JAPANESE SOCIOLOGY

Japanese sociology divides roughly into four stages of development: pre–World War II, with emphasis on theoretical and philosophical orientations, influenced primarily by European (especially German) sources; post–World War II, with growing emphasis on empirical orientations, influenced primarily by the United States; diversification, with emphases on both theoretical and empirical orientations (on various aspects of the history of Japanese sociology, see, e.g., Halmos 1966; Koyano 1976; Odaka 1950); and globalization, with emphasis on theoretical orientations and an increasing number of empirical orientations, some encompassing cross-national and foreign area studies. In a general sense, the development of Japanese sociology reflects the country’s social and cultural change, as well as shifting national policies. The significant Western influence generally exhibits a time lag in terms of its expression in Japanese sociology.

PRE–WORLD WAR II STAGE (1893–1945)

Japanese sociology began as a European import and reflected a conservative stance. This occurred shortly after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. E. F. Fenollosa (1853–1908), an American professor, first taught sociology at the University of Tokyo in 1878. Three years later, Masakazu Toyama (1848–1900) began teaching at the same university; in 1893 (just one year after the founding of the University of Chicago’s sociology department), he became the first professor of sociology in Japan and is regarded as the founder of Japanese sociology. Toyama, and later Nagao Ariga (1860–1921), a student of Fenollosa and the first sociologist in Japan to publish, both introduced aspects of Herbert Spencer’s organic analogy for society. The works of Spencer and John Stuart Mill were particularly significant during these early years and were translated frequently.

Tongo Takebe (1871–1945), successor to Toyama in 1898, introduced Auguste Comte to Japan, combining Comte’s positivism with Confucian philosophy and social thought to fit Japanese society. In 1913 Takebe also founded the Japan Institute of Sociology, an organization replaced by the Japan Sociological Society in 1924. A new approach began to take hold in the 1910s—the psychological approach initiated by Ryukichi Endo (1874–1946), who drew on Franklin Giddings’s theory of consciousness of kind to explain social phenomena.

During the 1910s, other Western sociological theories came to Japan, largely through the work of Shotaro Yoneda (1873–1945). Yoneda, who looked at society and culture from a sociopsychological perspective, was an important teacher who introduced the ideas of many Western sociologists to Japan, including those of Gabriel Tarde, Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, and Franklin Giddings. Yoneda laid the groundwork for the subsequent strong influence of the German school of sociology.

From this point forward, until the end of World War II, the German school dominated
Japanese sociology. There were two major divisions that grew out of the German school: formale Soziologie (formal sociology) and, later, Kultursoziologie (cultural sociology). The major proponent of the former was Yasuma Takata (1883–1972), a student of Yoneda. Takata (1922, 1989) successfully changed the view of sociology from that of a synthesis of the social sciences to one in which sociology stood as separate and independent, drawing in particular on the work and influence of Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Ferdinand Tönnies, and Robert MacIver.

New influences, however, emerged in the 1920s. Formal sociology was deemed abstract and out of touch with the real world. As a consequence, cultural sociology gained a stronger foothold in both Germany and Japan. Pioneering the work in cultural sociology in Japan was Eikichi Seki (1900–1939). No doubt a reaction to the Depression of 1929, cultural sociology gained popularity for its closer ties with the social realities of the day. Although a theory of cultural sociology fitting the Japanese society seemed imminent, it never really unfolded.

While there were also French and American influences on Japanese sociology during the prewar period, they were minor compared with those of Germany. Jyun’ichiro Matsumoto (1893–1947) saw a need to synthesize formal and cultural sociology into what he would call “general sociology.” At the same time, Masamichi Shimmei (1898–1988) sought to take Matsumoto’s thoughts and combine them with Simmel’s general sociology and the thinking of Karl Mannheim.

Because Western theory and thought dominated Japanese sociology in the prewar period, little of the work analyzed Japanese society. There were, however, a handful of notable empirical studies, especially in family and rural sociology, a tradition begun at the University of Tokyo by Teizo Toda (1887–1955). Toda had studied at the University of Chicago, where he learned about survey methodologies being used in the United States. Toda analyzed statistics on the Japanese family structure, using census and other then-current and historical data. Kizaemon Aruga (1897–1979) worked in the area of rural sociology, linking his findings with previous folklore studies and working toward clarifying the condition of social strata in prewar Japan. Lack of financial support, however, hindered the development of empirical research during this time.

Two phenomena in particular worked against the development of Japanese sociology prior to World War II. First, Japanese sociology focused on European sociology rather than on studies of its own society. The second phenomenon, bolstered by government officials and scholars inclined toward nationalistic militarism, involved a distorted public image: that sociology and sociologists were associated with socialism because of the two words’ similarity in the Japanese language (“sociology,” shakaigaku; “socialism,” shakaishugi). Many thought that sociology was the study of socialism or social revolution and that sociologists were socialists and, therefore, a sinister threat to national security. As World War II grew closer, and during the war, publications were often censored, academic freedom was severely curtailed, and meetings and conventions were forbidden.

**POSTWAR STAGE (1946–1960s)**

Defeat and U.S. occupation brought drastic social changes to Japan. The traditional family system collapsed, and land reform became the order of the day. Favorite prewar survey subjects centering on village and family were replaced by issues related to land reform and revision of traditional family values. Indeed, the traditional Japanese value system was pulled out from under the nation. “Democratization” was the new buzzword. The term “sociology” was released from taboo. Educational reforms in the 1950s now required sociology courses as part of the general university education, especially for freshmen and sophomores. More and more departments of sociology or sociology programs within other departments were formed, particularly at private colleges and universities. Suddenly, many sociologists were needed. American influences were rampant in all areas of Japanese society, and sociology was no exception. Many American sociological theories came to influence Japanese sociology, the strongest being that of Talcott Parsons.

As the importance of empirical study was growing in the United States, Japanese sociologists also began to develop a strong interest in empirical
work. Social research, positivism, and functionalism were key words. Marxism had significant impact on Japanese sociology as well. “Democratization” and “modernization” were major fundamental themes in sociological studies. Japanese sociologists studied American research methods, ultimately leading to a rapid increase in surveys and research based on the results of these surveys. To many, the empirical studies of Japanese sociology moved the entire discipline from one of art and humanity to one of social science. However, many surveys were carried out for fact-finding purposes rather than hypothesis testing for theory construction.

Tadashi Fukutake (1917–1989) significantly influenced the postwar stage and the subsequent stage of Japanese sociology. Fukutake’s studies focused on rural sociology (see, e.g., 1967) in the context of Japanese society’s postwar democratization. Also influential was Kunio Odaka (1908–1993), a positivist, who played an important role in industrial sociology (see, e.g., 1975) as well as general sociology, especially during the period of extraordinary economic development from 1955 through 1965. Odaka and Fukutake were two of Japan’s leading empirical researchers conducting field research in real social settings during this stage in the development of Japanese sociology.

Mentioned earlier, the Japan Sociological Society is a nationwide organization for Japanese sociologists. It holds annual meetings and publishes a journal, and it joined the International Sociological Association (ISA) in 1950. Two years later, a survey on social stratification and mobility was conducted under the auspices of the Japan Sociological Society, led by Odaka, in cooperation with the ISA. This survey was repeated three years later on a nationwide scale and subsequently every ten years.

In 1954, the Institute of Statistical Mathematics in Tokyo began a nationwide time-trend survey of the Japanese national character, a survey conducted every five years since, with the objective of analyzing changes (or lack thereof) in general social attitudes among the Japanese since World War II (Hayashi 1998). This ongoing survey pioneered the use of identical questions over time and as such became a model for the General Social Survey of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. Both these ongoing surveys continue as the most well-known nationwide social surveys in Japan.

Although the postwar period saw great social change in Japan, within academic circles, senior sociologists, most of whom belonged to the pre-war generation, prevailed. A generational change among leading Japanese sociologists occurred in the 1960s, marking the end of the postwar period (Koyano 1976).

**DIVERSIFICATION STAGE (1960s–1990s)**

Since the 1960s, American sociology has gained an ever-stronger influence on Japanese sociology. With the exception of Talcott Parsons and his structural-functionalism, however, no major American sociologists have significantly influenced the theoretical aspects of Japanese sociology. Whereas Marxist sociology had tended to influence many of the younger Japanese sociologists from a theoretical perspective, “the entire history of [Japanese] sociological development to the 60s was criticized and thrown into examination by more or less radical criticism. . . . Thus many talented younger sociologists turned from Marxism to structuralism or structuralist social theory . . . [or] alternately accepted rather subjective methodologies and theories such as phenomenological sociology, symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology . . . [i.e.] phenomenological trends” (Shoji 1996). Interests among some Japanese sociologists also shifted from macro- to micro-sociological analyses. Multi-dimensional paradigms became prevalent, such as those of Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, Niklas Luhmann, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, and Alfred Schutz, all of whom have consequently influenced Japanese sociology. Much as the pre-war emphases of the theoretically oriented Japanese sociologists tended toward the purely theoretical, the new attractions continued the inclination toward speculative and interpretive theory–more like social philosophy–as against the empirical science tradition represented by Fukutake and Odaka. Though Japanese sociologists have been quite keen on the general trends in Western social and sociological thought, there is about a ten-year lag from introduction to translation and analysis of the works of Western sociologists.

Along with the vast changes in Japanese society in the postwar period came a nearly unlimited
number of topics for sociological study and investigation, particularly from an empirical standpoint. This, too, accounted for diversification in Japanese sociology and signaled the establishment of a number of subdisciplines in the field. Thus, as a result of American influences, economic development, and a host of other factors, Japanese sociology continuously diversified from the early 1960s on. This is partially attributable to the fact that the industrialization of Japan, into the early 1970s, led to serious social and environmental problems, which in turn led to student uprisings, increases in delinquency and other expressions of social unrest, and, in response, the emergence of environmental-protecting, feminist, and other movements, even though many of these social phenomena and movements waned in the 1980s.

These circumstances brought forth a wide variety of challenging research topics for sociologists and coincidentally created a situation in which there are no especially influential figures in Japanese sociology, although each subdiscipline does have its major proponents. These scholars include, among others, Eiichi Isomura (1903–1997) in urban sociology; Michio Nagai, who later became Japanese Minister of Education, in the sociology of education (cf. 1971); Kazuo Aoi in the field of small groups; Kiyomi Morioka in the sociology of religion and the sociology of the family (cf. 1975); Saburo Yasuda (1925–1990) in sociological methodology (cf. 1964); Akira Takahashi in social movements; Joji Watanuki in political sociology (cf. 1976); Ken’ichi Tominaga in social stratification (cf. 1969); and Tamito Yoshida in communication.

