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Sociology for Beginners

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Abstract

This article examines the teaching of the introductory course in sociology. The first section sets the context of the teaching of introductory sociology in American higher education. The second turns to an examination of the written materials of introductory sociology: the textbooks used in the vast majority of these courses. Their widespread use provides a window into how introductory sociology has evolved over time. These texts also provide a view of what certain stakeholders—publishers and a select group of authors—have taken as central for beginners to master. The third section considers the scholarship on teaching and learning (SOTL) literature in sociology, which has produced research on current pedagogical practices and on strategies, techniques, ideas, and solutions to problems that contemporary introductory instructors face. A short conclusion offers a reflection on the implications of these issues for the future of teaching in the discipline.

INTRODUCTION

The problem is well-known and long-standing: Sociology, like all academic fields, must continually recruit new students to survive. Yet outsiders and potential students are perpetually confused as to what exactly "it" is. In 1909, the American Sociological Society, the precursor to the modern American Sociological Association (ASA), formed a committee to create a standardized curriculum for the small but growing number of introductory sociology courses then being taught. The members of the committee, which included William Graham Sumner, Albion Small, and Charles Horton Cooley, could not agree, and the idea was dropped (Howard 2010, p. 83). The problem persists. As Abbott (2001) put it more recently, "sociology. . .is the most general of the social sciences, or, to put it less politely, the least defined," and "no form of knowledge (about society) is alien to it" (pp. 3, 6). James House (2019, p. 21) recently asserted that "it is increasingly difficult to achieve even a Quaker consensus as to what sociology is." Sociologists often cannot agree on the definition of core concepts like that are nevertheless widely used in the field (see also Lizardo 2021, Abend 2023). Perhaps putting his finger on the problem directly, Arthur Stinchcombe once joked that while other social sciences were "monogamous" in their outcomes of interest while being "promiscuous" in examining independent variables, sociology was uniquely promiscuous in its choice of dependent variables as well. This may be a virtue to some, a reason to take up a discipline with no limits, but in the competition for new students it also invites confusion and doubt.

The claim that sociology's jurisdictional ambiguities are unique could be contested. All traditional disciplines are, today, influenced by multiple cognate fields and are inherently and inevitably interdisciplinary (Jacobs 2014). As theory and research develop, a "chaos of disciplines" and subdisciplines almost inevitably emerges (Bourdieu 1989, Abbott 2001). What is, however, unique about the divisions within sociology, at least in comparison to the other leading social sciences, is that sociology has not systematically organized itself into a small handful of well-established subdivisions. Consider, as examples, the major established divisions within the other social sciences: in economics, micro- and macroeconomics; in political science, international relations, comparative politics, American politics, and political theory; in psychology, cognitive, clinical, behavioral, social, and developmental; in anthropology, the four fields of social-cultural, physical/biological, archeological, and language. American sociology, by contrast, continues to present itself to both beginners and outsiders as a unified, if rather lumpy, discipline.

So, what is sociology? Or, more specifically, how do sociological instructors define the discipline for beginning students? The "what is sociology?" question may matter relatively little to sociological researchers deeply invested in their subfield(s), but it is a fundamental marketing problem for the discipline and its instructors, especially at the beginning level. Across different multiple platforms—textbooks, departmental websites, the publications of the ASA and various working groups, and the growing and now voluminous scholarship on teaching and learning (SOTL) scholarship—many answers have been offered, but no consensus has emerged. In an era of heightened vocational anxiety for undergraduate students, disciplinary vagueness risks leaving sociology in a disadvantaged position in the competition for students and majors. And evidence of declining interest in the study of sociology on the part of undergraduate students (American sociology has about half as many majors per capita today as it did in the mid-1970s) should be viewed as cause for some concern, although all of the traditional social science disciplines except psychology are experiencing similar declines on a per-capita basis (Natl. Cent. Educ. Stat. 2023).

My focus in this article is on American higher education at the undergraduate level, and more specifically the literatures about the teaching and learning of introductory sociology. While sociology is flourishing in a wide variety of national contexts (Burawoy 2016), and comparative investigation of these issues is certainly important (e.g., why is sociology better able to attract more students in some places than others?), that agenda lies outside the scope of this article. The

central questions are instead: What do we know about how sociology is being presented to students in single-semester (or quarter) courses? What can we learn, from pedagogical sources such as textbooks used in or aimed at introductory courses, about how sociology is being taught? In what ways has introductory sociology evolved in recent decades, especially in view of the rapidly developing SOTL literature and the efforts of government agencies and nonprofit organizations to improve the quality of undergraduate instruction?

The questions I take up here have virtually never been explored in leading sociology journals in recent decades. While pedagogical issues were once frequent topics in the top professional journals (Goldsmid & Wilson 1980), research on teaching sociology has largely been ghettoized, at first in *The American Sociologist* and, since 1973, in *Teaching Sociology* (Howard 2010). Yet the relative lack of attention to effective introductory teaching is puzzling. At most college and universities, significant numbers of students will take but one introductory sociology course, and the recruitment of new majors from among the students taking that course is vitally important for the discipline's well-being [as Abbott (2000, p. 296) plaintively puts it, "as long as majors exist, sociology departments will exist," without feeling the need to state the converse proposition]. Furthermore, the students who attend an introductory sociology course every year constitute the largest single audience anywhere exposed to sustained sociological ideas and theories. Anyone who cares about public sociology should be quite interested, then, in the beginner's course, as every decade several millions of American college students will attend that class. In the eras of both enrollment-centered management and public sociology, then, the topic is very much ripe for analysis in the *Annual Review of Sociology*.

The article proceeds as follows. A short introductory section sets the context of the teaching of introductory sociology in American higher education. The second section turns to an examination of the written materials of introductory sociology: its textbooks. These books provide a view of what certain stakeholders—publishers and a select group of authors—have taken as central for beginners to master, and a historical analysis reveals some important ways in which sociology's introductory pedagogy has shifted over time. The third section turns to a review and discussion of the contemporary SOTL movement in sociology. A short conclusion offers a reflection on the implications of these issues for the future of the discipline.

THE CONTEXT OF INTRODUCTORY SOCIOLOGY

We start briefly with the necessary big picture. The image of American higher education as an iceberg, or a pyramid, is common. A small number of highly visible, selective, and research-oriented public and private universities and highly selective liberal arts colleges sit at the top, teaching a relatively small percentage of all students. Faculty at these colleges dominate publication in the top research journals and the prestige hierarchy in the discipline. However, the vast bulk of students attend relatively unselective and/or teaching-oriented two- and four-year colleges, where faculty (both full- and part-time) typically have higher teaching loads and few resources and incentives to pursue significant research programs. Overall, in 2021, approximately 16 million undergraduate students attended institutions of higher education in the United States; about 60% attended full-time (about 10.4 million students), with two-thirds attending four-year colleges and one-third enrolled in two-year community colleges (Natl. Cent. Educ. Stat. 2023).

