



Applied Sociology Thematic Group For those who work outside University

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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 your 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 your 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.

Alan Scott, Convenor

Sorry the letter is a little late but the storm in northern NSW took away the power lines and I was without electricity for a while.

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.