From the 1960s on, the number of sociologists in Japan grew markedly, to the point where, based on memberships in national sociological organizations, there are more sociologists in Japan than in any other country except the United States. While there were about 300 sociologists teaching at colleges and universities in Japan in the 1970s, their number grew to about 1,000 by the late 1980s. The Japan Sociological Society’s membership rosters totaled 870 in 1957; 1,931 in 1985; 1,945 in 1988; 2,200 in 1990; 2,450 in 1992; and 3,034 in 1999.

In 1988, Japanese sociology had about thirty subdisciplines. On the basis of first-, second-, and third-choice subdiscipline selections by the 1,945 members of the Japan Sociological Society at that time, the most prominent were: (1) rural sociology and community studies, 17.7 percent; (2) sociology of the family, 17.2 percent; (3) general sociological theories, 16.4 percent; (4) social welfare, social security, and medical sociology, 16.2 percent; (5) social thought and the history of sociology, 14.9 percent; (6) management, industry, and labor, 13.0 percent; (7) social pathology and social problems, 12.5 percent; (8) culture, religion, and morality, 12.4 percent; and (9) the sociology of education, 11.6 percent. Among other things, we see that sociology of the family and rural sociology held their significance from the prewar era.

Sociologists who study industrial sociology—including management; urban sociology; and social welfare, social security, and medical sociology—have increased in number continuously since World War II. And, over time, foreign sociologists have shown more and more interest in industrial sociology; the sociology of education; and social welfare, social security, and medical sociology, as these are seen as particularly successful elements of Japan’s economic and social development.

Derived from lists of publications in the Japanese Sociological Review between 1984 and 1988, publication of articles originating from the various subdisciplines broke down as follows: (1) sociology of the family, 7.4 percent; (2) social thought and the history of sociology, 7.2 percent; (3) general social theories, 6.5 percent; (4) the sociology of education, 6.5 percent; (5) urban sociology, 6.2 percent; (6) rural sociology and community studies, 5.8 percent; (7) industrial sociology and management, 5.2 percent; (8) social pathology and social problems, 5.1 percent; and (9) social welfare, social security, and medical sociology, 5.1 percent. Articles totaled 7,426 (books, 927) during the five-year period, most of which appeared in Japanese.

Unlike in the United States, in Japan there is no rigid screening or referee system for publications, with the exception of a few well-known journals such as the Japanese Sociological Review (Shakaigaku Hyoron, the official journal of the Japan Sociological Society), The Study of Sociology (Shakaigaku Kenkyu), and Sociology (Shoshioroji). With regard to presentations at meetings of the Japan Sociological Society, the five regional associations, and the associations of the various subdisciplines, there have been, in many cases, no rigid referee systems. Heated debate is rare, and
thus academic stimulation from published or presented controversies is quite limited.

By the late 1980s, 33 of Japan’s 501 colleges and universities had doctoral programs in sociology. The major institutions with such programs included the public universities of Hokkaido, Tohoku, Tokyo, Hitotsubashi, Tokyo Metropolitan, Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe, and Kyushu, and the private universities of Waseda, Keio, and Hosei. Also during the period, there were about 700 graduate students studying sociology, 490 of whom were doctoral candidates (see Committee on Education for Sociology 1988). In general, two years are required to obtain a master’s degree and an additional three years to finish coursework for doctoral programs. A much higher percentage of those who complete a master’s program at public universities go on to a doctoral program than do those at private universities. Most who obtain master’s degrees do not complete their doctoral theses within three years. Rather, after finishing their doctoral coursework, they obtain teaching or research positions and often complete their doctorates at a later stage in their careers. Forty-one persons obtained doctoral degrees in sociology during the period 1977–1986. During this time, there was a surplus of sociology graduates versus the number of teaching positions available. In the late 1980s, of those teaching at Japanese universities who obtained their doctoral degrees from Japanese universities, twenty-four sociology professors held doctoral degrees in literature, about thirty held doctoral degrees in sociology, and several others held doctoral degrees in related fields. Compared to other social sciences such as economics, the number of professors who obtained their doctoral degrees in sociology from foreign educational institutions is limited. For instance, only about twenty Ph.D. holders who taught at Japanese colleges and universities in the late 1980s obtained their degrees in the United States, although their numbers have been increasing.

GLOBALIZATION STAGE (1990s AND BEYOND)

As a whole, Japan has recently seen substantial movement toward globalization (or internationalization), and Japanese sociology is no exception. However, before exploring the implications of globalization for Japanese sociology, it is appropriate to look at the changes that took place in the 1990s.

In 1997, out of 586 universities and colleges in Japan, 65 had master’s programs and 47 had doctoral programs in sociology. In 1997, more than forty-five Ph.D. degree holders (obtained from non-Japanese universities) in sociology were teaching at Japanese universities and colleges. Also, more than sixty-five doctoral degree holders (obtained from Japanese universities) in sociology were teaching at various universities and colleges in Japan. It should be noted that these numbers are not at all significant compared to those in the West.

The Japan Sociological Society polled its members in 1998 for their preferred subdisciplines and research fields. They identified (1) general sociological theories, 15.6 percent; (2) sociology of the family, 15.2 percent; (3) communications and information, 15.1 percent; (4) social thought and the history of sociology, 14.7 percent; (5) social welfare, social security, and medical sociology, 14.3 percent; (6) culture, religion, and morality, 13.6 percent; (7) social psychology and social attitudes, 13.1 percent; (8) rural sociology and community studies, 12.2 percent; and (9) cross-national and foreign area studies, 11.3 percent. Note that the first three choices, including communications and information, are effectively tied for first place. We can see, compared with the figures from 1988, that management, industry and labor, social pathology and social problems, and the sociology of education all dropped out of the top nine fields, having been replaced by communications and information, social psychology and social attitudes, and cross-national and foreign area studies. That communications and information made such a showing is particularly notable and reflects the changes in information infrastructure (the Internet, among others) that are in large part responsible for globalization.

During the period 1989–1996, publication of articles originating from the various subdisciplines broke down as follows: (1) social thought and the history of sociology, 8.7 percent; (2) the sociology of education, 7.2 percent; (3) sociology of the family, 6.6 percent; (4) general sociological theories, 6.6 percent; (5) urban sociology, 6.2 percent; (6) communications and information, 5.6 percent;
(7) culture, religion, and morality, 5.6 percent; (8) management, industry, and labor, 5.4 percent; and (9) rural sociology and community studies, 5.2 percent. These figures were derived from lists of publications in the *Japanese Sociological Review*. Notice that, compared to the publications listed from 1984 through 1988, social pathology and social problems and social welfare, social security, and medical sociology dropped from the top nine while communications and information, and culture, religion, and morality appeared. That communications and information did not rise to the top here is not surprising, as publishing traditionally carries with it varying degrees of time lag.

As in the United States and western Europe, aging has become a serious issue; in 1998, about 16 percent (i.e., 20 million persons) of the Japanese population was over 65. Therefore, more and more sociologists are involving themselves in this field and contributing to national and local policy formation.

In Japan, there are no major university research centers such as the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan or the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, nor does Japan have any colleges or universities that are especially well known for their sociology departments or programs. However, there are some survey sections within organizations (e.g., research institutions, government organizations, the press and mass media) that have carried out major surveys since the 1950s, some on a continuing basis, including surveys targeting trends in social attitudes. Among others, these include the Japanese Prime Minister’s Office; the Institute of Statistical Mathematics, as mentioned above; the Mainichi Press; Jiji Press; and Nippon Hoso Kyokai, a Japanese broadcasting organization (see Sasaki and Suzuki 1991). Each one of these endeavors is independent and generally does not provide its data to outside researchers, making secondary analysis of such data a difficult task in Japan. This hinders those in graduate training, as they often lack access to such data for thesis work.

On occasion, surveys, including cross-national studies, are funded by agencies such as the Japanese Ministry of Education, the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, and the Toyota Foundation. On a regional or local basis, funds are sometimes provided by prefectural or municipal governments. Findings from some of these studies have had significant impacts on policy formation at the local and national levels. Most research grants for sociologists, for both domestic and international (cross-national and foreign area) studies, are provided by the Japanese Ministry of Education. The Japan Society for the Promotion of Science provides grants for foreign area and cross-national research projects, for joint research conferences and seminars, as well as travel allowances for visiting scholars.

Japanese sociology does not enjoy a wide-ranging reputation in the rest of the world. This has been attributed to lack of integration and coordination, as well as a descriptive rather than analytic focus. Indeed, Japanese sociology has relied substantially on foreign influence, particularly that which is *au courant*, and has not excelled in the development of original theoretical or empirical ideas, rather having a stronger commitment to theory interpretation than theory testing and theory building. With the exception of a few research groups doing cross-national studies, in general Japan’s sociologists have had limited contact with researchers in other nations. This can be attributed primarily to the language barrier and lack of experience in exchanging ideas. Despite these apparent shortcomings, sociology is comparatively popular in Japan, where there is a strong demand for books on the subject. As a consequence, Japanese scholars often feel little need to publish in foreign languages.

Broader publication—in English, in particular—will be essential to the mutual exchange of ideas and research results now and in the future, as well as to enhancing the reputation of Japanese sociology. To encourage scholars, the Japan Sociological Society has published the *Bibliography of Japanese Sociological Literature in Western Languages* in 1982, 1986, 1990 and 1994 (see Japan Sociological Society 1982, 1986, 1990, 1994). Research Committee meetings of the ISA have been held from time to time in Japan, and occasionally Japanese sociologists have served as ISA Executive Committee members. Japanese sociologists will need to host, and invite their foreign colleagues to, more international meetings and conventions, as occurred in 1991 when the 30th World Congress of
the International Institute of Sociology (IIS; founded in 1893 and the oldest sociological association in the world) met in Kobe, Japan, for the first time in the history of Japanese sociology. In 1998, a Japanese sociologist became the first IIS president ever elected from Asia.

Japan’s globalization has fostered opportunities for sociologists through studies of Japanese communities with growing contingents of foreign workers and studies of communities with Japanese administrative and managerial personnel in foreign countries. In these instances, Japanese sociologists are able to examine social, ethnic, and multicultural issues stemming from these circumstances. In this respect, Japanese sociologists are able to contribute to policy implications for community formation in the globalizing environment. Recently, too, the number of Japanese sociologists conducting cross-national and/or foreign area studies has increased (see, e.g., Japan Sociological Society 1997). In 1992, the Japan Sociological Society began publishing the International Journal of Japanese Sociology, its only English-language journal and one of the few in Japan to employ a referee system.