We lack systematic data on how many students take specific courses such as introductory sociology.[1] However, textbook publishers do periodically attempt to track such information, and they have a strong incentive to get it approximately right. Most of these data are proprietary and not

[1]None of the national higher-education monitoring organizations, including the US Department of Education, nor the leading professional social science associations, including ASA, collect such data. The National

available to researchers, but a few published industry sources have been quoted in the literature to provide a clue. In 1974, an article in the ASA's *Footnotes* newsletter reported the results of a unique survey conducted by a publisher that found 892,000 students attending an introductory course, when total college enrollments were a little over half what they were in 2020 (Am. Sociol. Assoc. 1975). More recently, several papers based on interviews with industry sources have reported that between 800,000 and 1 million students a year attend an introductory sociology course each academic year (Hamilton & Form 2003, Manza et al. 2010, Greenwood & Howard 2011).

Who teaches introductory sociology? Returning to the iceberg metaphor, it may come as a surprise to learn that while a large majority of sociology undergraduates will be taught by instructors with a PhD in sociology (or by graduate students working to attain one), a significant minority enrolled in four-year teaching schools and community colleges will be taught by adjunct instructors with a master's degree in sociology or without any advanced sociology degree. A nationally representative sample of community college sociology instructors finds that only 39% have a PhDs in sociology, 27% have master's degrees, and 24% have degrees in other fields (Kapitulik et al. 2016). These instructors, especially those without any degree in sociology, are likely to have very limited knowledge of contemporary sociological research, seldom attend professional sociology conferences, and inevitably teach the introductory course at some distance from the contemporary research mainstream. Faculty at these schools—part-time or full-time—often do not have the time or resources to do original research or writing for scholarly publication, although some will (10% reported publishing a research article in a sociology journal in the past two years in the survey). Teaching is the primary focus of their professional lives.

What about the privileged minority who teach at public or private institutions that support research and expect scholarship to be produced by their faculty?[2] Many volumes have been written proposing that teaching, scholarship, and research go hand in hand, and each can inform the others (e.g., Goldsmid & Wilson 1980, Boyer 1990). Yet during the life-course of faculty careers in research-oriented schools, there are relatively few incentives to prioritize high-quality undergraduate teaching. While truly awful teaching with no sign of improvement may be a problem at tenure time, once one's teaching reaches some minimally acceptable standard, there are usually relatively few institutional rewards for going beyond to seek teaching excellence. Professional peers around the country will be largely unaware of whether any particular sociologist is a great, good, average, or bad teacher in the classroom, even when they have a strong sense of the quality of their scholarship. Indeed, as Mauksch (1986, p. 41) put it, "in the teaching/research/service triumvirate, teaching has the least opportunity to harness cosmopolitan symbols . . . the [teacher's] activities are essentially limited to the confines of the institution and whose actual productivity is witnessed only by those clients who have neither permanence nor power—i.e., the students" [see also Arum & Roksa (2011, chapter 1) for an important analysis of these issues].

In spite of the incentive structures they face, faculty at all kinds of institutions report in surveys that they invest substantial effort in teaching, even at research-oriented, PhD-granting institutions where research is assumed to be central to one's career. For example, social scientists at public and private PhD-granting institutions report devoting about 50% of their total time to teaching (50.8% at public institutions, 49.3% at private ones), which translates to more than

Center for Educational Statistics does have some highly aggregated course enrollment data, but not at the level of detail that would be necessary for a good estimate.

[2]A more systematic set of contrasts would identify a middle tier of primarily BA-granting institutions, sometimes referred to as comprehensive institutions, that may impose both high teaching loads and expectations of high scholarly research productivity on their faculty (Wright et al. 2004).

27 hours a week out of the 55 working hours a week reported by the surveyed social science faculty members (Cataldi et al. 2005).[3] There are also other indicators that the teaching mission in higher education is of some importance. The institutionalization of SOTL in the social sciences generally, and sociology specifically (through ASA), is not insignificant. SOTL can be seen in a variety of ways: the establishment of journals devoted to research on teaching (e.g., the journal *Teaching Sociology* in sociology), or the existence of sponsored professional subgroups focused on teaching in the leading professional associations (ASA has had a teaching and learning section since the mid-1970s, and many regional associations sponsor teaching and pedagogical conversations). A modest but significant commitment of resources by government agencies (such as the National Science Foundation) and private foundations (such as the Carnegie Foundation) is being devoted to improving undergraduate education.

A WINDOW ON INTRODUCTORY SOCIOLOGY FROM TEXTBOOKS

Lacking systematic data or much other information on what goes on inside the hundreds of introductory sociology courses taught each semester, we do have one invaluable source of information: the introductory textbook. Sociology, like every academic discipline, has had, since its founding, comprehensive textbooks for beginning students. Textbooks have long played a key role in the development of mass education systems in the United States. As enrollments in higher education grew, especially beginning in the 1920s and accelerating after World War II, textbooks served as an increasingly valuable pedagogical tool for teaching larger classes, and they allow instructors to follow a ready-made outline for the course. As two-year schools have proliferated, with many faculty lacking advanced training in the field they teach, the importance of the textbook in organizing the disciplinary core for introductory courses has likely increased.[4]

Theoretical work on textbooks has long emphasized their problematic relationship with the cutting edge of the discipline's research mainstream. In his path-breaking work on the history of science, Kuhn [1996 (1962), 1979] argued that textbook modes of presentation produce stable and formulaic presentations of the dominant paradigm within a field [see also Fleck 1981 (1935)]. It is not difficult to show from a content analysis that textbook formulations of key concepts and research subfields often contain simplifying formulations that potentially mislead students. For example, Hamilton & Form (2003) document a variety of examples of introductory sociology textbooks that misstate established contemporary research findings in sociology. Many other such studies can be found (see the **Supplemental Appendix** for a full bibliography).

Textbooks are estimated by industry sources to be used in 75–80% of introductory sociology courses in the United States (Hamilton & Form 2003, Manza et al. 2010, Greenwood & Howard 2011). The content of these texts—and how they have evolved over time—provides some basis for understanding how sociology is presented to beginning students. But they also have to be regarded with care, as they are unique types of scholarship, produced by pedagogical entrepreneurs for the educational market (J. Manza, unpublished article). Authors of these titles are entrepreneurs in a double sense. First, pedagogical products can, if successful, earn their producers a considerable

[3] Presumably, faculty respondents from PhD-granting institutions are thinking about the academic year, as most teach little in the summers. These self-reports should also be taken with some caution, as there has been no effort at validation of faculty time-use at these institutions.

