in the Theory of Social Investigation and Director of Research at the Training School for Jewish Social Work, and has been interested in the bordering fields of sociology and especially social psychology and social work for a number of years. She contributed a critical review of the meetings of the Section on Sociology and Social Work last year and was again asked to review the meetings of the Section this year.

It is the earnest hope of those interested in the Section on Sociology and Social Work that the material herewith presented will stimulate further research. As indicated above, the writer will be glad to receive, on behalf of the Committee, comments on these papers and suggestions for the forthcoming meetings to be held in December of 1929. While we are especially interested in reports of research, we shall not eschew stimulating and critical contributions of a theoretical nature.

THE SECOND ANNUAL MEETINGS OF THE SECTION ON SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK OF THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY: A CRITICAL REVIEW

FAY B. KARPF

A NUMBER of major considerations emerged fairly clearly from last year's meetings of the section on Sociology and Social Work. The more important of them may perhaps be indicated in terms of the following questions: (1) Are the social research and social work attitudes compatible? (2) And more specifically, should social workers be expected to subject their own processes of work, such as come into play in the interview, for instance, to objective analysis and investigation? (3) Can social workers so write their case records as to make them more available for sociological research without jeopardizing their value as social work documents? (4) What definite suggestions and contributions has sociology to make to the treatment of specific social work problems such as family discord.

These are complex considerations which cannot be dismissed dogmatically with the formulation of a single point of view, and this year's meetings seem to have been definitely planned with a view to throwing additional light on them. There were four meetings of the section this year, devoted respectively to the discussion of the following topics: (1) "Some contributions of Sociological Theory to Social Work;" (2) "A Sociological Analysis of the Contents of 2,000 Social Case Records with Special Reference to the Treatment of Family Discord;" (3) "A Study of Social Case Work Interviews;" (4) "Is Prediction Feasible in Social Work? An Inquiry Based Upon a Sociological Study of Parole Records."

Two of these meetings, it will be noted, carry forward directly the discussion of subject-matter which was introduced last year and two less directly, but altogether the meetings of this year stand in very close relationship with those of last year. It seems desirable to follow a logical rather than a chronological order of discussion.
in this review, in order to bring this out
more clearly.
It is perhaps worth while noting in this
connection, that the section on Sociology
and Social Work is responsible for two
innovations in the conduct of meetings of
the American Sociological Society. The
usual practice in the Society is to present
several related but unconnected papers at
each session. These generally fill the
entire time allotted, so that there is little
or no time for discussion. Furthermore,
each year's meetings are treated more or
less as a complete unit, the central theme
of which is decided upon by each incom-
ming president. There may, therefore, be
little or no connection between the empha-
sis given at the meetings from year to
year. Last year, for instance, the subject-
matter stressed was the "Relation of the
Individual to the Group," this year it
was "The Rural Community," next year
the emphasis may fall on some entirely
new subject-matter.
It was felt at the outset that this pro-
cedure was not as well adapted to the
purpose of the section on Sociology and
Social Work as to those of the better
established sections of the American
Sociological Society. Continuity of dis-
cussion, it was felt, would be an essential
element in the success of this section,
where controversial material would in
the nature of the case be dealt with, at
least in the beginning, requiring an all-
around discussion. Accordingly, it was
decided from the first to give each session
over to the discussion of a single topic,
the plan including the reading of a main
paper at each session, followed by the
reading of several prepared discussions,
and then discussion from the floor lead by
a designated person. In addition, pro-
vision was made to secure some sort of
continuity from year to year, whenever it
appeared desirable to carry over a discus-
sion in that manner, in order to stimulate
continuous thought and research on topics
of special interest or importance.

II
The advantages of this procedure began
to appear in at least one of this year's
sessions—the one given over to the con-
sideration of Joanna C. Colcord's report
on "A Study of Social Case Work Inter-
views." This report, as suggested above,
followed directly upon last year's report
by Stuart A. Queen on "Social Interaction
in the Interview." As was the case last
year, some of the most illuminating
differences of standpoint and interest
between the sociological study of the
interview as "a bit of social interaction" and
the social work study of the interview
as a very important part of "case work

technique" came out from the discussion
of this topic. Yet this common treatment
of the problem, it was generally felt, was
a definite advantage to each.
"It is a curious fact," said Stuart A.
Queen in commenting on Miss Colcord's
report, "that the Minneapolis-St. Paul
group, whose immediate objective is
frankly improved teaching of how to
interview clients, has made one of the
most significant contributions to the
analysis of the interview." It is perhaps
quite as curious a fact that the Kansas
City group, under his direction, which
"has been concerned primarily in studying
the interview as a type of social inter-
action" should have thrown so much light
on the technique of the interview. But
curious or not, this evidence of the possi-
bilities for the inter-stimulation of
thought in the section on Sociology and
Social Work is a most encouraging feature
of the undertaking.

