day was also political by instituting an event to celebrate the King and his religion. Down through British history, other political events have brought demonstrations on to the streets, such as the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), a women-only political movement and leading militant organisation campaigning for women's suffrage in the United Kingdom. Known as the suffragette movement to get women the vote and change government policies. More currently protests have been about climate change. However, the protests may say it's about climate change, but it is a move to change the policy of governments.

In other countries people want similar changes but often do not in fact have the opportunity to change things. Political Sociology looks at international relations, how the government of a state deals with its people, how people are allowed to participate in the way a country is run. Political parties are always talking about their 'policies' but probably don't realise that the word comes from the Greek 'politeia' meaning 'citizenship'.

Who knows, we might get another bonfire day to celebrate the political parties not changing their policies on climate change

Keep Sociology Alive: December 2019

We are coming to the end of the year 2019 on the western calendar, but many other people work to a different calendar. For me this end of the year has presented me with a rather difficult decision. In October I passed the age of 87. I have been “retired” longer than some of you will have been at work. I learnt early in my retirement that “retirement” didn’t really mean that you stopped working, it meant that you got out of the clutches of whoever had been employing you and hopefully with enough money and good health to do what you wanted to do. For me I soon learnt that to stay alive you had to keep your mind active. If your mind has nothing to do, it begins to say “what’s the point”, and starts to shut everything else down. (That is a sociological assessment not a medical one.) I ended up with five volunteer jobs that kept my mind and body active. I am still in good health, I passed my old peoples driving test a couple of weeks ago, so I can still legally drive anywhere I want. I ran the Coffs Harbour University of the Third Age, for several years and got it to over 600 enrolments in 30 or so different subjects with experienced lecturers. I offered myself or other qualified people, to go to a couple of nursing homes and give lectures to those bed ridden, but was told by occupational therapists that these were, old people and they wouldn’t understand what I was talking about. One of the big problems in these places is boredom.

Then along came the idea of a book of my monthly Contact Emails for Sociologists outside of Academia. In 2011 I became the convenor of the Applied Sociology Thematic Group, and realised there was no real connection with the members, who, unlike those in academia were often the sole Sociologist in a workplace where most people had no idea what a sociologist did or could do. So I had the idea of the monthly email and have been sending them to you ever since.

I have been most grateful to those of you who have responded to my efforts from time to time. The convenor can also get lonely if no one makes a comment and you begin to wonder if it’s worth it. With the coming of the Book idea, it was decided that I should finish off the year’s emails to provide a tidy end to the book. I wrote the October and November email, with little trouble, but when it came to the December one I found that the question of the last one was pointing at me. Was I too old? How long could I keep it up? Should I give someone else a go? I am long past the age when my parents died, I would not last for ever.

I think my conclusion is that this December should make the end of my contribution to applied sociology. However, I still feel there is something in me to contribute somewhere and I am not sure what that is, but something will present itself in due course. So thank you all, and keep Sociology alive.

"When everything is a crisis, who should you believe?"

... you can remind your employer, be they government, industry, service industry or welfare organisations or what ever, that they need the insights of sociology to achieve better outcomes.

"For some time now, there have been efforts in the U.S. to marginalise and delegitimise the social sciences."

The popular opinion is that social media has the power to transform

"Where can I get sociological support when I am a lone sociologist and no one to talk to about my work."

"[There are] two possible courses of action. First, we could try to demonstrate to these industries, the advantages of employing a sociologist could bring to the productivity of their work. Second, we can do the same thing with those industries where we apparently have no representation."

"Do I hear a cry from Sociologists? Have we given up? Is it all too hard to persuade people that we have something important to offer?"

It seems to me that applied sociology must be prepared to challenge the misapplication of a social process.

I support the approach that sociology should not be judged against the physical sciences. If for no other reason than societies and individuals are not made up of fixed entities.

We do not have a professional association which sets standards for sociologists. I wish we did and in time this may come

If someone had designed a work regime perfectly suited to maintaining the power of finance capital, it's hard to see how they could have done a better job. Real, productive workers are relentlessly squeezed and exploited.

At question time I again pointed out that sociology did not belong solely to the Universities. That sociology was the day to day work of nearly 100 members of TASA and the universities need to recognise their responsibility to train people in sociology to work outside Universities.

"We need to ensure that those who choose to work outside academia are adequately paid and have ongoing professional development."

"But for our members the question might be; is censored by employers or funding bodies when we suggest question that might produce politically incorrect answers?"