[4] This is almost certainly more true in disciplines that only train specialists but offer introductory courses that purport to cover an entire discipline (and all of the social sciences closest to sociology fall into this group). But as sociology specializes, this same encouragement develops for instructors to look to textbook to know what they are supposed to teach (see Manza et al. 2010).

income, and they are written to generate income, not to advance knowledge. Top-selling titles in each of the large traditional disciplines can reach sales in the tens of thousands annually, although most will not achieve that level of sales.[5] Market considerations are important factors shaping textbook content, and new authors face various pressures to conform to common patterns in the existing market if they are to be successful (Manza et al. 2010).

The other, and more interesting, sense of pedagogical entrepreneurship is that textbook writers, as well as the authors of sociological primers (i.e., short introductory books[6]), are, in the act of writing an introductory textbook (or primer), defining (or redefining) what the core of the discipline really is about. Since no textbook can cover everything, no matter its length, authors must pick and choose what kinds of research to emphasize. Most of the time, textbooks and primers stay in a discipline's pedagogical lane and have little impact on the larger discipline. Yet this is not always the case. The most famous example can be seen in the case of Paul Samuelson's (1948) principles textbook for introductory economics, which famously combined neoclassical microeconomics with Keynesian macroeconomic theory. It is universally acknowledged to have fundamentally reoriented the teaching of economics as well as establishing a new core for the discipline (Pearce & Hoover 1995, Bowles & Carlin 2020).

In sociology, too, there are at least two key examples of influential texts and primers: Robert Park & Ernest Burgess's (1921) *An Introduction to the Science of Sociology* and C. Wright Mills's (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*. Park & Burgess's "green bible," as it came to be known around the University of Chicago, quickly became more or less mandatory reading for all Chicago Sociology students—undergraduate and graduate—and in many ways came to define the Chicago School at the peak of its influence (e.g., Abbott 1999, Deegan 2001). In particular, it was central in the development of interactional sociology, and it served as the foundation for many of famed ethnographies done at Chicago in its wake. Park & Burgess's theory of the "race relations cycle," with its well-known phases of contact, competition, accommodation, and finally assimilation, was also deeply influential in shaping the sociological ideas about race (or what came to be known as the race relations paradigm) for decades to come (McKee 1993, Steinberg 2007). Sica (2016, p. 128) sums up its influence thus: "It became the totem for the Chicago tribe, and was perceived as such from the beginning." It continues to be the source of both inspiration and criticism to this day (see Kivisto 2021).

Mills's *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), the founding document of the primer literature in sociology, also had an immediate and controversial impact, and overtime has ascended into the hierarchy of canonical works in all of sociology.[7] Mills' famous phrase "the sociological imagination" had come into very wide use in introductory textbooks by the 1980s; today, virtually all American

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[5]The author of the best-selling introductory textbooks in economics, Harvard's Gregory Mankiw, claims to have placed some 4 million copies of his textbooks in print during the first 20 years of his title (including translations), which (even accounting for production costs, many advertising discounts, and promotional copies freely given out) would have netted him many millions of dollars in author royalties (Mankiw 2020, p. 215). Needless to say, however, this is an extreme outlier.

[6]Elsewhere, I have identified 51 sociology primers that have been published since C. Wright Mills's pathbreaking *The Sociological Imagination*. A very large number of these primers have been written by major figures in the discipline (for example, such figures as Adorno and Horkheimer, Bauman, Berger, Boudon, Collins, Elias, Giddens, Nisbet, Lemert, and Zerubavel) (J. Manza, unpublished article; see also the **Supplemental Appendix** for a reference list).

[7]For example, in a survey of the membership of the International Sociological Association asking respondents to identify the 10 most important sociological books in the twentieth century, *The Sociological Imagination* came in second behind Max Weber's *Economy and Society* and ahead of works such Robert Merton's *Social Structure and Social Theory*, Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction*, and Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

(and most non-American) sociologists are familiar with it. Most of the introductory textbooks currently on the market introduce the phrase, and many deploy it to frame the primary goal of the introductory course (e.g., "to develop your sociological imagination"). It is clear from his correspondence and other materials that Mills did not envision that *The Sociological Imagination* would be taught to many thousands of beginning sociology students and that the sociological imagination would become the catch-phrase of the discipline (see Horowitz 1983, chapter 5; Geary 2009, pp. 168–78). Its unanticipated success in the introductory market is likely attributable to the incomparable opening chapter, where Mills (1959, pp. 3–13) famously claims that "the sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society," and first presents his classic distinction between the personal troubles of individuals and the social problems of the many. The book also elevates a certain kind of sociological thinking above all the other contemporary social sciences, and sociologists no doubt appreciated the flattery.

When sociology textbooks have been examined in recent years, it has almost entirely been through largely critical analyses of their content (for examples, see the **Supplemental Appendix**). However, the relentless criticisms introductory texts receive suggest a one-sided view of their pedagogical contribution. An alternative line of analysis is to treat textbooks as a source of data to identify the conventional wisdom of the discipline (or, less charitably, as a way of shedding light on its lowest common denominator) (e.g., Ferree & Hall 1996, Lynch & Bogan 1997, Manza & Van Schyndel 2000, Platt 2008). This approach usefully extends the Kuhnian framework but typically lacks historical nuance or attention to the organizational and market dynamics at play in the production of textbooks. In regard to the latter, there are virtually no published studies examining why textbooks as a whole appear the way they do, how they organize the discipline, and how they have evolved over time.

Introductory Sociology Textbooks: A Brief (but Interesting) History

We can make a start by examining the evolution of sociology textbooks over time. **Table 1** lists most of the early textbooks in the discipline, and then the more notable introductory textbooks that appeared after 1930.[8] Textbook authorship played a vital early role in establishing the discipline, and for individual sociologists before about 1925, it was a way of claiming authority within the discipline. The importance of the introductory textbook in the early history of the discipline arose, in part, because for some time it was the major book format of sociological writing, one that had a better chance to find a sufficient market in the United States than books based on original research (Buxton & Turner 1992, pp. 375–76). In this early period, textbook writing was an important pathway to disciplinary leadership. Odum (1951, p. 254) reports that an astounding 27 of the first 40 presidents of the American Sociological Society had authored an introductory textbooks. Contrast that with the period since 1970; while some of the 52 elected ASA presidents have written subfield textbooks, only one produced an introductory textbook (Smelser 1981). If the introductory textbook was once a place for intellectually ambitious sociologists to present their work, in recent decades it has mostly been produced by authors far from the center of the discipline (see Manza et al. 2010).