Although the language barrier also hinders foreign scholars from coming to Japan to study, again, this is changing, and more and more such activity has been observed recently. In 1998, there were about 340 Japanese sociologists who reported internationally comparative sociological research or foreign area studies as one of their top three research interests, although many of these were not officially collaborating with other nations’ researchers. Of these, the most popular areas of emphasis were ethnicity and nationalism; rural sociology; community studies; social history and ethnology; and sociology of the family, culture, and religion. The popular locations for study were Asia, the United States, and western Europe.

There are also less pragmatic reasons why Japanese sociology has not enjoyed a wide-ranging reputation in the rest of the world. Despite a history now spanning more than a century, Japanese sociologists have made few efforts to integrate their considerable empirical research findings with sociological theory. Japanese sociology has had a long history of importing “fashionable” theories from the West. Japanese sociologists with theoretical orientations have tended more toward social philosophy, with its emphasis on pure theory. Japanese sociological researchers, on the other hand, have tended to limit their studies to specific features of Japanese society, often without sufficient hypothesizing aimed at investigating the underlying social structures and processes thus potentially revealed. This lack of originality, this reluctance to carry through to a complete synthesis of empirical findings and structures and processes, has contributed to Japanese sociology’s limited outside appeal. The foreign influences inevitable in and attendant with globalization will no doubt encourage Japanese sociology to finally integrate empirical research results with original thought about Japanese social structures and processes, toward the construction of viable theories of Japanese society as well as society as a globalizing whole. This suggests the need for greater theoretical and methodological training—in the context of their synthesis—in Japanese graduate sociology programs.

While Japanese sociology commands a significant amount of useful empirical data, it is nonetheless disparate. The establishment of a central data archive would be imperative for secondary analysis, graduate training, and empirical study in general. As data gathering becomes increasingly expensive, the usefulness and need for such archives will become even more important.

In conclusion, in terms of the disciplines within Japanese sociology that will take on greater and greater importance, cross-national and foreign area studies will certainly become more popular. Along these same lines, time-trend studies will increase in popularity, in an effort to discover what changes and what does not change in society. Major research funding is likely to continue to center around empirical studies, both within Japan and comparatively with other nations. Finally, whereas Japanese sociologists traditionally have seldom been consulted in the industrial, business, and governmental environments, this will change as Japanese sociologists acquire greater methodological skills and theoretical knowledge, as well as empirical research experience and findings. And, from a strictly practical standpoint, growth in the number of teaching positions in sociology has not kept pace with the growth of sociology’s popularity in Japan, nor with the output of sociologists from Japanese and foreign graduate schools, forcing
many to seek teaching positions in junior high and high schools or nonacademic positions in government, research institutes, and industry. This diffusion of the discipline outside the traditional academic environment will no doubt impact Japanese society as a whole, and it could well become a two-way medium for idea exchange.

While Japanese sociology will no doubt become more pervasive and useful in Japanese society, it will nevertheless take time. The same is true outside of Japan, as Japanese sociology becomes more internationalized and demonstrates greater tangible offerings to the sociological community in the rest of the world. Certainly more and better cross-national and foreign area studies will emerge, as this is an area where Japanese sociology has already made particularly beneficial contributions. In turn, in the tradition of comparativists such as Machiavelli, Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, who sought to construct universalized theory based on comparison, Japanese sociology may finally be able to make its mark. Given the methodological expertise demonstrated by Japanese sociology, these efforts may ultimately assist Japanese sociologists in positing social theories of use to the rest of the world’s sociological community. Of course, such a vision requires that Japanese sociology strive to broaden its horizons internationally—for Japanese sociologists to recognize that they must cooperate and join with the global sociological community to achieve these objectives.

REFERENCES


Masamichi Sasaki

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND JUVENILE CRIME

The twentieth century ended amid an explosion of violence in all corners of the globe. However, juvenile violence has probably been center stage more in the United States than in any other industrialized nation. As the 1998–1999 school year ended, we had just experienced a massive display of
of violence by two young men at a high school in Littleton, Colorado. Both seniors, these two killed twelve of their fellow students and a teacher before turning their assault weapons on themselves. The decade of the 1990s ended in the way it started, with a public grown increasingly apprehensive of its youth. This increase was not limited to the United States; it has been detected in many other countries—England, Spain, France, Italy, and Germany, among others.

It is important to note here also that this anxiety and disquiet induced by youth is not limited to the modern area. Citing the code of Hammurabi, which dates back to 2270 B.C., Regoli and Hewitt (1991) note that “legal prohibitions of specific behavior by juveniles is centuries old” (p.6). Still, they note that in the Middle Ages “little distinction was made between juveniles and adults who were older than 12” (p. 6). In a comment made in 1959, but which is still relevant to those who are intrigued, frightened, or perplexed by the “heedlessness” of today’s youth, Teeters and Matza (1959) stated: “It has always been popular for each generation to believe its children were the worst” (p. 200). We are also reminded by them that “Sir Walter Scott in 1812 deplored the insecurity of Edinburgh where groups of boys between the ages of 12 and 20 years scoured streets and knocked down and robbed all who came in their way” (p. 200). Apropos of delinquency, such remarks underscore the relativity of opinions and the brevity of trends. They also remind us that while juvenile delinquency is a relatively new legal category that subjects children to court authority, it is also a timeless and ubiquitous part of life. Regoli and Hewitt (1991) suggest that postcolonial American delinquency was similar to that found in Spain in the seventeenth century and in Britain in the eighteenth century. By the mid-1800s, teenage gangs were frequently found in the larger cities in the United States. “The habits of hanging out on street corners, verbally abusing pedestrians, and even pelting citizens with rocks and snowballs were among the least threatening of their behaviors. More serious were the violent gangs of juvenile robbers” (p. 7). They also note that “the latter decades of the nineteenth century saw a number of changes in the public’s understanding of the causes of delinquency and [of] appropriate approaches to its control and treatment . . . the common law distinction between child and adult had changed for purposes of criminal prosecution” (p. 7). The change contrasted greatly with practices in the early part of the century: In America, children as young as three years of age could be brought before the court, while in England a girl of seven was hanged. In Massachusetts, in 1871, 1,354 boys and 109 girls were handled by the courts. Reform schools proliferated during the nineteenth century and were criticized for failing to prevent the apparent increase in delinquency. Reformers—called “child savers”—believed that juveniles required noninstitutional treatment that would reflect the natural family (Platt 1969). This legal and humanitarian concern for the well-being of children led to the establishment of the first juvenile court in Cook County, Illinois, in 1899. By 1925, all but two states had followed the Illinois example. Thus, it seems fair to say that the idea of “juvenile delinquency” is a relatively modern construction, a notion shared by writers such as Gibbons and Krohn (1991), Empey (1982), and Short (1990). The data on delinquency, however, are not limited to the legal status of “juvenile delinquent,” because sociologists are just as interested in unofficial as in official acts of delinquency. More specifically, it is well known that much of the behavior defined by law as delinquent is not detected, not reported, or not acted on by legal agents.

Moreover, different jurisdictions have different legal definitions of delinquency. In the United States, for example, while the statistics defining delinquency are similar in the fifty states and District of Columbia with respect to age and type of offense requiring juvenile court control, there are more differences than similarities. First, laws vary in terms of the age limits of juvenile court jurisdiction: thirty-one states and the District of Columbia set seventeen years of age as the upper age limit, twelve states set sixteen years, six set fifteen years, and one sets eighteen years. Moreover, in many states the delinquency laws empower the juvenile court to remand youths under the maximum juvenile court age to criminal courts. In such cases, the offenses are often those for which adults may be arrested: index crimes (see below). In addition, some states have passed legislation that requires certain cases, such as homicides, or youths charged with other serious offenses, to be dealt with by the criminal court. In these cases, the
juvenile acquires the legal status of criminal. Finally, it should be noted that all U.S. state jurisdictions contain an omnibus clause or provision, referred to as status offenses, that awards the court jurisdiction over youths who have behaved in ways not forbidden by criminal law. While these provisions differ from state to state, it is of interest to note a few examples of these conditions. They include engaging in indecent behavior, knowingly associating with vicious or immoral persons, growing up in idleness or crime, being incorrigible, and wandering the streets at night. Critics note that these behavior categories are so vaguely defined that nearly all youngsters could be subjected to them.

Such different procedures and practices caution us against making easy generalizations both within and between countries when examining official data. Indeed, other shortcomings likewise warn against drawing firm conclusions when unofficial data are examined. Although methodological shortcomings may exist in the study of delinquency, there may be advantages in utilizing all the data of delinquency (official and unofficial) in pursuit of its understanding. Thus, the study of official delinquency data places much of the focus on the actions of official agents of control (the police, the courts), while the study of unofficial—including hidden—delinquency often allows students to examine the processes leading to the behavior. Moreover, as Vold and Bernard (1986) and others have noted, unofficial data, especially self-reports, frequently focus on trivial offenses, while the more serious offenses often do not appear in self-reports but are limited to reports of official agencies.

In sum, our concern here will be to discuss those topics of delinquency that are of the greatest concern: the frequency, severity, and duration of delinquency. Attention will also be devoted to trends. In the following section, the focus is on the extent of delinquent behavior.

**EXTENT OF AND TRENDS IN DELINQUENCY**

In addressing the matter of the extent of delinquency, it is important to note the admonitions of Empey and Erickson (1966), Hirschi (1969), Matza (1964), and others that delinquency is not only transient but also widespread. Many juveniles engage in delinquency only occasionally, but some engage in it more frequently. Gibbons and Krohn (1991) call delinquency "a sometime thing," while Matza (1964) describes the process of drifting into and out of delinquency. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that some acts of delinquency are serious acts of criminality and others are petty, trivial acts. As we consider both official and unofficial data on juvenile delinquency and juvenile crime, we will encounter these various clarifying factors.

**Official Delinquency.** The most serious crimes committed by youths and adults in the United States are referred to as index crimes; data on them are compiled by the FBI, based on reports of law enforcement agencies throughout the country. These index crimes, reported in Uniform Crime Reports, are divided into two major types: violent (homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) and property (burglary, larceny-theft, motor-vehicle theft, and arson). Nonindex offenses are those considered to be relatively petty, such as liquor law violations, disorderly conduct, sex offenses (except forcible rape, prostitution, and commercialized vice), and drug-abuse violations.

Readers are warned that various official reports of offenses should be treated with caution since there are inconsistencies in reporting processes. While great efforts are being made by federal agencies to improve reporting mechanisms, it is well to remember that the number of reporting agencies fluctuates regularly, and the number of cases involving persons with unknown characteristics (such as age, sex, and race) also fluctuates (sometimes by as much as 30 percent). In 1987, the U.S. Department of Justice reported that there were 10,747 contributing agencies covering approximately 84 percent of the U.S. population. This number appears to be higher than the number reporting in 1996. Moreover, the news media have occasionally reported that some jurisdictions have been accused of irregular reporting habits in apparent efforts to demonstrate improved efficiency.