1 Social Forces, June, 1928, p. 345 ff.
"In spite of the fact that our immediate interest has been 'scientific' while their's has been 'technological,' they have shown us the next step that we must take in the effort to produce a sociological analysis of interviews," is the way Queen summarized the situation. And as was stated last year, the analysis of the interview made by his group and especially their emphasis on the importance of certain more or less neglected factors of the non-verbal elements in the interview, such as tone of voice, facial expression, bodily attitude, etc., had the effect of clearing "the ground of much confusion in the discussion of the interview" and of offering "a good starting point for further analysis." All in all, therefore, a definite advance ought to be made, at once in the investigation of an important aspect of social interaction and a most important part of social work technique.

It is to be hoped, therefore, that the discussion of this important topic will be continued again next year. And in this connection, it might perhaps be recalled here that a very significant question, as it seems to the writer, was raised last year regarding the study of the interview which has so far not been followed up; namely, whether the interview ought to be studied as though it occurred in a cultural vacuum. Do not the patterns of behavior observed in the interview, reflect the cultural background of the participants, and if so, is not the meaning of behavior in the interview "a matter of culture" requiring study "just as any part of culture?" This, in substance, is the question which was raised. Or, more definitely stated in the words of the author,—"can an episode be understood as an episode, or an interview as an interview, apart from the previous and prospective culture and behavior."

One wonders what results would be obtained if this suggestion for the cultural and comparative investigation of behavior in the interview were carried out.

III

The other of the two sessions which followed directly upon last year's meetings as regards subject-matter, at any rate, was concerned with the report by E. R. Mowrer on "A Sociological Analysis of the Contents of 2000 Social Case Records with Special Reference to the Treatment of Family Discord," which quite obviously connects up with E. R. Groves' paper of last year on "Some Sociological Suggestions for Treating Family Discord by Social Workers." Progress in the consideration of family discord was, however, not as clearly in evidence as in the case of the study of the interview, probably because the treatment of this subject was not as carefully defined and linked up. In addition, the challenging nature of certain elements of this year's report had the effect of dividing the meeting into partisan groups and of putting them on the defensive against one another. Such statements as the following: that "while the court technique is more currently used than any other" in the treatment of domestic discord by social agencies, court action "only widens the breach between husband and wife in the larger proportion of cases if not in all;" and that "the percentage of adjustments in cases having contact with the court of domestic relations is only 3.5," were naturally not as conducive to frank and objective discussion as could have been desired.

One social worker raised the important question in this connection of the adequacy and usability of present-day case records for

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3 Ibid., p. 558.
5 Ibid., p. 569.
purposes of social research on social work treatment technique.

"... I believe [she said] that social workers generally would have considerable quarrel with his (Dr. Mowrer’s) analysis of the eleven techniques used. ... Accepting [however] for the moment, Dr. Mowrer’s analysis of the techniques and his conclusions with reference to adjustment, is it not possible that something should be said about the influences that may produce these results? Is the proportion of use of domestic relations courts, extradition, etc. a valid commentary on the philosophy of the case worker in her thinking about treatment of domestic friction, or may it not be a proportion arising out of the stage at which domestic friction cases come to the attention of agencies?"\(^6\)

This is certainly an important point for the interpretation of the results of this study. And such suggestions were played back and forth at this session. But criticism did not stop with such technical considerations. Commenting further on the outcome of this study, the above social worker for instance observed, that “the very phrasing” of some of the social work techniques listed by Dr. Mowrer “suggests the days of witchcraft and their serious acceptance would quite justify the United States Census Bureau in continuing to classify social workers as a part of the semi-professional group made up chiefly of mediums, fortune-tellers, chiropractors and other semi-professional groups.” “Perhaps,” she stated, “our records are to blame but one is tempted to suspect an emotion-driven bias in the selection of these terms on the part of the author.”\(^7\)