One reason for the importance of the early texts is that they were, in many respects, places where original ideas were being presented for the first time. Evidence for this claim can be seen

[8]Information about early textbooks is provided by Hobbs (1951) and Odum (1951). For information about which texts made an impact after World War II, I rely on a variety of reports from published and industry sources about sales leaders and/or influential titles. Numerous textbooks are not included; at any point in time since 1945, there have typically been somewhere between 30 and 60 titles available for adoption, in varying stages of their productive lives.

Table 1 Some early sociology textbooks and later best-sellers

Year	Author	Title	Length (pages)	Author appointment (at publication)	Publisher
Early textbooks in the discipline					
1894	Albion Small	*Introduction to Sociology*	384	University of Chicago	American Book Co.
1896	Franklin Giddings	*Principles of Sociology*	476	Columbia University	MacMillan
1896	Lester Henderson	*Elements of Sociology*	456	University of Chicago	MacMillan
1897	Lester Ward	*Outlines of Sociology*	295	US Geological Survey (USGS)	MacMillan
1898	John H.W. Stuckenberg	*Introduction to the Study of Sociology*	336	Philosophical Society of Berlin	A.C. Armstrong
1902	Carroll Wright	*Outline of Practical Sociology*	431	Clark University	Longman's
1903	Lester Ward	*Pure Sociology*	607	US Geological Survey	MacMillan
1905	Lester Ward	*Textbook in Sociology*	326	Brown University	MacMillan
1905	E.A. Ross	*Foundations of Sociology*	410	University of Wisconsin	MacMillan
1905	Frank Blackmar (and John Gillan)	*Elements of Sociology*	454	University of Kansas	MacMillan
1909	James Dealey	*Sociology*		Brown University	Silver, Burdett and Co.
1910	Charles Ellwood	*Sociology–Social Problems*	331	University of Missouri	American Book Co.
1914	Franklin Giddings	*Inductive Sociology*	302	Columbia University	MacMillan
1915	Albert Keller	*Societal Evolution*	338	Yale University	MacMillan
1915	Edward Hayes	*Introduction to Sociology*	718	University of Illinois	D. Appleton and Co.
1916	Henry Fairchild	*Outline of Applied Sociology*	353	New York University	MacMillan
1916	Edwin Kirkpatrick	*Fundamentals of Sociology*	293	University of Wisconsin	Houghton Mifflin
1917	Emory Bogardus	*Introduction to Sociology*	466	University of Southern California	University of Southern California Press
1920	EA. Ross	*Principles of Sociology*	708	University of Wisconsin	The Century Co.
1921	Robert Park (and Ernest Burgess)	*Introduction to the Science of Sociology*	1,040	University of Chicago	University of Chicago Press
1927	William G. Sumner (and Albert Keller)	*The Science of Society* (4 volumes)	3,550	Yale University	Yale University Press
Prominent textbooks after 1930					
1931	Robert MacIver	*Society*	569	Columbia University	Farrer and Rinehart
1933	Charles Horton Cooley (and Robert Angel and Lowell Carr)	*Introduction to Sociology*	516	University of Michigan	Scribner's
1934	Kimball Young	*An Introductory Sociology*	615	University of Wisconsin	American Book Co.
1939	Edward Lundberg	*Foundations of Sociology*	555	University of Washington	MacMillan
1940	W.F. Ogburn (and Meyer Nimkopf)	*Sociology*	605	University of Chicago	Houghton Mifflin
1942	L.L. Bernard	*Introduction to Sociology*	1,041	Washington University	Thomas Crowell

(*Continued*)

Table 1 (*Continued*)

Year	Author	Title	Length (pages)	Author appointment (at publication)	Publisher
1943	Charles A. Ellwood	*Sociology Principles and*	408	Duke University	American Book Co.
1946	Richard LaPiere	*Problems Sociology*	568	Stanford University	McGraw-Hill
1947	Howard Odum	*Understanding Society*	749	University of North Carolina	MacMillan
1948	Kingsley Davis	*Human Society*	398	Columbia University	Burgess Pub, Co.
1955	Philip Selznick (and Leonard Bloom)	*Sociology*	660	University of California–Berkeley	Harper and Row
1963	Alvin Gouldner	*Modern Sociology*	683	Washington University	Harcourt, Brace
1964	Paul Horton (and Chester Hunt)	*Sociology*	582	University of Western Michigan	McGraw-Hill
1970	Gerhard Lenski	*Human Societies*	525	University of North Carolina	McGraw-Hill
1972	Peter Berger (and Bridgett Berger)	*Sociology*	371	Boston University	Basic Books
1975	Donald Light (and Suzanne Keller)	*Sociology*	570	Rowan School of Medicine	Knopf
1981	Ian Robertson	*Sociology*	681	Independent University	Worth
1986	Richard Schaefer	*Sociology*	616	DePaul University	McGraw-Hill
1987	James Henslin	*Sociology*	702	Southern Illinois University	Allyn-Bacon
1988	John Macionis	*Sociology*	681	Kenyon College	Prentice-Hall
1991	Anthony Giddens	*Introduction to Sociology*	970	Cambridge University	Norton
2008	Dalton Conley	*You May Ask Yourself*	801	New York University	Norton

Data are from Odum (1951), Hobbs (1951), and the author's compilation.

in the exceptionally high level of citations in early introductory textbooks to other introductory textbooks. In a survey of 22 introductory titles produced in the 1930s and 1940s, Hobbs (1951, p. 16) counted all citations and found that 21% were from other introductory sociology texts, while an additional 16% cited other sociology textbooks on topics such as social problems and social psychology. The most common citation category out of sociology was to works of cultural anthropology, with just 6% of counted citations.[9] They were also characterized by a good deal of diversity in terms of topics and theoretical orientations, as indicated by their tables of contents. Of special note is that most of the introductory titles before 1930 wrestled seriously with theories of biological traits and instincts as factors explaining social outcomes, with different authors lining up for or against essentialist (or eugenic) views of racial difference (McKee 1993, chapter 1). Perhaps as a consequence of the banishment of W.E.B. Du Bois and the marginalization of other Black sociologists to the margins of the discipline (Morris 2017), it would not be until after World War II that sociology textbooks all began to uniformly abandon traces of racial essentialism, even as the

[9]In our own reading of introductory textbooks in sociology in the 1990s and early 2000s (see Manza et al. 2010), my co-authors and I found that more contemporary textbooks virtually never cited other introductory textbooks, and in most cases authors make significant efforts to cite original research rather than textbooks of any kind. For further discussion of this point, see Hess (1988).

race relations approach (still found in some textbooks today) tended to treat racial divisions as the natural responses of individuals to skin color, perhaps yielding unjust but unsurprising stereotypes (cf. Steinberg 2007, Morning 2011).