Index crimes are reported annually by the FBI; sometimes estimates for the United States as a whole are derived from a sample of reporting agencies. In 1996 the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) indicated that of all arrests in the United States in 1996, approximately 18.9 percent were of youths under eighteen years of age; 18.7 percent of the arrests for violent crimes in 1996...
Juvenile Crimes of Violence. In contrast to this apparent improvement, an examination of murder and non-negligent manslaughter shows a different picture. While the national murder rate in 1996 (7.4 per 100,000 inhabitants) was down 11 percent since 1987, the proportion of murder and non-negligent manslaughter offenders who were under age 18 increased from 9.7 percent in 1987 to a whopping 15.2 percent in 1996, an increase of about 50 percent. Editors of the Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics for 1997, and other analysts such as Conklin (1998), Gall and Lucas (1996), and Blumstein (1995) have commented on the increasingly serious nature of crimes by juveniles.

Conklin (1998), reviewing data presented by Fox (1995) and by Blumstein (1995), says that between 1985 and 1995 “the homicide arrest rate for people twenty-five and over declined by 20 percent, while the rate for eighteen-to-twenty-four year olds increased by 65 percent and the rate for fourteen-to-seventeen year olds rose by 165 percent” (p. 124). An increasing number of researchers fear that there will be a continued surge in violent crimes by the under-eighteen population.

This increase in youth violence in the United States has apparently been mirrored in a number of industrialized nations. In a study of juvenile violence in Great Britain, Oliver (1997) states that the number of violent juveniles increased by 34 percent between 1987 and 1993, an increase he attributes to the growth of inequality and family stress in Britain. In France, Bui-Trong (1996) has written about the recent escalation of juvenile violence, noting especially the increased severity of scale. This author, noting a decline in family morals, predicts that this problem can be expected to worsen. During the 1980s even Japan experienced an increased rate of juvenile delinquency, which some observers attributed to the stress of competition for academic success (Conklin 1998).

School violence has been most dramatic, of course, in the United States and is a focus of great national attention. Presenting data gathered by the National School Safety Center, the Boston Globe reported in 1999 that since the 1992–1993 school year there had been 248 deaths from violent acts in schools. (“U.S. Police Chiefs” 1999). Although many school shootings and other violent acts have not resulted in deaths, they have resulted in injuries and heightened fears. The 248 school deaths
between 1992 and 1999 included cases of multiple deaths in seventeen states. Many of these incidents involved the use of assault weapons. This increase in school violence has elicited a spate of explanations, including weakened parental supervisions, ostracism by schoolmates, bullying and its effects (Farrington 1993), the easy availability of guns, and the poor examples set by our leaders. The search for the causes of violence among the young will, no doubt, have to be accompanied by an examination of violence in the adult population as well. Certainly the official data on violence show that the population over age eighteen is also engaged in a substantial amount of violent behavior.

**Cohort Study.** One of the first longitudinal studies of delinquency was conducted by Wolfgang and colleagues (1972) in Philadelphia. They traced the police contacts of all boys born in 1945 who lived in the city between their tenth and eighteenth birthdays. One of their aims with this cohort of 9,945 was to trace the volume and frequency of delinquent careers up to age eighteen. They found that 35 percent of these boys (3,475) were involved with the police at least once between their tenth and eighteenth birthdays. Of these 3,475 boys with police contacts, 54 percent were repeaters. The total number of delinquent events (offenses) for the 3,475 delinquent boys amounted to 10,214 through age seventeen. It is clear that the number of offenses far outnumbers the number of offenders in the cohort. One must note, then, that longitudinal (i.e., over an extended period) studies of delinquents yield data with important differences from those obtained when cross-sectional (i.e., single point in time) studies of persons arrested are conducted. Examples of other longitudinal studies include the Provo Study, the Cambridge-Somerville Study, the Vocational High Study, and, in Britain, the National Survey of Health and Development.

**Self-Reports: Offender Reports and Victim Reports.** Official reports of crime and juvenile delinquency have been criticized for years because they are widely believed to underreport the volume of offenses. Moreover, many scholars, especially those with a conflict perspective, believed that official reports underreported middle-class crime and delinquency. In an effort to detect “hidden” delinquency, sociologists developed a technique designed to produce a more accurate picture. The technique used by Short and Nye (1958) in a number of studies of hidden delinquency consisted of having juveniles in a school or other population complete questionnaires on the extent to which they engaged in law-violating behavior. They found that delinquency was widespread throughout the juvenile population. Subsequently, Williams and Gold (1972) and Empey and Erickson (1966) embarked on studies employing self-reports. These writers found that 88 percent and 92 percent of their study groups, respectively, had engaged in violations. Hindelang and colleagues (1981) present a similar volume of law-violating behavior in their Seattle study. Criticisms of the self-report method followed many of these studies, centering on issues of respondent misrepresentation, respondent recall, and inappropriateness of study groups. A major criticism (by Nettler, 1984, for example) was that self-reports elicited admission of only minor or petty infractions for the most part. Because of its obvious utility, the self-report technique has been greatly improved in recent years, becoming an important, if not the dominant, method of measurement in studies focusing on the extent and cause of delinquency.

A number of students of delinquency agree that many of the improvements in self-report studies have been contributed by Elliott and Ageton (1980): (Bartol and Bartol 1989; Gibbons and Krohn 1991; Regoli and Hewitt 1991). Elliott and colleagues have created a panel design that employs periodic interviews instead of questionnaires. The study, called the National Youth Survey (NYS), utilized a 5-year panel design with a national probability sample of 1,726 adolescents aged eleven to seventeen and covered more than a hundred cities and towns in the United States. In contrast with earlier self-report studies, Elliott asked his respondents about a full range of activities designed to get at serious as well as minor infractions. In addition, his respondents were asked whether they were caught when engaging in delinquent and criminal activities.

Another attempt to ascertain the volume of delinquency in the United States is represented by the National Crime Survey (NCS). This survey, an effort to determine the extent of victimization in the population of the United States, was begun in 1973 after an initial study sponsored by the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice in 1967. Interviews are conducted semiannually by the Bureau of the
Census with a large national sample of 60,000 households (Bartol and Bartol 1989). The survey was intended to supplement the Uniform Crime Report data and measures the extent to which persons and households are victims of rape, robbery, assault, burglary, motor-vehicle theft, and larceny. Binder and colleagues (1988) note that one of the major findings of the 1967 study of victims by the President’s Commission was the revelation that “actual crime was several times that indicated in the UCR” (p. 34). In the current victim interviews, if the respondent has been victimized, he or she will be asked questions about both self-characteristics and characteristics of the offender. Binder and colleagues warn about the difficulties of age discrimination by a victim under stress and suggest that this method cannot be relied on too heavily in measuring delinquency.

Nevertheless, Laub (1983) has found NCS data useful in addressing the issue of the extent and change in delinquency volume. In an analysis of NCS data obtained between 1973 and 1980, he found no increase in juvenile crime over those years. He further noted that data from the National Center for Juvenile Justice supported this conclusion. It would seem, then, that the NCS data, UCR data, and juvenile court data have been fairly consistent regarding the volume of delinquency. While self-report data indicate that violations are consistently widespread in American society, it is important to note that these reports involve primarily minor violations. Indeed, to the extent that almost everyone engages in minor violations, it may make sense to focus mainly on serious violations. Nettler (1984), noting that self-report studies find a large number of minor infractions, suggests that such violators are best described as lying on a continuum rather than as being “delinquent” or “nondelinquent.” The cohort studies of Wolfgang and colleagues (1972) show that only a small proportion of the study groups were involved in serious violations.

FACTORS RELATED TO DELINQUENCY

Age and Gender. In the United States, Britain, and other European countries where delinquency is recognized and studied, there is general agreement that it peaks in adolescence (ages fifteen to eighteen) rather than in childhood. (This is not to say, however, that delinquency is not on the increase among younger children. A study by the FBI in 1990 found that the arrest rate for rape among males aged twelve years and under had more than tripled since 1970 (Parmley 1991). The UCR shows that 18.9 percent of all arrests in 1996 involved persons under eighteen years of age. This age group accounted for 31 percent of arrests for index crimes, however. Male arrests peaked at age eighteen in 1996 and female arrests at age sixteen. Earlier studies and analyses by Empey and Erickson (1966), Wolfgang (1983), and Braithwaite (1981) are consistent with this picture, with age sixteen being the peak year for juvenile misconduct.

It has consistently been found that males outnumber females in UCR arrest data. Thus in both 1988 and 1989, among those under eighteen, males were arrested four times more frequently than females. For those under eighteen in both 1988 and 1989, males outnumbered females 8-to-1 in arrests for violent offenses. In 1990, Short pointed out that the gender ratio had declined substantially. Between 1980 and 1989 violent crime increased by 4.5 percent for males under eighteen and by 16.5 for comparable females. Considering all arrests for males and females under eighteen, males showed a decline of 8.5 percent between 1980 and 1989, while females showed an increase of 1.1 percent for the same period.

Indeed, as reported in the Uniform Crime Reports, female delinquency, compared to male delinquency, has been rising steadily since the 1960s. In 1960, there was a 6-to-1 ratio of male to female juvenile arrests. The ratio has declined steadily since then and in 1987 was 3.4-to-1. In 1996 the FBI data revealed a male-female ratio of just 3-to-1.

Moreover, the ratio for violent offenses has dropped from 8-to-1 in 1989 to 5.5-to-1 in 1996, according to FBI data reported in the Sourcebook for 1997. Finally, it must be mentioned that FBI data reveal a decline of 15.3 percent in the murder and manslaughter charges for males under age 18 between 1995 and 1996 but reveal no change for females in that age group. It should also be noted, however, that for those aged thirteen to nineteen, 92 percent of murder offenders in the UCR in 1996 were males and only 8 percent were females. Also sobering is the fact that 29 percent of all
murder victims in the under-eighteen age group were females in 1996.

Perhaps Hagan’s power-control theory is relevant here. Hagan and colleagues (1987) suggest that child-rearing styles in the home (the power structure) are determined in part by the nature of the parents’ occupations. The two main types of child-rearing styles are patriarchal and egalitarian. The two types of occupations are command (managerial) and obey (subject to others’ authority). In the egalitarian family where both parents work in authority positions, the mother’s authority means she has a substantial amount of power in the home, and this leads to daughters having increased freedom relative to sons. This situation is reversed in patriarchal families, which are controlled by fathers and sons. In the egalitarian family, the adolescent daughter has an increased willingness to take risks. Hagan assumes that willingness to take risks is a fundamental requirement for delinquency. He also predicts that female delinquency will be high in mother-only homes. The absence of a father leaves a void in male power, allowing the adolescent girl more freedom, greater risk taking, and an increased tendency to deviate. The theory needs to be tested more fully.