However unfortunate this sort of clash may appear to some, it has a value all its own. It is serviceable if it does nothing more than to stir us out of a false equanimity and an over-confident feeling of security. For such challenging back and forth as the above, must eventually be met by some sort of valid evidence, either in criticism or in substantiation of the facts submitted and the technique of investigation employed, both of which would of course involve the sort of constructive consideration which this section is interested in fostering. With this in view, it was suggested by one social worker, that “arguments cannot be met by heated denials” merely. Serious attempts at analysis and criticism even if, as in the case of the study under consideration, they are themselves not altogether free from criticizable elements, demand serious re-analysis and re-criticism. How, otherwise, can progress be made in this day of scientific standards and criteria?\(^8\)

IV

But if the sociological analysis of one aspect of social welfare activity produced the heated discussion above indicated, the analysis of another aspect was strikingly productive of calm and objective consideration, despite its many-sided and most significant implications. The paper by E. W. Burgess on “Is Prediction Possible in Social Work? An Inquiry Based Upon a Sociological Study of Parole Records” brought forth, in fact, some of the most interesting and most stimulating discussion of this year’s meetings.

After giving a detailed description of a study, demonstrating the possible use of expectancy rates for prediction of observance or violation of parole, as a result of which we make the startling discovery that on the basis of a study of certain items of information contained in present-day parole records, it is possible to arrive at a workable estimate of the probability of

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\(^6\) From paper by Dorothy C. Kahn in this issue of Social Forces.

\(^7\) From same paper.

\(^8\) Summary of a statement made from the floor by Edwin G. Eklund, Director, Council of Social Agencies, Springfield, Ill.
a prisoner's success or failure in parole, Professor Burgess proceeded to the formulation of his thesis in the generalized terms suggested by the title of his paper.

"In my judgment [he stated] this same method and variations of it may with profit be widely used wherever a social agency or other organization keeps relatively full records of significant traits of personality and behavior. The problems of social work to which this method is applicable are many, and not limited to the parole of adult criminals or juvenile delinquents. Expectancy rates based on experience tables can be prepared for probabilities of success or failure on probation, for the liability to family discord, for the likelihood of desertion, for the risks in child placing."

It was, of course, to be expected that this thesis would bring forth a variety of reactions. And they were registered—from complete and enthusiastic endorsement of the thesis in all its varied and many-sided implications, to almost as complete a repudiation, not merely on the ground of various technical limitations and difficulties which a critical analysis of the methodology employed in this study of parole revealed, but also because of a quite definite refusal to accept the implications of the notion of the applicability of this term in physical science is "altogether different from that which can possibly be hoped for in the field of social welfare work," for "when you deal with the problems of social service, in all its aspects, you are confronted with human emotions that will not lend themselves to cold scientific analysis."

"I am inclined to agree in part [explained the defender of the latter point of view] with those social workers who (quoting Professor Burgess) 'sincerely feel that their services like those of religion are in the realm of intangible rather than material values and are not to be subjected to crude measurements of statistical procedure.' Health problems and life expectancy tables as adopted by life insurance and other agencies, rely to a large extent on preventive measures that have their bases in definite principles of conduct but behaviorism which involves mental and emotional adaptability does not brook any fixations; a similar set of facts, identical environment, cultural parentage, etc. will usually produce totally dissimilar personalities."

Are we, then, left in this impasse even after the seeming factual demonstration of predictability at least in one realm of human behavior directly of interest to the social worker? Not quite. For with due reservations and qualifications, even this most critical standpoint finds it possible to arrive at some sort of working relationship with the prediction thesis proposed. "I cannot concur," said the above critic of the prediction standpoint, "in the premise of Professor Burgess in the relation of prediction of violators based on statistics. But analysis such as he has prepared might be of service in readjusting parole guardianship. It is

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9 Most of the discussions of this paper brought forth relevant considerations of this sort. See especially paper by Stuart A. Rice in this issue of Social Forces.

10 See paper by Edwin J. Cooley in this issue of Social Forces.

11 From paper by Lewis E. Lawes in this issue of Social Forces.

12 Same paper.
possible," he suggests, "that parolees can be grouped for group treatment, after release" on the basis of such analysis; also that it may be useful in facilitating educational grouping for special types of supervision in youth; and possibly also for purposes of vocational guidance. And this cautious acceptance of possible experimental applicability in fields where less is humanly at stake than in the case of parole, is perhaps entirely sufficient, and all that may reasonably be asked for in the present stage of our knowledge about human behavior and social life.