Prior to World War II, the most successful textbook was that of Edward Alsworth Ross, which was reported to have sold over 1 million copies by 1950, while at least two other texts were reported to have sold over 250,000 copies (Odum 1951, p. 248). The Park & Burgess text, despite its intellectual leadership, sold only 30,000 copies. This was, however, regarded as a tremendous success for its university press publisher (Sica 2016, p. 128). In the 1950s, the textbook first produced by Leonard Broom and Philip Selznick in 1955, became the best-selling work and would continue to be so all the way into the 1970s (and, given its longevity as a market leader, probably the best-seller of all-time).[10]

Then something interesting happened. In the mid-1970s, a textbook written by a young sociologist, Donald Light, and his former Princeton advisor, Suzanne Keller, quickly became popular, and its key innovation—identification of three core traditions of social theory (structural-functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interaction) became the textbook standard. It was absorbed into South African writer and independent sociologist Ian Robertson's textbooks, which were the overwhelming leaders throughout the 1980s. The three traditions model become so widespread that it had become a bit of a joke among insiders by the early 2000s; texts were characterized as either three traditions, and thus possibly big sellers, versus all others. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the three best-selling titles were those of John Macionis (Kenyon College), James Henslin (Southern Illinois), and Richard Schaeffer (DePaul), all of whom followed Light/Keller and Robertson in featuring a three traditions approach. In the most extreme version, found in many chapters of some of the early editions of these texts, each of these three models is applied to every topic treated, ultimately suggesting there are no established sociological findings, just a set of competing approaches (Manza et al. 2010).

The case of the prominent British social theorist Anthony Giddens's (1991) American introductory textbook is interesting in this regard.[11] In its first edition in 1991, it presented a rich discussion of social theory at the end of the book (albeit containing a brief mention of to the standard triad); in the second edition, however, the three traditions are placed at the beginning of the book, and referred to as "modern sociological thinking" (see Giddens 1996, pp. 10–13). This is hardly representative of Giddens's scholarly writings on social theory. Presumably the 1996 edition was generated at his publishers' urging, in an effort to gain additional market share.

For many years, texts that deviated from the three traditions model were outliers, and none were reported to have sold especially well. Some examples of deviant titles that did emerge in this period—for example, books brought out by the rational choice sociologist Rodney Stark (1985); a self-described "radical" textbook by Howard Sherman & James Wood (1979); the multi-authored, historically oriented British textbook on *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies* (Hall et al. 1996); and Jonathan Turner's (2006) erudite introductory text, which contains no photos, cartoons, and boxed material in an attempt to focus readers on the essentials—were never reported to have achieved significant market share (although the Stark titles did well enough to go through multiple editions). Another very creative venture on the introductory text market, Craig Calhoun & George Ritzer's (1996) multi-authored, print-on-demand *Primis* program, provided a flexible set

[10]My comments in this paragraph and the next are based on interviews with veteran textbook publishers and editors, some of which are reported in Manza et al. (2010).

[11]Giddens has long published a European version of his introductory textbook, which is quite distinct from his American textbook (compare Giddens et al. 2021 with Giddens & Sutton 2017).

of chapters authored by multiple sociologists writing in their own subfields that instructors could order individually for their course. It, too, did not break through.

Some Notes on Contemporary Introductory Textbooks

In the period since about 2010, several important changes have come to the introductory textbook market. The three traditions model of the discipline finally disappeared, to be found today mostly lingering in the editions of aging titles like those of Macionis, Henslin, and Schaeffer. Dalton Conley's *You May Ask Yourself*, first launched in 2008, became the market leader, and none of the other newer recent best-selling texts launched after 2010 have employed a three traditions approach.[12]

The most potentially impactful recent developments have been steady advances in pedagogical technologies, which now allow for fully digital texts (i.e., not e-books) that can embed assignments, films, interviews, and other materials alongside traditional prose. Legacy publishers offering digital textbooks—notably Pearson, McGraw-Hill, Cengage, and Wiley—are also now being joined by newer technological disrupters, who in some cases offer free or very low-cost digital products.[13]

Digital textbooks can be sold at significantly lower cost, as they eliminate the resell and rental markets that have long plagued the higher-education textbook publishing industry. In that sense, there are market incentives to convert print texts into digital works. But publishers—traditional as well as new entrants—also claim that the new digital products improve student learning. For example, one of the leading traditional publishers, Pearson, claimed in it online advertising in 2022 that its Revel digital system "lets you read, practice and study in one continuous integrated learning experience," and "interactive activities illustrate what you're reading about, helping you learn without getting sidetracked" (Pearson 2022). Another, McGraw-Hill, declared in 2022 that its digital textbooks "allows students to access their course text on their smartphones or tablets anytime, anywhere" while giving instructors the advantage of "flexible learning moments. . .[in which] students are better prepared so you can focus on teaching that provides a dynamic in-class experience" (McGraw-Hill 2022).

Are the digital textbooks delivering on such promises? There have been a few efforts to examine this question (Singer & Alexander 2017, Slocum-Schaffer 2021). One clear advantage of interactive platforms is that they can embed test questions and written assessments so that they compel students to complete reading assignments before coming to class. This is important because there is long-standing anecdotal and systematic evidence that many college students prefer to cram for an exam rather than do readings at the assigned time (Burchfield & Sappington 2000, Junco & Clem 2015). Students who do read on schedule perform better in their courses (Sappington et al. 2002). Whether students actually directly learn more with a digital text, however, has not been

[12]For a recent list of the most popular introductory titles, see Liu & Szasz (2019). The other titles in the top five besides Conley, on their list in order of sales and dated by their first editions, are Manza et al.'s *The Sociology Project* (2012), Benokraitis's *Soc* (2012), and Ritzer's *Introduction to Sociology* (2013). John Macionis's textbook *Sociology*, first launched in 1988, remained one of the five best-sellers in 2018.

