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Social Attitude and Social Class

H. J. EYSENCK

IT IS often said that the most interesting and fruitful investigations in science are those carried out in fields which lie between two well-established disciplines. While it would not perhaps be quite accurate to call either Sociology or Social Psychology "well-established", and while the lines of demarcation between them are not as clear as one might sometimes wish, nevertheless they differ sufficiently in their theoretical setting and their methods of work to make it possible to institute inter-disciplinary investigations which may serve to give an air of verisimilitude to the generalization quoted above.

The relation between social attitude and social class is clearly a topic which is of interest both to the sociologist and the social psychologist. The analysis of social class has for long been the business of the sociologist, while the investigation of social attitudes has been largely undertaken by the psychologist. An attempt to integrate these two fields of study has recently been made by an American writer, R. Centers, in his book on *The Psychology of Social Classes* [3]. It seems opportune to discuss in some detail the methodological problems raised, and the scientific value of the results reported, and to draw parallels, wherever possible, with similar research carried out in this country.

The Psychology of Social Classes begins with the statement of a theory which the author traces back to Marx, Sombart, Sorokin and a plethora of other writers. This *interest group theory of social classes*, as Centers calls it, may best be stated in the author's own words:

This theory implies that a person's status and role with respect to the economic processes of society imposes upon him certain attitudes, values and interests relating to his role and status in the political and economic sphere. It holds, further, that the status and role of the individual in relation to the means of production and exchange of goods and services gives rise in him to a consciousness of membership in some social class which shares those attitudes, values and interests.

It will be seen that we are in reality dealing with two hypotheses here, rather than with one. The first hypothesis declares that (a) persons differing with respect to economic status will also differ with respect to social attitudes, and (b) that these differences in attitudes are *caused* by the existing differences in status. The second hypothesis declares that (a) an individual's economic

position gives rise to some form of class-consciousness, and (b) that the class to which he feels himself to belong will be the one whose social attitudes he shares. The remainder of the book is devoted to an attempt to define the various concepts used in operational terms, and to advance experimental and statistical proof for the hypotheses outlined.

Centers begins by considering some previous work in this field. Kornhauser's [9] well-known studies (he found very large differences in attitude statements between members of upper and lower income groups, usually in the direction of greater liberalism or radicalism among the lower income groups), as well as numerous Gallup and Roper Poll break-downs by income groups, leave little doubt that hypothesis I (a) is to be regarded as a fact rather than an hypothesis. Hypothesis II (a), however, appears to be contradicted by some poll data collected by Roper, Gallup and Cantril. These data showed that 88, 79 and 87 per cent of the respondents claimed membership in the "middle-class" group, as against the other two alternatives, "upper" and "lower" class. Data such as these have in the past been interpreted in the sense that "Americans are middle-class conscious", and the conclusion has been drawn that Marxian concepts of class struggle and class consciousness of the workers do not apply to the United States. Few better examples of hasty generalization from inadequate and faulty research data have ever appeared in the literature; Centers has no difficulty in showing that the wording used ("lower" class) makes identification of working-class people with the bottom group very difficult; when the term "working class" is substituted he finds that over half of his National Cross Section of White Males identify themselves with this group (51 per cent), as against 3 per cent Upper Class, 43 per cent Middle Class, 1 per cent Lower Class and 2 per cent Unclassified ("Don't know" and "Don't believe in classes"). "Nearly three-quarters of all business, professional and white-collar workers identify themselves with the middle or upper classes. An even larger proportion of all manual workers, 79 per cent, identify, on the other hand, with the working and lower classes."

These data are derived from what purports to be a representative cross-section of the adult white male population, sampled according to the rules of quota control, and interviewed according to a long, prearranged schedule by routine interviewers of the Office of Public Opinion Research of the Department of Psychology at Princeton University. It is hardly necessary to show in detail that the sample is really not completely representative, and that it deviates in many respects from such an ideal sample; the author himself admits as much, and it is doubtful if such deviations as occur would invalidate the findings. It is more important to raise another point, which the present writer has made elsewhere in connection with different sampling techniques and principles [6]. Nowhere does Centers explain why he chose a representative cross-section as his experimental group; he assumes, as do most workers in the field, that such a sample is *ipso facto* superior to any other kind. Yet, clearly, "the type of sample which is taken must depend on the purpose of the analysis" (p. 54); hence the need for what the present writer has called