With respect to self-reports, the reports of the NYS suggest that gender was not strongly related to involvement in delinquent acts. Although males admitted to more infractions than did females, the differences were much less pronounced than those seen in the UCR. Again, it should be emphasized that efforts are being made to enhance the ability of self-report studies to elicit information on more serious infractions.

**Race and Class.** UCRs for 1985 and 1989 present data on arrests by race in the United States. Among persons arrested and under eighteen years of age, the number of blacks increased from 23 percent in 1985 to 28 percent in 1989, but declined slightly to 27 percent in 1996; the number of whites decreased from 75 percent in 1985 to 70 percent in 1989 and remained at 70 percent in 1996. The remainder of the arrests were categorized by race as Native Americans, Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Alaskan Natives. The proportion of violent index crimes committed by blacks under age eighteen increased from 52 percent in 1985 to 53 percent in 1989 but declined to 47 percent in 1996. The comparable proportions for whites were 46 percent, 45 percent, and 50 percent. Also of interest are the figures for murder and non-negligent homicide. Here, blacks under eighteen accounted for 51 percent, 61 percent, and 57.5 percent of these crimes in 1985, 1989, and 1996, respectively; whites accounted for 48 percent, 37 percent, and 39 percent during the same three years. This slight decline in the proportion of murder and non-negligent manslaughter accounted for by blacks under eighteen is accompanied by the fact that the number of such crimes increased by 25 percent for blacks and by 18 percent for whites under eighteen during the period between 1988 and 1996. This is a decided improvement over the period between 1985 and 1989, when there was a doubling of the number of such crimes for blacks and a 30 percent increase for whites under age eighteen. Aggravated assaults also increased substantially during this period for both whites and blacks under eighteen, increasing for blacks by 25 percent and for whites by 50 percent during the eight-year period ending in 1996. Forcible rapes by blacks under age eighteen showed an improving picture, declining by 12 percent between 1988 and 1996. On the other hand, forcible rapes by whites under age eighteen increased by 15 percent during this time frame. Overall, despite short-term improvements in the murder rate for those over age 18, there is no denying the fact that serious and violent crime increased among those under age 18 between 1988 and 1996. This violence has been growing among white youth as well as black youth.

William J. Wilson (1996) and other sociologists have long suggested that social class and inequality are important concepts in the attempt to understand the increase in violence among blacks. The move of businesses to suburban locations with consequent loss of job opportunities, educational inequities, and the growth of female-headed households have combined to limit the coping resources in inner cities where most black youth reside. Wilson suggests that the resulting stresses hit lower-class blacks particularly hard and contribute to the high rates of violent crime in these areas. In addition, Bernard (1990) suggests that anger is reinforced by the social isolation that comes from being confined to communities that have high rates of crime. Policies by local departments of justice with respect to police routines, bail practices, and sentencing as these apply to
blacks have also come in for considerable comment (Teele 1970b). In 1999 news media reported that the U.S. Department of Justice was investigating allegations of racial profiling—targeting minorities for an unjustified amount of police attention—by police in New Jersey, Michigan, and Florida (“US Police Chiefs” 1999).

While there are those who say that the nation has not paid enough attention to the causes of black teenage violence, an increasing number of analysts say that we have paid a lot of, perhaps too much, attention to black violence in urban areas while ignoring the rising tides of violence by white youths in suburban and rural areas. While income inequality has seemed appropriate to an explanation of urban violence, it may appear less relevant in the analysis of violent behavior in our affluent suburban areas. This situation brings to mind Toby’s (1967) classic work on delinquency in affluent society as well as Durkheim’s (1951) discussion of rising expectations in his theory of anomie.

In Toby’s case, he was trying to account for the rise in theft crimes in a variety of countries. Although he took special note of adolescent crime in industrial countries such as Japan, Sweden, and Great Britain, he also included developing countries such as Nigeria and India in his analysis. Toby suggests that the resentment of poverty is likely to be greater among the relatively poor in an affluent society than among the poor in a poor society. He suggests, however, that envy is at work not only in the more affluent societies, such as Japan, but also in countries with rising standards of living, such as India and Nigeria. Moreover, he suggests that not only adults but also the young are subject to rising expectations. It may be that relative deprivation can account for at least some of the rise in youth violence in the United States. Toby’s work also suggests that the presence of such envy could be heightened where the inhibiting effect of schools or families or jobs is missing in either affluent or developing societies. Here Toby’s thesis greatly resembles control theory. The increase in single-parent families among blacks, persisting educational inequalities for blacks, and chronic employment problems for black youth may tend to lessen social controls and could be factors in the greater increase in violence among them.

Toby’s discussion of “resentment” seems somehow applicable to the school violence discussed earlier, but with a different twist. There seems present in these cases something besides income inequality—especially since in many of these instances the youth are from apparently affluent families, as in the Littleton, Colorado, case. While assault weapons were certainly available and parents seemed loathe to invite their sons’ privacy, there was at school, perhaps, a certain intolerable inequality that alienated the assaulters and pulled them into circles of violent schemes, feelings, and, eventually, behavior. Most of the youths—usually white—felt rejected by their peers, their teachers, their parents, or their girlfriends. In Colorado they resented the athletes and those who were generally in the “in crowd.” There apparently were feelings of jealousy toward those who did not invite them to join their group. While such feelings, involving relative deprivation, seem to be far removed from considerations of wealth, they fit the phenomenon of inequality. This form of inequality is probably anathema to children who are deprived of neither their basic needs nor considerable luxuries.

Social class has been by far the most controversial of all the factors studied in connection with juvenile delinquency. The argument seems to revolve around both method and theory. Some argue about the impact of social class, others debate the measurement of social class, and a few argue about both. Several writers have attempted to review the research on class and delinquency or crime. Tittle and colleagues (1978), noting that nearly every sociological theory of crime or delinquency had class as a key factor, reviewed thirty-five such studies. Their findings suggested that the class and crime–delinquency connection might be a “myth” because the relationship could not be confirmed empirically.

Subsequently, Braithwaite (1981) criticized Tittle’s study not only as incomplete but also as having come to the wrong conclusions. He reviewed fifty-three studies that used official data and forty-seven studies that used self-reports in the study of delinquency. Braithwaite forcefully argues that the class–crime relationship is no myth. Of the studies using official records, Braithwaite found that the vast majority (forty-four) showed lower-class juveniles to have substantially higher offense rates than middle-class juveniles. Of the forty-seven self-report studies, he concluded that eighteen found lower-class juveniles reported higher
levels of delinquent behavior, seven reported qualified support for the relationship, and twenty-two found no relationship. Braithwaite is critical of self-report studies when (1) they do not closely examine the lowest group on the social-class continuum (the lumpen proletariat) and (2) they do not include serious offenses and chronicity in their data gathering. While the argument may continue, Braithwaite and others seem to be less critical of self-report studies when they correct these apparent shortcomings.

Apparently the work of Elliott and Ageton (1980) has done much to defuse this issue. They found, for example, that the relationship between class and self-reported delinquency is totally a consequence of the difference between the lowest class group and the rest of the sample, with no difference between the working and middle classes. Writers such as Messner and Krohn (1990), Hagan and Palloni (1990), and Colvin and Pauly (1983) have apparently profited from these debates; their work shows an inclination to refine the “objective” measure of class, using insights from conflict theory as they formulate explanations of delinquency. Indeed, it is safe to say that social class is alive and well, but it is more broadly conceptualized now; many of the new theories include patterns of child rearing, job experiences, and family structure that are incorporated into the framework of a more radical neo-Marxist perspective. The effort by sociologists in the United States and in other countries to better understand juvenile delinquency appears to have entered a new and more urgent phase.

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The topic of juvenile delinquency is a fertile area for construction of sociological theory. Three major sociological traditions, including structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and conflict theory, contribute to the explanation of delinquency. Much of the work in this area seeks to explain why officially recorded delinquency is concentrated in the lower class, or in what is today more often called the underclass. This entry considers the most prominent theories of delinquency under the theoretical rubrics noted above.

**STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM AND DELINQUENCY**

Structural-functional theories regard delinquent behavior as the consequence of strains or breakdowns in the social processes that produce conformity. These theories focus on institutions, such as the family and school, that socialize individuals to conform their behavior to values of the surrounding society and on the ways in which these institutions can fail in this task. Wide agreement or consensus is assumed about which behaviors are valued and disvalued in society. The question structural-functional theories try to answer is: Why do many individuals during their adolescence behave in ways that challenge this consensus? That is, why do many adolescents violate behavioral norms that nearly all of us are assumed to hold in common?

**Anomie Theory.** The roots of functional theory are found in Durkheim’s notion of *anomie* ([1897](#)) and ([1951](#)). To Durkheim, this term meant an absence of social regulation, or normlessness. Merton ([1938](#)) ([1957](#)) revived the concept to describe the consequences of a faulty relationship between goals and the legitimate means of attaining them. Merton
emphasized two features of social and cultural structure: culturally defined goals (such as monetary success) and the acceptable means (such as education) to their achievement. Merton argued that in our society success goals are widely shared, while the means of or opportunities for attaining them are not.

Merton’s theory is used to explain not only why individual adolescents become delinquents but also why some classes are characterized by more delinquency than others. Since members of the lower- or underclass are assumed to be most affected by the disparity between the goals and the means of attaining success, this class is expected to have a higher rate of delinquent behavior. Merton outlined a number of ways individuals adapt when faced with inadequate means of attaining their goals. Among these, innovation revolves substituting illegitimate for legitimate means to goal attainment; it is the resort to this adaptation that is thought to account for much theft among adolescents from the underclass.

Subcultural Theory. Group-based adaptations to the failure to attain success goals involve the delinquent subculture. Cohen (1955) suggests that children of the underclass, and potential members of a delinquent subculture, first experience a failure to achieve when they enter school. When assessed against a “middle-class measuring rod,” these children are often found lacking. A result is a growing sense of “status frustration.” Underclass children are simply not prepared by their earliest experiences to satisfy middle-class expectations. The delinquent subculture therefore emerges as an alternative set of criteria or values that underclass adolescents can meet.

Cohen argues that these subcultural values represent a complete repudiation of middle-class standards: the delinquent subculture expresses contempt for a middle-class lifestyle by making its opposite a criterion of prestige. The result, according to Cohen, is a delinquent subculture that is “nonutilitarian, malicious, and negativistic”—an inversion, of middle-class values. Yet this is only one possible type of subcultural reaction to the frustration of failure. As we see next, many subcultural responses are elaborated in the theoretical tradition of structural functionalism.