[13]Leading technology firms offering textbook platforms—such as OpenStax, OpenCourseWare, and panOpen—have sometimes benefitted from sponsorship and funding from large foundation grants or venture capitalists. Even Congress has gotten in on the act, allocating $5 million for open textbook projects in 2018. In some cases, the purely digital titles have also benefitted from written contributions volunteered by working sociologists. Whether these projects will prove sustainable over time is unclear; as Mankiw (2020) points out, the cost of producing a textbook does not stop after the first edition is released, and keeping authors and a team of editors and technical experts fully engaged without the kinds of resources a traditional publisher has heretofore been able to provide is no small feat.

fully established. In one experiment, in which two sections of an Introduction to American Politics course were taught by the same instructor, one using a digital text the other the same text in print form, the section using the digital textbook exhibited greater engagement with the text and higher levels of reading compliance. Students with higher levels of interest entering the course benefited more from the digital text than did students with lower levels of interest. The study did not find average gains or improved outcomes among the latter less-engaged group (Slocum-Schaffer 2021). Fully digital texts are, however, in their infancy, and more research is needed to understand how to maximize the benefits of digital texts.

Why Do Introductory Sociology Textbooks Offer a Smorgasbord of Topics?

One of the most frequently voiced, and long-standing, complaints about introductory sociology textbooks and courses based on them is that rather than pushing students to develop a firm theoretical grasp of core sociological concepts and social processes, the texts instead offer a "mélange" of disconnected topics (see Page 1959, Phillips et al. 2002). Becker & Rau (1992, p. 72) lament that "the best-selling textbooks show how specialties dictate the structure and content of the curriculum." Davis (1983, p. 186) asserts that textbook-driven introductory courses contain too many topics and create a course that "is superficial, unscientific, unduly eclectic, moralistic, [and] thin in substance." Wolf (1996, p. 408) decries the "dull encyclopedic presentation of concepts," while Lenski (1983, p. 155) suggests that "the [introductory] course and its textbooks have taken on an encyclopedic quality—they have become a succession of unconnected topics . . . with little or no cumulation of ideas." More recently a group of SOTL scholars have reignited that conversation in relation to the issues that fragmentation creates for both beginning students and undergraduate majors (Ballantine et al. 2016).

Are these concerns about contemporary introductory textbooks new? Some observers believe the early textbooks did better in creating a unified core for the discipline by focusing on general social processes rather than a large number of subfield topics. For example, Turner & Turner (1990, pp. 161–63) compare the table of contents of some of the earliest sociology textbooks (those of Small, Ward, and Park & Burgess) with three leading post–World War II texts (those of Kingsley Davis in 1948, the 1973 edition of Leonard Broom and Philip Selznick, and Ian Robertson's 1980s text). They assert that the early texts were "far more analytical than modern texts, trying to describe the basic and fundamental properties of society" in their "emphasis on social process" while "the most notable feature of the modern text, compared to its earlier counterpart, is the topic emphasis of current texts" (Turner & Turner 1990, pp. 160, 164).

Reading contemporary textbooks, one could hardly disagree with the characterization that today's introductory textbooks do indeed typically cover a wide range (or mélange, if one prefers) of topics. But is this really a problem? Or is it a reflection of the very discipline they aim to introduce students to? Turner & Turner are right to say that the early textbooks focused more on general societal processes, paying far less attention to actual empirical research than do the modern texts. One response is that at the time these early texts were written, there was very little subfield research to draw upon and synthesize for beginners, whereas today most research is taking place within those subfields. Furthermore, the broad dismissal of contemporary texts by some of the authors cited above, who exhibit little evidence they have actually read very many of these titles before pontificating upon them. Such dismissals risk missing the many ways, big and small, in which the modern texts grapple with broad social processes in the context of the specific topics they cover (gender, education, criminal justice, etc.). The evolution of the introductory textbook can be seen as reflecting the evolution of the discipline.

A good example of how modern titles achieve this better than the earlier texts can be seen in the difference between the treatment of race and ethnicity in the early textbooks, in the mid-twentieth

century, and in contemporary texts. Let us start with Park & Burgess's landmark text, published in 1921. It was here that Park's theory of the race relations cycle was fully worked out (see above). The race relations model was deeply influential in sociology for many decades, but as the Black-led civil rights movement emerged after World War II, it became seen as increasingly problematic to view racism as resulting from individual-level attitudes, not the functioning of social and political institutions. Park & Burgess also take racial and ethnic categories as givens, rather than examining their social and political constructs (McKee 1993, pp. 109–13; Steinberg 2007). The race relations framework is essentially reproduced, for example, in early editions of Broom and Selznick's mid-century best-seller. For example, in their third edition, Broom & Selznick (1963) cover a range of topics, and they do describe caste systems and other examples of comparative ethnic stratification systems. But much of their chapter on race in this edition is devoted to a variety of social processes not far removed from the Park/Burgess model (demography, identity, within-group stratification), and while noting that change is possible, they have nothing to say about the modern civil rights movement that was at the peak of its influence at that time. There is also no concept comparable to contemporary theories of the social construction of race, institutional racism, Whiteness, or color-blind and systematic racism.

Today, virtually all textbooks build their chapters around the realities and persistence of racial and ethnic inequalities in the United States, and they focus extended discussions on institutional racism (for popular titles, see, e.g., Henslin 2005, pp. 334–35, 349; Macionis 2007, p. 372; Ritzer 2013, pp. 351–52; Conley 2017, pp. 365–67; Manza et al. 2018, pp. 248–51). They also describe the arbitrary (or socially constructed) character of racial and ethnic categories, rather than taking them as natural or pregiven categories (e.g., Henslin 2005, pp. 324–26; Macionis 2007, pp. 362–64; Ritzer 2013, pp. 330–32; Conley 2017, pp. 334–35; Manza et al. 2018, pp. 252–53).[14] While a process-oriented approach to racial and/or ethnic conflicts highlights some universal features of these divides, and can introduce historical or comparative variation, the current texts reflect—to different degrees—the expansive character of contemporary research on race that identifies processes and conflicts in a much richer way than the earlier or mid-century work.

The example of the race chapters also highlights some good reasons why contemporary textbooks in the United States cover such a wide range of individual topics. The thickness of current research on the persistence of racial inequality compels more focus and detail than was available to earlier texts. Contemporary texts do also, however, introduce the sociological imagination (or related concepts) that aim to provide beginning students with tools to think sociologically. All of the titles cited above, for example, feature an opening chapter that typically introduces the author's conception of the sociological imagination, gives examples of its use, suggests how it could be utilized in multiple domains, and then contrasts sociology with the other disciplines. Consider, for example, two very different but highly successful texts, one the current market leader, the other the market leader in the 1990s and early 2000s. Conley (2017, chapter 1) defines the sociological imagination (pp. 3–8), gives an example of how to calculate the true costs and returns of going to college (pp. 8–14), defines a social institution (pp. 14–17), introduces some classical and contemporary social theorists (pp. 17–34), and compares sociology with other neighboring fields (pp. 35–40). The legacy text of the former market leader Macionis (2007, chapter 1), introduces a sociological perspective [following Berger's (1963) famous competitor primer to that of Mills], with constituent elements of "seeing the general in the particular," "seeing the strange in the familiar," and "seeing personal choice in social context," (pp. 1–5); gives an example of the