"analytic sampling". If the purpose of an investigation is the determination of the percentage of persons within a given population holding a certain view, then obviously some form of representative sampling is called for. But when, as in the present case, the main purpose of the investigation is the comparison of persons in different social classes, then clearly the most efficient technique would be one which equalized numbers in all the groups to be compared. In other words, if we want to compare upper-, middle- and working-class people, we should choose our sample in such a way that one third of all our respondents fell into each of these three categories. Only in this way can we avoid the usual admission, when break-downs are attempted, that in certain groups there are not enough people to make comparisons possible. If we start out with only 3 per cent of our sample in the "upper class" category, we will not be able to calculate meaningful figures for break-downs of this group into educational, political, attitudinal and other sub-groups. This point should be too obvious to make, were it not for the fact that countless workers are so hypnotized by the stress commonly laid on "representative sampling" that they forget that sampling of any kind is done for a purpose, and does not, like the Kingdom of God, carry its own salvation. It should also be noted that only by some such analysis of variable design as this will we be able to study the effects of "interaction" between the variables included in the experiments.

Having demonstrated the fact of class identification, Centers proceeds to measure social attitude by means of a "Conservatism-Radicalism" scale. This is made up of six questions, to be answered Yes or No: America is truly a land of opportunity; Everybody would be happier if working people were given more power and influence in the government; Things would be better if government took over mines, factories and industries; Most important job of government is to guarantee every person a decent and steady job; In strikes and lockouts, do you usually side with the workers; Working people are usually fairly treated by their employers. Correlations between these questions are all positive, and average around $+0.36$; correlations with total score are 0.49 , 0.77 , 0.75 , 0.88 , 0.61 and 0.72 for the six questions. These values are not dissimilar to data from studies carried out in this country, using somewhat more comprehensive questionnaires [6], and indicate the existence of a general conservative-radical factor running through these various attitude statements. Centers attempts to provide an external criterion against which to validate the interpretation of these results, and reports correlations of each question with the voting behaviour of the subjects, on the assumption that Republicans on the average are more conservative, while Democrats on the average are more radical. The correlations found are proportional to, though lower than, the correlations of each question with the total score, a result which tends to support his interpretation of the meaning of the scale. Accordingly, he combines answers to these six questions into a total scale, classifying respondents as Ultra-Conservative, Conservative, Indeterminate, Radical and Ultra-Radical, using an original and somewhat odd method of scale construction. (Centers gives equal weight to each ques-

tion, and comments that "no more acceptable method of weighting is known to the writer, and none appears less arbitrary than that employed". If there is any value in his discussion of internal consistency and validity of the questions, then there are at least two criteria for determining such weights, correlating very highly together, and any elementary textbook on statistics would disclose a wealth of methods for arriving at an acceptable weighting.)

Centers goes on to show that occupational groups differ with respect to the degree of radicalism shown on his scale; the groupings he uses show the following percentages of Ultra-Conservative and Conservative answers: Large business—87; professional—70; small business—74; white collar—56; skilled manual—39; semi-skilled manual—21; unskilled manual—23; farmowners and managers—69; farm tenants and labourers—44. While some of the groups are very small, the trend both on the urban and on the rural side is unmistakable. Combining all business, professional and white-collar groups, and contrasting them with all urban manual groups, he finds a difference in "conservatism" of 68 per cent to 28 per cent. We may compare this figure roughly at least with Gallup Poll figures for this country, when at the time of the last election 61 per cent of the middle classes and 30 per cent of the working classes declared their intention to vote for the Conservative party. While the two criteria are of course different, these and other Gallup figures dealing with individual attitudes make it seem reasonable that a repetition of Centers' work in this country would show results not too different from those obtained in the U.S.A.

Occupational groups, then, differ with respect to their social attitudes; it becomes necessary for Centers to link this finding up with his hypothesis by showing that occupational groupings are related closely to the concept of class. He does so in a variety of different ways. In the first place he shows, as mentioned before, that members of different occupational groups identify themselves with different social classes. In the second place, he shows that when his respondents are asked to identify the social class to which a variety of occupational groups belong, there is considerable agreement as to their exact placement. In stressing occupation as a major determinant of social class, Centers is not oblivious of the fact that other criteria might also be useful, and by direct questioning he finds that of criteria other than occupation the item "Beliefs and attitudes" is considered the most important, followed by "Education", "Family" and "Money". In other words, the man in the street appears to accept the correlation between social class and social attitude, which Centers is trying to establish, as obvious and commonplace; so much so that in fact he uses "beliefs and attitudes" as a criterion of social class.