V

The remaining session seemed to have been especially designed to give expression to differences of point of view and conception on sociology and social work. The very title of the leading paper on "Some Contribution of Sociological Theory to Social Work" by E. E. Eubank, when taken in conjunction with the author’s promise of a conceptual procedure was a "lead" to controversy. What can sociology or rather sociological theory "offer to the field of social work as a genuine aid to its technique?" is the specific question to which this paper directed itself. But "What kind of sociological theory?" one is immediately tempted to ask and "What kind of social work?" If there are today less than 57 varieties of sociology contending for recognition, there are still enough to make this an interesting speculation. And as regards social work, there are probably an indefinite number of varieties of social work. For, since social work practice does not get itself formulated as frequently as does sociological theory, it does not as readily produce the clustering we term "schools of thought," and in the comparative absence of such clustering, every social worker may be pretty much a law unto himself.

Coming back, then, to this question of what sociological theory has to offer to social work as an aid to its technique, we see more clearly the difficulties of the task undertaken. Professor Eubank started out with the following thesis: Sociology has already made "no small contribution" to social work "as a fact-gatherer of materials so essential to the operative areas of social work." "Its contributions in the field of theory, however, are potentially far greater than those in the capacity just mentioned." Particularly true is this, according to him, regarding the concepts which sociology has evolved for the analysis of human situations. By way of illustrating this thesis concretely, he sought to indicate the applicability of certain sociological concepts in the interpretation of selected case material: the record of a homeless man, of a desertion case, of a case dealing with juvenile delinquency.

It is hardly to be wondered at that this thesis and mode of attack were more convincing to some than to others. Nor is it to be wondered at that, as a consequence, discussion in this session refused to be moored to the consideration of the cited case interpretations and the concepts and principles suggested. Too many interesting general questions were raised by the procedure adopted, some of them having the vivid association of long-time controversy behind them: the relation between the social sciences, and sociology in particular, to social work and social practice generally; the place of sociology in a logical scheme of social thought; whether sociology need be directly concerned with social problems and with the discovery of principles of immediate value to social workers; the present-day

13 Same paper.
need of a social technology; the extension of sociological thought to other fields more intimately in contact with present-day social work, such as psychology and psychiatry; whether social workers cannot, therefore, get sociological concepts and principles more directly from these other fields, etc., etc.

Among the various conceptions of sociology in its relation to social work thus formulated—sociology as social economy, sociology as "glorified slumming," sociology as social philosophy, sociology as abstract theory, sociology as an inductive technique of social investigation—the following comment on the procedure followed in the paper under consideration is especially notable, in that it proposes an alternative procedure which has value as a supplement to Professor Eubank's treatment of the subject.

"A defense of sociology on the conceptual plane," it was pointed out by Jesse F. Steiner, "has serious limitations because concepts have real meaning only for those who have been trained to use them as tools in their thinking." Such a defense can thus appeal only to those, according to him, "whose professional education has included a thorough study of sociology." In the present state of social work training as regards sociology, then, this approach has obvious difficulties. "There is grave doubt," he stated, whether this method "of showing the contributions of sociology to social work can be carried to successful conclusion."

His own suggestion was that the most fruitful method of procedure in handling the subject at the present time is to place chief emphasis "upon those phases of sociological thought that seem to have real implications for social work theory and practice." Such, according to him, are "Cooley's discussion of the rôle of primary groups and the genesis of the social self; Thomas' demonstration of the wide usefulness of documents in social interpretation, his emphasis on the situational procedure, and his analysis of the process of personal and social organization and disorganization; Ogburn's explanation of the factors involved in social change; Park's discussion of the process of assimilation in secondary groups," etc.

"The value of these and similar lines of sociological thinking [he explained] points the way to the further tasks to which the sociologists should address themselves, the description and analysis and interpretation of social processes which are fundamental to an understanding of human nature and the problems of collective behavior. If sociology is able to exploit this field in a thorough manner, its contribution to social work will not be questioned."

Judging from the tenor of this meeting, there are many who would like to see Professor Steiner follow out this lead. Meanwhile, however, the result of the discussion in this session, was the bringing into clearer perspective of an already well-recognized dilemma, which is clearly indicated by the following statement of his:

"When the sociologist at the present time is called upon to show the usefulness of his science to the field of social work, it should be recognized that its contributions may not appear significant to social workers inadequately trained in the social sciences. To the extent that this is true, the fault lies with the social worker and the remedy for this situation can be found only in the more fundamental professional training for social work."

This means, of course, that to be a competent judge of the contribution which sociology can make to social work, one must first know sociology. And it is to be hoped that this Section on Sociology and Social Work may eventually provide a satisfactory answer to the social worker's question, "Why study sociology"?