[14]One of the top six best-sellers listed by Liu & Szasz (2019), Benokraitis (2012), stands out for largely ignoring modern sociological approaches to racial inequality, with no treatment of institutional racism, the social construction of race, and Whiteness.

problem of poverty (pp. 5–6); argues that it is crucial to think not just locally, but also with a global perspective, and then introduces some important classical social theories (pp. 14–24); and closes with a discussion of stereotypes (pp. 24–25). Even if not all sociologists would define a sociological imagination in the same way, there are nevertheless some widely shared and inescapable elements, such as understanding the importance of social structures in shaping human interaction, individual behaviors, and life chances; the operation and role of power and inequality in every major institutional arena; attention to how institutions work; and social change (see, e.g., Persell 2010, Howard 2015, Ferguson & Carbonaro 2016). How instructors across the United States apply such ideas throughout the course is, of course, impossible to know, but the material to do so is present in these texts a way that can be practiced across subfield topics.

THE TEACHING AND LEARNING MOVEMENT IN SOCIOLOGY, 50 YEARS ON: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

In recent decades, the growth of the SOTL movement across American higher education has significantly expanded research and analysis of pedagogy. In recent decades, those with special interest in SOTL have also built a small but vibrant interest group within ASA. The section on teaching and learning currently (as of 2022) has about 700 members, which makes it the tenth-largest section of the 51 sections currently enrolling members under the ASA umbrella. Journals such as *Teaching Sociology*, materials contributed to and collected by the ASA's Teaching Resources and Innovations Library for Sociology (TRAILS) (whose website has over 3,500 contributions as of August 2021), and regular sessions on SOTL at regional and national conferences collectively identify the disciplinary commitment to pedagogy.[15]

One significant accomplishment of the SOTL movement is its impact on new teacher training. It was once far from common for PhD-granting sociology departments to require new students to complete a teaching course as part of their graduate curriculum and/or before they began serving as teaching assistants or course instructors (Goldsmid 1977, Keith & Moore 1995). That is, for the most part, no longer the case. My research assistant, Georgia Groome, and I surveyed the approximately 100 PhD-granting departments, using information available on departmental websites and, when necessary, follow-up inquiries with directors of graduate study. We found that all but 17 departments require, at least on paper, some type of pedagogical training as part of their graduate program. In some cases, the preparation appears to have been outside the department in a university's teaching center, which may be less valuable for beginning sociology instructors, but a significant majority of departments seem to have sociology-specific training programs. If the discipline once often threw its graduate students into teaching with little or no preparation, today that is mostly no longer the case. (Follow-up research on the content of these courses and best practices would be a valuable disciplinary project but is beyond the scope of this article.)

SOTL in Sociology

The SOTL movement has many diverse sources. A key landmark that advocates often point to is Boyer's (1990) call for faculty to better connect their scholarship and teaching, and for universities to treat pedagogical scholarship as every bit as important as other kinds of research college faculty conduct. As president of the Carnegie Foundation, Boyer (and his successors) directed significant

[15]The TRAILS website (**https://trails.asanet.org/**), which is available free of charge to every ASA member, is a very valuable and underutilized resource for instructors. TRAILS contains many useful suggestions for teaching exercises and approaches for teaching numerous concepts, theories, and topics, including use of films, novels, and other multimedia materials outside the classroom.

resources toward SOTL initiatives, helping the movement to grow across the higher-education landscape. Sociology was an early home for SOTL; for example, the establishment of a journal dedicated to teaching, *Teaching Sociology*, appeared relatively early (in 1973) by comparison with other disciplines. At its best, SOTL seeks to improve the quality of teaching by providing faculty with evidence-based information about best practices in the classroom as well raising the status of teaching (and just as importantly, scholarship about teaching) (McKinney 2013).

The growth of SOTL in sociology has an interesting history (Howery 2002, McKinney & Howery 2008; see also McCartney 1983). Hans Mauksch, a medical sociologist trained at the University of Chicago who later taught at medical schools, the University of Missouri, and finally the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, was a pedagogical entrepreneur in a different sense than the textbook and primer writers discussed in the previous section of the article. It was Mauksch who, by all accounts, pressed for the creation of the first serious ASA initiative on teaching in the mid-1970s. With the support of some of the leaders of ASA at the time, Mauksch transformed what had a been a little-noticed and largely scattered set of initiatives by individuals who prioritized high-quality sociology instruction and pedagogical research into an organized presence in ASA. A section within ASA on undergraduate education (now known as teaching and learning), was founded in 1973, and other examples of institutionalization (e.g., in establishing a Distinguished Contributions to Teaching Award), and later the creation of the TRAILS website.

Fifty years on, the SOTL movement retains a small but significant presence in American sociology. Not surprisingly, the introductory course has received considerable attention in the SOTL literature. In the past three decades, repeating the effort of 1909 committee, ASA has mounted several attempts to bring key SOTL researchers together to define a model introductory course and to guide and shape undergraduate and high school sociology teaching and the undergraduate sociology major (Eberts et al. 1991; Am. Sociol. Assoc. 2008, 2015; McKinney et al. 2004), as well as to fund research into what leaders in the field consider essential to be taught (Persell 2010). These works, generally speaking, are stronger on identifying lists of subjects that should be covered rather than focusing on developing a skills-based pedagogy. In this sense, they are not far removed from the major themes in contemporary textbooks. For example, the 2008 ASA task force on introductory sociology provides a course outline that could almost be culled from leading textbooks: the sociological perspective, research methods, culture, socialization, inequality, deviance and conformity, social institutions, and social change (Am. Sociol. Assoc. 2008).

Such exercises may have limited utility. Most sociologists can probably agree on the essential goals of teaching sociology to beginning students (with some version of "developing a sociological imagination" as a good starting point). The bigger challenge, however, may be to help students develop tools to apply this knowledge, both in individual courses and in the sociology major, rather than focusing on specific content. Richard Arum, Josipa Roksa, Amanda Cook, and their colleagues in the Measuring College Learning project (see Arum et al. 2016) make the critical point that learning is a process in which absorbing specific theories and empirical facts is best thought of as a secondary objective, not the proper primary goal of most undergraduate coursework aimed at advancing students' intellectual growth and critical learning skills (see Arum et al. 2016, chapter 1). Extending the classical Bloom's taxonomy to sociology, Ferguson & Carbonaro (2016) present a model for a "sociological literacy framework" that focuses on building competencies in applying core concepts to the sociological curriculum, beginning with the introductory course. Ferguson (2016, p. 173) concludes her summary of the project by suggesting that "we do not need more reflection or debate on whether there is a core in sociology; we have been debating this issue for one hundred years!" She goes on to suggest that introductory courses and sociology majors should be designed to make sure that all students graduate with some specific skills and competencies in applying data, theory, and empirical research to solve (or at least address) societal issues.