Differential Opportunity Theory. Cloward and Ohlin (1960) argue that to understand the different forms that delinquent and ultimately criminal behavior can take, we must consider the different types of illegitimate opportunities available to those who seek a way out of the underclass and where these opportunities lead. Different types of community settings produce different subcultural responses. Cloward and Ohlin suggest that three types of responses predominate, each one leading to its own respective subculture: a stable criminal subculture, a conflict subculture, and a retreatist subculture.

The stable criminal subculture offers, as its name suggests, the most promising (albeit still illegitimate) prospects for upward economic mobility. According to Cloward and Ohlin, this subculture can emerge only when there is some coordination between those in legitimate and in illegitimate roles—for example, between politicians or police and the underworld. One pictures the old-style political machine, with protection provided for preferred types of illegal enterprise. Only in such circumstances can stable patterns be established, allowing opportunities for advancement from adolescent to adult levels of the criminal underworld. When legitimate and illegitimate opportunity structures are linked in this way, the streets become safe for crime, and reliable upward-mobility routes can emerge for aspiring criminals.

Violence and conflict, on the other hand, disrupt both legitimate and illegitimate enterprise. When both types of enterprises coexist, violence is restrained. However, in the “disorganized slum,” where these spheres of activity are not linked, violence can reign uncontrolled. Cloward and Ohlin see these types of communities as producing a conflict subculture. A result of this disorganization is the prevalence of adolescent street gangs and their violent activities, making the streets unsafe for more profitable crime.

The retreatist subculture includes adolescents who fail in their efforts in both the legitimate and illegitimate opportunity structures. These “double failures” are destined for drug abuse and other forms of escape.

Cloward and Ohlin’s theory played a role in encouraging the Kennedy and Johnson administrations of the 1960s to organize the American War on Poverty, which attempted to open up legitimate opportunities for youth and minorities in the underclass (see Moynihan 1969). However,
another important variant of structural-functional theory argued that the most important cause of delinquency was not a strain between goals and means but rather a relative absence of goals, values, commitments, and other sources of social control.

**Social Disorganization Theory.** The earliest North American efforts to explain crime and delinquency in terms of social control focused on the absence of social bonds at the community level. Entire neighborhoods were seen as being socially disorganized, as lacking the cohesion and constraint that could prevent crime and delinquency. This work began in the late 1920s, when Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1931, 1942) sought to identify areas of Chicago that were experiencing social disorganization. They explored the process that characterized these communities. What they found were indications of what they assumed to be social disorganization—truancy, tuberculosis, infant mortality, mental disorder, economic dependency, adult crime, and juvenile delinquency. In Chicago, the rates of these conditions were highest in the slums near the city center; they diminished in areas farther away from the center. Since these problems were assumed to be contrary to the shared values of area inhabitants, they were taken as indications that these areas were unable to realize the goals of their residents. In other words, they were taken as indicators of social disorganization.

Shaw and McKay also attempted to determine the sorts of community characteristics that were correlated with delinquency so that they could infer from these characteristics what the central components of social disorganization were and how they caused delinquency. Three types of correlates were identified: the economic status of the community, the mobility of community residents, and community heterogeneity. The implication was that poverty, high residential mobility, and ethnic heterogeneity led to a weakening of social bonds or controls and, in turn, to high rates of delinquency. All of this was being said of the neighborhoods Shaw and McKay studied; it was left to later theories to spell out the meaning of weakened neighborhood bonds or controls for individuals.

**Control Theory.** At the level of individuals, to have neither goals nor means is to be uncommitted and thus uncontrolled. Hirschi (1969) argued that the absence of control is all that really is required to explain much delinquent behavior. There are other types of controls (besides commitment to conformity) that may also operate: involvement in school and other activities; attachments to friends, school, and family; and belief in various types of values and principles. Hirschi argues that delinquent behavior is inversely related to the presence of these controls. Alternatively, as these controls accumulate, so too does conformity. According to control theory, the more committed, attached, involved, and believing individuals are, the greater is their bond to society. Again, Hirschi’s point is that no special strain between goals and means is necessarily required to produce delinquent behavior; all that is required is the elimination of the constraining elements of the social bond.

In each of the theories that we have considered thus far, values or beliefs play some role in causing delinquency. It is argued that the presence of success goals or values without the means to obtain them can produce deviant behavior, as can the absence of these goals or values in the first place. It is an emphasis on these values, and the role of the school and family in transmitting them, that ties the structural-functional theories together.

**SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM AND DELINQUENCY**

Symbolic-interactionist theories of delinquency are concerned less with values than with the way in which social meanings and definitions can help produce delinquent behavior. The assumption, of course, is that these meanings and definitions, these symbolic variations, affect behavior. Early versions of symbolic-interactionist theories focused on how adolescents acquired these meanings and definitions from others, especially peers; more recently, theorists have focused on the role of official control agencies, especially the police and courts, in imposing these meanings and definitions on adolescents. The significance of this difference in focus will become apparent as we consider the development of the symbolic-interactionist tradition.

**Differential Association Theory.** Edwin Sutherland (1939, 1949) anticipated an emphasis of the symbolic-interactionist perspective with his early use of the concept of *differential association*. This concept referred not only to associations among
people but also, and perhaps even more important, to associations among ideas. Sutherland’s purpose was to develop a general theory that explained delinquency as well as adult criminality. He argued that people violate laws only when they define such behavior as acceptable and that there is an explicit connection between people and their ideas (that is, definitions). So, for example, delinquent behavior is “learned in association with those who define such behavior favorably and in isolation from those who define it unfavorably,” and this behavior occurs when “the weight of the favorable definitions exceeds the weight of the unfavorable definitions.”

Although Sutherland intended his theory to be general and explicitly to include the explanation of delinquency, his best-known applications of the theory were in his famous studies of professional theft and white-collar crime. Nonetheless, Sutherland’s emphasis on white-collar illegality was important for the study of delinquency because it stressed the ubiquity of criminality, and, as we see next, it helped to mitigate delinquency theory’s preoccupation with underclass delinquency.

Neutralization Theory. While most of the theories we have considered to this point portray the delinquent, especially the underclass delinquent, as markedly different from “the rest of us,” Sykes and Matza (1957, 1961) follow Sutherland’s lead in suggesting that the similarities actually outnumber the differences. Their argument is based in part on the observation that underclass delinquents, like white-collar criminals, usually exhibit guilt or shame when detected violating the law.

Sutherland had argued that individuals become white-collar criminals because they are immersed with their colleagues in a business ideology that defines illegal business practices as acceptable. Sykes and Matza (1957) argue that the delinquent, much like the white-collar criminal, drifts into a deviant lifestyle through a subtle process of justification. “We call these justifications of deviant behavior techniques of neutralization,” they write, “and we believe these techniques make up a crucial component of Sutherland’s definitions favorable to the violation of law” (p. 667).

Sykes and Matza list four of these neutralization techniques: denial of responsibility (e.g., blaming a bad upbringing), denial of injury (e.g., claiming that the victim deserved it), condemnation of the condemners (e.g., calling their condemnation discriminatory), and an appeal to higher loyalties (e.g., citing loyalty to friends or family as the cause of the behavior). Sykes and Matza’s point is that delinquency in the underclass, as elsewhere, is facilitated by this kind of thinking. A question lingered, however: Why are these delinquencies of the underclass more frequently made the subjects of official condemnation?

Labeling Theory. Franklin Tannenbaum (1938) anticipated a theoretical answer to this question. He pointed out that some aspects of juvenile delinquency—the play, adventure, and excitement—are a normal part of teenage street life and that, later in their lives, many nostalgically identify these activities as an important part of their adolescence. But others see such activities as a nuisance or as threatening, so they summon the police.

Tannenbaum’s concern is that police intervention begins a process of change in the way the individuals and their activities are perceived. He suggests that there is a gradual shift from defining specific acts as evil to defining the individual as evil. Tannenbaum sees the individual’s first contact with the law as the most consequential, referring to this event as a “dramatization of evil” that separates the child from his or her peers for specialized treatment. Tannenbaum goes on to argue that this dramatization may play a greater role in creating the criminal than any other experience. The problem is that individuals thus singled out may begin to think of themselves as the type of people who do such things—that is, as delinquents. From this viewpoint, efforts to reform or deter delinquent behavior create more problems than they solve. “The way out,” Tannenbaum argues, “is through a refusal to dramatize the evil.” He implies that the less said or done about delinquency the better.

Sociologists have expanded Tannenbaum’s perspective into what is often called a labeling, or societal reactions, theory of delinquency and other kinds of deviance. For example, Lemert (1967) suggests the terms primary deviance and secondary deviance to distinguish between acts that occur before and after the societal response. Acts of primary deviance are those that precede a social or legal response. They may be incidental or even random aspects of an individual’s general behavior. The important point is that these initial acts
have little impact on the individual’s self-concept. Acts of secondary deviance, on the other hand, follow the societal response and involve a transformation of the individual’s self-concept, “altering the psychic structure, producing specialized organization of social roles and self-regarding attitudes.” From this point on, the individual takes on more and more of the “deviant” aspects of his or her new role (Becker 1963, 1964). The societal response has, from this viewpoint, succeeded only in confirming the individual in a deviant role; for example, by potentially making adolescent delinquents into adult criminals through the punitive reactions of the police, courts, and others.

In the end, symbolic interactionists do not insist that all or even most delinquent behavior is caused by officially imposed labels. Being labeled delinquent is thought, rather, to create special problems for the adolescents involved, often increasing the likelihood that this and related kinds of delinquent behavior will be repeated. The point is that not only the actor but also reactors participate in creating the meanings and definitions that generate delinquency. The symbolic interactionists note that poor are more likely than the rich to get caught up in this process. This point is further emphasized in conflict theories.

CONFLICT THEORY AND DELINQUENCY

The most distinctive features of conflict theories include attention to the role of power relations and economic contradictions in generating delinquency and reactions to it. For example, conflict theories have focused on the role of dominant societal groups in imposing legal labels on members of subordinate societal groups (Turk 1969). The fact that subcultural groups typically are also subordinate groups ties this work to earlier theoretical traditions discussed above.

An Early Group-Conflict Theory. George Vold (1958) was the first North American sociologist to write explicitly about a group-conflict theory of delinquency. He began with the assumption that criminality involves both human behavior (acts) and the judgments or definitions (laws, customs, or mores) of others as to whether specific behaviors are appropriate and acceptable or inappropriate and disreputable. Of the two components, Vold regarded judgments and definitions as more significant. His salient interest was in how groups impose their value judgments by defining the behaviors of others as illegal.