Sociology's Special Pedagogical Challenges and Some SOTL Responses

Fink (2013, p. 72) once provocatively suggested that every field has its own pedagogical challenges, and as Howard (2015) notes, students often come to a first course with certain kinds of ideas and interests that may not fit what instructors seek to teach. As an example, Fink notes that in teaching twentieth-century German history, many students want to learn mostly about the Holocaust and the Nazi era but are bored with other important topics. Howard (2015, pp. 16–17) notes several specific examples for beginning sociology students that are probably known to anyone who attempts to teach an introductory sociology course. Students have many preconceived ideas about the social world that have been built up from years of conditioning through their families, social and mass media, their peers, their religious upbringing, their previous schooling, and so forth. Their own lived experiences, for many young people, may seem to provide obvious truths about how the world works, while being completely at odds with the lived experiences of other people (or established sociological findings). For American undergraduate students, cultural ideas like that of the American dream often highlight individualism and individual opportunity, which are also at odds with sociological ideas about how social structures work, especially the role of cumulative inequalities.

These issues lay in the background of a very rich body of writing by sociologists for strategies and techniques to overcome such pedagogical obstacles, many of which can be utilized in the introductory course. Since the appearance of the first issue of *Teaching Sociology*, these suggestions have been presented, and in some cases tested in classrooms, in attempting to validate the power of seemingly mysterious social structures. It would exhaust the page limit of this article to try to list even a small fraction of these papers (in the **Supplemental Appendix**, I have provided a reference list of some of the best), but a short list of pedagogical suggestions might include the following:

- Use of films, novels, popular music, documentaries, poetry, etc. (and specific suggestions for which ones and how)
- Critical reading of newspaper articles using and applying a sociological approach to "reading between the lines"
- Use of classroom debates and panels in which students take different sides of an issue and are assigned to find and present social science evidence in support of their position
- Dividing students in groups and having them write and direct a short play/film exemplifying some sociological concept
- Using games, such as Monopoly, to teach about inequality
- Classroom simulations, such as SIMSOC (Gamson 2000)
- Doing visual sociology, in which students use their phones to take images that are meant to exemplify some sociological concept
- "Breeching" experiments, in which students see how norms operate by trying to break them in low-stakes settings
- Using classroom games based on a popular TV show such as *Jeopardy*
- Having students write biographies in which they are asked to reflect on the social structures that have enabled and hindered them
- Using an extended television series, such as HBO's *The Wire*, that can introduce students to the complex intertwining of social institutions and inequalities in worlds and societies that they may not be familiar with

Many other ideas exist; for discussion, further references, and advice, readers are directed to Goldsmid & Wilson (1980), Nilson (2015), and Jones (2017).

SOTL in Sociology and Higher Education: Some Critical Reflections

If one spends much time rooting around in sociology's SOTL literature, one will find numerous assertions of the "we've come a long way, baby" sort. But is that really accurate? Has the SOTL movement significantly altered norms and practices across the higher-education iceberg? Or, more specifically, since we don't have systematic data on what goes on in the introductory classroom, is the scholarship on teaching advancing over time, giving us rigorous evidence of how to do things better, or are we just accumulating ever greater examples of how to teach concepts but little scientific evidence of what works?

The quality of the research articles in *Teaching Sociology* has long been an issue noted by editors and external observers (see, for example, Baker 1985, Chin 2002, Paino et al. 2012). In particular, questions about the rigor of claims for the benefits of a particular way of teaching concepts and ideas based on very thin evidentiary foundations have been raised. In a recent systematic review of the journal, covering published work through 2020, Palmer (2022) shows that in spite of this history, most articles continue to report results based on severely limited outcome measures (such as student self-reports), frequently without random assignment into test conditions, and very few provide tests of actual learning. Reliability is virtually never considered; Palmer (2022, p. 8) observes that 93% of articles report findings from a single site test application. To be sure, *Teaching Sociology* can only publish the best of the articles that are being submitted. But of the many articles on teaching that imply causal effects, few would pass peer-review at leading professional research journals. Even in comparison with the scholarship in the leading teaching journals in other social sciences, sociologists are simply not yet producing rigorous and careful analyses based on randomized controlled trial experiments that have a critical pre/post-test design to test learning outcomes. A critical future goal of the SOTL movement should be to conduct research that tests pedagogical ideas systematically using modern research tools.

CONCLUSION

Introducing newcomers to sociology is challenging to do well and it is an important collective task for the future viability of the discipline that instructors succeed. Sociology has numerous subfields that have become increasingly dense with research findings over time, and in many cases, debates in one subfield may be only loosely connected to those in others. Experienced researchers and teachers may be able to see those connections, but beginners do not have the tools that experts do to make the same kinds of connections, even at a more rudimentary level (Natl. Res. Counc. 2000). Introductory textbooks, which are used in most introductory courses, largely reflect the diversity of the discipline, with a wide range of seemingly disparate topics covered. Critical to successful textbooks, and more generally, the introductory courses they are intended for, is providing a rigorous grounding in the sociological perspective, or "sociological imagination," while creating sociological literacy (Ferguson & Carbonaro 2016) through emphasizing applications of the perspective to the topics that are covered.

As American higher education is currently organized, the SOTL movement in sociology (and other disciplines) is likely to continue to have a limited impact among all practitioners and teachers, largely blocked by organizational factors and career incentives of faculty. Organizational factors in higher education minimize the importance of high-quality teaching for either individual faculty or administrators at research-oriented universities, and even at schools where teaching is the primary or sole activity, there are few incentives or opportunities to leverage truly outstanding teaching into greater rewards outside the local context. The assessment of quality teaching and student learning remains limited at best, further impeding incentives for improving introductory and other courses. As has been the case since sociology's founding, creating attractive, exciting introductory courses

that will attract students to the major falls on the shoulders of those faculty who want to put in the effort. The good news is that there are far more resources available to help those who do seek them out, and even a small investment can go a long way.

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The author is part of a large team at New York University that has collectively authored *The Sociology Project*, now (2023) in its third full edition. However, all royalties from the text are returned to the Sociology Department, so there is no direct financial stake in the text's success for the author of this paper. He is also is not aware of any other affiliations, memberships, funding, or financial holdings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

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