Vold regarded delinquency as a “minority group” behavior. For example, he argues that “the juvenile gang . . . is nearly always a ‘minority group’, out of sympathy with and in more or less direct opposition to the rules and regulations of the dominant majority, that is, the established world of adult values and powers” (p. 211). In this struggle, the police are seen as representing and defending the values of the adult world, while the gang seeks the symbolic and material advantages not permitted it under the adult code. At root, Vold argues, the problem is one of intergenerational value conflict, with adults prevailing through their control of the legal process.

A Theory of Legal Bureaucracy. According to this viewpoint, determining which groups in society will experience more delinquency than others may be largely a matter of deciding which laws will be enforced. Chambliss and Seidman (1971) observe that in modern, complex, stratified societies such as our own, we assign the task of resolving such issues to bureaucratically structured agencies such as the police. The result is to mobilize what might be called the primary principle of legal bureaucracy. According to this principle, laws will be enforced when enforcement serves the interests of social control agencies and their officials; and laws will not be enforced when enforcement is likely to cause organizational strain. In other words, the primary principle of legal bureaucracy involves maximizing organizational gains while minimizing organizational strains.

Chambliss and Seidman conclude that a consequence of this principle is to bring into operation a “rule of law,” whereby “discretion at every level . . . will be so exercised as to bring mainly those who are politically powerless (e.g., the poor) into the purview of the law” (p. 268). Theoretical work of this kind coincided with important research on the policing of juveniles (e.g., Reiss 1971). According to the conflict theorists, poor minority youth appear disproportionately in our delinquency statistics more because of class bias and police and court prejudice than because of actual behavioral differences.

Recent Structural Theories. Some recent theories of delinquency have combined conflict theory’s structural focus on power relations with
etiological questions about sources of delinquent behavior as well as reactions to it. Thus Spitzer (1975) begins the formulation of a Marxian theory of delinquency (and deviance more generally) with the observation, “We must not only ask why specific members of the underclass are selected for official processing, but also why they behave as they do” (p. 640).

One effort to answer behavioral questions with insights from conflict theory is an “integrated structural-Marxist theory” proposed by Colvin and Pauly (1983). This theory integrates elements of control theory and Marxian theory. The theory is comprehensive, and only some of its most striking features can be outlined here. These features include a Marxian focus on working-class parents’ experiences of coerciveness in the workplace, which Colvin and Pauly suggest lead to coerciveness in parenting, including parental violence toward children. In turn, Colvin and Pauly argue that such children are more likely to be placed in coercive control structures at school and to enter into alliances with alienated peers. All of these experiences make delinquent behavior more likely, including the violent and instrumental kinds of delinquent behavior that may be precursors of adult criminality.

Power-control theory is another recent structural formulation (Hagan 1989) that attempts to explain large and persistent gender differences in delinquency by taking power relations into account. Power relations in the family are the starting point of this theory. The cornerstone of the theory is the observation that, especially in more patriarchal families, mothers more than fathers are involved in controlling daughters more than sons. A result of this intensified mother–daughter relationship is that daughters become less inclined to take what they perceive as greater risks of involvement in delinquency. Police and other processing agencies act on stereotypes that extend these gender differences in officially recorded delinquency. Power-control theory generally predicts that in more patriarchal families, sons will be subjected to less maternal control, develop stronger preferences for risk taking, be more delinquent, and more often be officially labeled for being so. More recently, this theory has been elaborated to emphasize that in less patriarchal families mothers may become more involved in the control of their sons and this can reduce their sons’ involvement in risk taking and delinquency (McCarthy and Hagan 1999).

These structural approaches illustrate an ongoing trend toward theoretical integration in this tradition and elsewhere in the study of delinquency (e.g., Hagan and McCarthy 1997; Messner et al. 1989; Sampson and Wilson 1995; Tittle 1995). These integrations involve theories that are often thought to be in opposition if not opposition to one another. Yet the trend toward integration in delinquency theory has been apparent for more than a decade, and it seems likely to continue.

TROUBLESOME QUESTIONS

Despite the richness of sociological theories of delinquency and the emerging sense of convergence among previously competing theoretical traditions, there is a new awareness that delinquency theories remain incomplete in their capacity to explain and sometimes even address basic micro- and macro-level questions. For example, a classic issue that persists despite its recognition is the question of why most delinquents discontinue their delinquency before or during their transition to adulthood. We know that most delinquents “age out” of delinquency, but we have not adequately explained why this happens (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1983). Our theories are much more attentive to why young people become delinquent than to why they stop being so.

A seemingly related but only more recently apparent question involves the decline since the early 1990s in the violent forms of delinquency, such as robbery and homicide, that we are best able to measure and monitor statistically over time. This trend is strikingly apparent as we head toward the millennium (see, e.g., Blumstein and Rosenfeld 1998). None of the prominent sociological theories of delinquency predicted or can easily account for this decline in violent delinquency. Again, our theories have focused more on increases in delinquency than on its decline. Sociological theories of delinquency confront new as well as continuing questions in the new century.

(SEE ALSO: Crime, Theories of; Criminology; Juvenile Delinquency and Juvenile Crime)
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JOHN HAGAN
KINSHIP SYSTEMS AND FAMILY TYPES

Kinship systems are mechanisms that link conjugal families (and individuals not living in families) in ways that affect the integration of the general social structure and enhance the ability of the society to reproduce itself in an orderly fashion. Kinship performs these social functions in two ways. First, through relationships defined by blood ties and marriage, kinship systems make possible ready-made contemporaneous networks of social ties sustained during the lifetimes of related persons and, second, they enable the temporal continuity of identifiable family connections over generations, despite the limited lifespan of a family’s members. Variations in norms governing the structure of contemporaneous networks and the modes of temporal continuity compose the basis for the typologies of kinship systems described in this article.

In conceptualizing connections between kinship systems and family types, social scientists have applied either of two approaches. Some have developed typologies from historical analyses (and evolutionary schemes) that depict the transition of Western societies from ancient or medieval origins to modern civilizations. Other social scientists construct typologies that cut across diverse historical periods. Each historical era then constitutes a unique medium in which the structural typologies are expressed.

MODERNITY, FAMILY PATTERNS, AND KINSHIP SYSTEMS

There are at least three ways to develop historical typologies related to kinship and family. One way is to hypothesize a linear historical progression, which includes a family type existing at the beginning point in time, a particular historical process that will act upon the family and kinship structures (e.g., urbanization or industrialization), and a logical outcome at the end of the process. A second approach builds upon the above approach by positing a transitional family type that emerges during the historical process and gives way in the final stages of the process to another family type. A third approach, which includes devising a family type based upon a configuration of attributes peculiar to a particular historical era (e.g., the Victorian family, the American colonial family), implies that any historical era represents a unique convergence of diverse factors.

Bipolar Typologies. By and large, sociologists have drawn a connection between kinship and family on the basis of a distinction between traditionalism and modernity. Generally, this distinction draws upon Henry Maine’s ([1861] 1963) depiction of the transformation of social relations in early societies. Maine argued that social relations changed from those based on ascriptive status (deriving from birth) to relations created and sustained through voluntary contractual arrangements. Maine’s theory has evoked a series of typologies that, in large measure, refine the status–contract distinction. For instance, an ideal type
KINSHIP SYSTEMS AND FAMILY TYPES

developed by Ferdinand Toennies ([1887] 1957) has provided a backdrop for later typologies. The Toennies typology itself refers to a shift from Gemeinschaft (community) as a form of social organization based upon an existential will (Wessenwille), which is suited to feudalism and peasant society, to Gesellschaft (society) as a social form based upon rational will (Kurwille), which fits an urban environment under modern capitalism. Contemporary family typologies, in building upon Toennies’s conceptual scheme, portray a weakening of kinship obligations and constraints.

One position, rooted in George P. Murdock’s (1949) analysis of cross-cultural archives, has resulted in the main sequence theory of social change in kinship structure (Naroll 1970). Main sequence theory pertains to the way differential gender contributions to production of material resources affects the use of kindred as human resources/property. This theory holds that basic changes in kinship are initiated by a shift in the relative importance of men and women to the economic life of the society. First, there is a modification in the economic division of labor by gender. (For example, in hoe cultures, women tend to do the farming; when plows are introduced, men become the farmers.) Second, the shift in sexual division of labor generates a change in married couples’ choices of residence, the major alternatives being near the husband’s relatives (patrilocal), the wife’s (matrilocal), or anywhere the couple desires (neolocal). (Plow cultures tend toward patrilocal residence.) Third, the change in choice of residential site affects the line of descent and inheritance favored in the kinship system: the husband’s side (patrilineal), the wife’s (matrilineal), or both sides (bilateral). (In line with the shift in residence, plow cultures show a greater inclination toward patrilinearity than do hoe cultures.) Fourth, the transfer to lineage affiliation generates a change in kinship terminology, particularly in ways that show tribal or clan membership, or, in modern societies, the dissolution of larger kinship structures. As applied to the emergence of modernity, main sequence theory predicts a continual emancipation from kinship constraints. An increase in the proportion of women in the labor force will produce a trend toward neolocal residence, which in turn will lead to increased emphasis upon bilaterality, weakening sibling ties and obligations to both sides of the extended family, and in the long run to changes in kin terminology and identity [e.g., voluntarism in choice of surnames as an indicator of preference as to line(s) of descent].

In a variation of main sequence theory, urban sociologists such as Wirth (1956) and Burgess and associates (1963) wrote on the effects of transferring the economic base of societies from the land to urban centers. The theme of their work is to be found in the German proverb “Stadt Luft macht frei” (“city air makes one free”). For example, Burgess and associates described a progression from what they named the institutional family to the companionship family. In this conceptualization, the institutional family, embedded in a larger kinship group, is characterized by patriarchy, clearly defined division of household labor by sex, and high fertility. Its unity is derived mainly from external constraints—social mores, religious authority, fixity in location, position in the social structure, and the value of familism (i.e., values giving priority to the collective welfare of the family over that of individual members). Burgess and associates regarded the institutional family as an adaptation to relatively immobile, rural, agricultural societies and believed its way of life was fixed over time. By way of contrast, urban society, which is characterized by mobility, anonymity, and change, makes inoperative the social control mechanisms developed to maintain stable, rural societies. With the withering of these external controls on rural family life, Burgess, Locke, and Thomes proposed that the companionship family is bound together by internal forces—mutual affection, egalitarianism, a sense of belonging, common interests—and affords freedom from the demands of traditional family and kinship ties.

Unlike the urban sociologists, structural functionalists such as Talcott Parsons (1954) place considerable emphasis on the interaction of sub-systems in the larger social system. In part, structural functionalists are concerned with economic and kinship factors in structuring nuclear family relationships. Parsons described American kinship as “a ‘conjugal’ system in that it is made up exclusively of interlocking conjugal families” (1954, p. 180) and is multilinetal (i.e., bilateral) in descent. Parsons associates kinship solidarity with unilineal descent, that is, with a “structural bias in favor of
solidarity with the ascendant and descendant families in any one line of descent” (1954, p. 184). The absence of such bias in the American descent system, Parsons suggests, is in large measure responsible for “the structural isolation of the individual conjugal family” (i.e., its autonomy).

The importance Parsons attributes to unilinearity as a factor in facilitating strong dependence upon kin ties is exemplified by his highlighting two exceptions to the structural isolation of the conjugal family in America—the upper-class elements, whose status depends on the continuity of their patrilineages’ solidarity, and the lower-class elements, in which there is “a strong tendency to instability of marriage and a ‘mother-centered’ type of family structure” (Parsons 1954, p. 185). However, Parsons regards the urban middle class as characterizing “the focal American type of kinship.” Since in the middle class the residence of the conjugal family typically is neolocal, and the conjugal family is economically independent of “the family of orientation of either spouse,” the role of the conjugal family in U.S. society can be, for theoretical purposes, understood as master of its own destiny, rid of the impediments of extended-family ties.

In reaction to those sociologists who see modernity as inimical to bonds of kinship, other social scientists (e.g., Adams 1968; Firth et al. 1969; Litwak 1985; Mogey 1976; Shanas et al. 1968; Sussman 1959) turn their attention to the attenuated functions of kinship in contemporary society. Just as Goode (1963) notes a “fit” between the needs of modern capitalist society for a socially and geographically highly mobile population and the flexibility of the isolated conjugal family system, the revisionists indicate a similar fit between the existence of a highly mobile population and the presence of kin who give emergency aid and social support to relatives. The revisionists shift our attention away from constraints imposed by kinship loyalties and obligations and direct it instead to sources of services, goods, and emotional support that cannot readily be supplied by bureaucracies, markets, or other agencies. In his typology, Litwak (1960a, 1960b) distinguishes the isolated nuclear family (without kiship resources) from the traditional extended family (implying a hierarchy of authority), on the one hand, and from the modified extended family (which consists of a network of related but autonomous nuclear families), on the other. Although the revisionists have not destroyed the foundation of the bipolar family typologies, they do focus on a previously neglected area of analysis.

Three-Stage Typologies. Some modernization typologies introduce a third, transitional stage between traditional and modern kinship and family structures. These typologies accept the position that initially there is an emancipation from traditional kinship constraints and obligations, but they also propose that at some point new values of modernity emerge to fill the vacuum left by the dissipation of the old kinship constraints. For example, building on the work of LePlay, Zimmerman and Frampton (1966) offer a scheme of transformation in which families change from a patriarchal form to a stem-family structure and thence to an unstable family type. Zimmerman and Frampton begin with the premise that each social organization derives its “essential character” from a triad of “imperishable institutions”—family, religion, and property. However, in their view, “familism is necessary in all complete social organization to a degree more imperative than the need for property” (1966, p. 14; 1947). Zimmerman and Frampton regard the patriarchal family as the most familistic form. The patriarchal type is rooted in idealistic religious values and is characterized by a common household of a patriarch and his married sons and their families, wherein the property is held in the name of the “house,” with the father as trustee. They identify the patriarchal form as having been prevalent among agriculturists in the Orient, in rural Russia, and among Slavonic peasants.

With urbanization and industrialization, however, the unstable family becomes predominant. Zimmerman and Frampton associate the unstable family with materialism and individualism and the resulting atomization of social life. Individuals are “freed from all obligations toward their parents and relatives” (1966, p. 15), and the identity of each conjugal family as a social unit ends with the death of the parents and the dispersal of the children.

The stem family represents a transitional state between the patriarchal and unstable forms. The stem family extends branches into urban centers
while retaining its roots in the ancestral lands. As a result, the stem family provides a balance between the security of the traditional influences and resources of the “house” and the freedom and resources of the cities. (However, historical researchers yield less idyllic descriptions of the stem family than the Zimmerman and Frampton portrait. See Berkner 1972.)

A less romantic depiction of a transitional family type is drawn by Lawrence Stone (1975) in his typology of the English family’s movement from feudalism to modernity. Stone posits the existence of a dual historical process. He places the decline of the importance of kin ties in the context of the emergence of a powerful, centralized state, and he then regards the rise of the modern family as an ideological emergence accompanying the development of capitalism.

According to Stone’s typology, feudal England emphasized (1) kin-group responsibility for crimes and reasonable acts of members and (2) the institution of cousinship with its broad obligations. As political and economic power moved away from the traditional, landed elite to the state and the entrepreneurial class, the common law of the courts no longer recognized criminal and civil deviance as a kin-group responsibility, and cousinship lost its effectiveness. To fill the vacuum left by the decline of kinship as a factor in one’s destiny, the relatively denuded conjugal family had to take over the task of guiding the destiny for its members. Consequently, by the sixteenth century, as an intermediate step toward the modern family, there was a trend toward authoritarianism in husband-wife interaction, and governance in the conjugal family took the form of patriarchy.

Stone (1975, p. 15) suggests that it was not until the eighteenth century that the spread of individualism and utilitarianism gave rise to a more companionate and egalitarian family structure. This last family form has been designated by Alan Macfarlane (1986) as the Malthusian marriage system, in which (1) marriage is seen as ultimately the bride’s and groom’s concern rather than that of the kin group; (2) marital interaction is supposed to be primarily companionate; and (3) love is supposed to be a precursor of marriage. Functionally, the Malthusian system yields relatively fewer children—by choice—than earlier family forms.

The Problem of Connecting Kinship and Family in Modernity Typologies. Revisionists of the isolated conjugal family position have presented considerable evidence of residual elements of kinship ties in contemporary society. However, they do not adequately explain the connections between types of kinship systems and variation in performance of family functions in different parts of the social structure. Their main concern is with changes in kinship and family, changes that are consistent with the general loosening of tradition

The Problem of Structure in Modernity Typologies. Typologies depicting historical transformations in family and kinship place much emphasis on the “fit” between the needs of modern industrial society and the presence of the conjugal family type (Litwak 1960a, 1960b; Parsons 1954). Despite this conjecture, Parsons (1954, p. 184) suggests that in Western society an “essentially open system” of kinship, with its “primary stress upon the conjugal family” and its lack of larger kin structures, has existed for centuries, long before the modern period. Like Macfarlane (1986), Parsons dates its establishment in late medieval times “when the kinship terminology of the European languages took shape.” Moreover, Goode’s (1963) analysis of family trends in eleven societies indicates that acceptance of modern, conjugal family ideology may precede economic and industrial development rather than come as a subsequent adaptation. Such findings cast doubt on the validity of the dichotomy between traditional societies and modernity as providing a theoretical basis for the typologies discussed above.

Parsons argues that (1) there is an incompatibility between corporate kinship and multilinear systems, and (2) in large measure, this incompatibility accounts for the prevalence of highly adaptable, structurally independent conjugal households in modern societies. However, findings by Davenport (1959), Mitchell (1963), Pehrson (1957), Peranio (1961), and others that corporate structures of kinship (such as clans) do exist in some multilinear kinship systems undercut Parsons’s argument that such structures are to be found only in unilinear systems. Nevertheless, if multilateral kinship systems can accommodate corporate structures, then they can also include other kinship elements that sustain loyalties to descent groups and facilitate segmentation of the society.
in modern society. But their focus on emancipation from tradition diverts their attention from (1) the influence of emerging ethnic, religious, or class interests upon patterns of integration of family networks in the larger social structure and (2) the temporal dimensions of kinship, which go beyond living kin to departed ancestors and generations yet to come.

Additionally, given the fact that the family–kinship typologies described above have their roots in the distinction between tradition and modernity, they overlook those nonindustrial, primarily nonurban societies in which families approach the companionship model as well as those ethnic and religious segments of industrial, primarily urban societies where strong familial tendencies persist. Except for Stone (1975) and Zimmerman and Frampton (1966), these typologies are based on the concept of emancipation from tradition, and they do not deal explicitly with the emergence of new family values (other than flexibility and freedom). Most of all, their emphasis on emancipation from the constraints of tradition precludes their explaining why cohesive forces of family and kinship may remain strong (or increase in strength) in the face of an economic and social environment that is hostile to stable family life. (Exceptions are Sennett 1970 and Harris and Rosser 1983.)

Critical Commentary on Historical Typologies. Family typologies describing historical trends from one period of history to another are vulnerable to criticism of their teleological assumptions. Criticisms often involve (1) the definition of polar concepts and (2) the problem of inevitability.

(1) Definition of polar concepts. The definition of polar concepts depends upon the value commitments of the analyst. For example, those analysts who view trends in kinship and family as movement toward liberation from traditional constraints and from obstacles to personal independence define the original state as confining and generally unjust and the future state as enabling emancipation from these obsolete social structures.

Family-theorist Ernest Burgess and associates (1963) view the evolution of family structure as going “from institution to companionship”—from external community constraints upon family relations to voluntaristic unity that derives from affection, domestic peace, and common goals. Similarly, Marxists define the transition as being away from family structures required to sustain an economic system based on unearned rewards of the dominant class and suppression of the laboring class. Their claim is that following the rise of future true communism, the dissolution of economic classes would liberate family life from the constraints and suffering imposed by economic position; for Frederick Engels ([1885] 1942), under true communism, family life would be liberated from economic demands, and, founded on personal bonds, families would endure only as long as these bonds lasted.

By way of contrast, analysts favoring traditional values define the trend in family life as a steady decay of family structure. Pitirim Sorokin (1937, vol. 4, p. 776), upon whose work Zimmerman and Frampton base their typology, notes that “the family as a sacred union of husband and wife, of parents and children, will continue to disintegrate . . . . [T]he home will become a mere overnight parking place mainly for sex-relationship.” From another perspective, the behaviorist John Watson (1927) predicted that “in fifty years [1977], unless there is some change, the tribal custom of marriage will no longer exist. Family standards have broken down . . . The mystery and beauty of marriage and the rearing of children has pretty well broken down.” In the Aldous Huxley’s science fiction novel Brave New World (1955), all functions now performed by families would be community undertakings, and the word “mother” would be regarded as obscene.

The distinction between typologies focusing on personal liberation and those portraying decay highlights the fact that each approach deals with partial realities. Liberation typologies tend to slight disruptive activities of emerging family structure (e.g., spouse abuse, child abuse, splitting into factions, isolation from resources of kin and family). Instead, they tend to associate these activities with traditional family structures. In the Soviet Union, family problems were generally attributed to survivals of the traditional pre-Revolution family forms. Decay typologies do the opposite. They tend to underestimate unifying elements and personal satisfactions associated with the emerging family types and to overestimate the chaos associated with these types.

(2) Problem of inevitability. Some typologies posit a straight-line progression from a beginning