Wherever we have a number of different criteria, it is possible to investigate the relationships obtaining between these criteria, and much interesting work has in the past been devoted to this point. By and large, as Cattell [1] has shown, different criteria of social class tend to correlate highly together; using five criteria (prestige rating, mean I.Q., average income, years of

education and amount of birth restriction) on twenty-five different occupations he finds correlations ranging from $+0.81$ to $+0.95$, and concludes that there is a general factor running through the whole matrix of intercorrelations, as well as two minor group factors. Other writers, such as Davidson and Anderson [5], Counts [4] and Cattell himself in another paper [2], also find considerable correlation between different criteria. Nevertheless, correlations are not perfect, and Centers finds that the identification of occupational group with social class shows a number of exceptions; we have professional, business and white-collar people who identify with the working class, and manual workers who identify with the middle class. Centers puts forward the hypothesis that these "occupational deviants" will be found to hold views shared by the class with which they identify, rather than those of the class to which they belong by occupation, and finds that this is indeed the case. Middle-class and working-class people, as judged by occupation, give somewhat-divergent criteria of class structure, and hold different social attitudes, and it appears that the criteria given and attitudes held by "deviant" middle-class people are similar to those of the working class, while those of "deviant" working-class people are similar to those of the middle class.

The existence of these "deviants" would appear to argue against Centers' interest-group theory, as clearly they show attitudes, interests and beliefs contrary to those "imposed upon them by their status and role with respect to the economic processes of society". However, Centers prefers to lay stress rather on the undoubted fact that *on the whole* middle-class and working-class people show significant differences in evaluating criteria of "belongingness".

In addition to the criterion of occupational status, Centers adduces two further criteria, "Power, or Dominance-Subordination" and "Economic Status", both of which are of course highly correlated with each other and with occupational status, and finally combines all three into a single Stratification Scale. These various scales are then used in a variety of correlational studies.

The Stratification Score correlates $+0.67$ with Class Affiliation, $+0.61$ with Conservatism and $+0.43$ with Political Behaviour (voting). It correlates $+0.50$ with Union Affiliation.

The impression is easily gained that though both unionism and political alignments are strongly related to stratification they are not as basically related to stratification as are class alignments and conservative-radical attitudes, and such a view makes good sense to the writer. Unionism and political behaviour . . . might properly be regarded as the behavioural manifestations of conservative and radical attitudes, which themselves appear to stem from economic sources.

Other correlates of Stratification are found in various fields. Working-class people are more anti-negro, but there appear no class differences in anti-Jewish prejudice. There is little difference in attitude to religion. In their attitude towards the employment of women, the working-class people appear to be more conservative. Middle-class and working-class respondents differ in the expected direction in their evaluation of reasons why people

succeed, of degree of job satisfaction, of satisfaction with pay, of opportunities for children, of opportunities for advancement, of what they value most in their jobs. These correlations are similar to values found in this country, and hardly surprising to the sociologist or psychologist.

More interesting is the analysis made by Centers of a number of variables, in an attempt to solve the problem of determinants. He finds, for instance, that Education correlates with Class Identification + 0.56, with Conservatism-Radicalism + 0.38, and with the Stratification Index + 0.59. By means of the technique of partial correlation, Centers attempts to discover to what extent the first two correlations are due merely to the fact that both the variables in question are correlated with Stratification. He shows that when Stratification is partialled out, these correlations sink to + 0.27 and + 0.03. A similar technique is used for various other variables, such as age, religion and so forth, and Centers concludes that

class identification and conservatism-radicalism are far more the functions of socio-economic stratification than anything else. The several variables that are correlated with class identification to some extent or other are seen to derive most of their concomitancy of variation with those functions mainly from the strength of their association with stratification itself.

This conclusion, unfortunately, is unfounded; it rests on a profound misinterpretation of what can be done in the way of elucidating causal relations by means of statistical techniques. Partial correlation methods are very valuable in their place, but they cannot in the nature of the case answer the question which Centers is asking. This would require experimental designs quite different from the extremely simple statistical model used in this book.

To what extent would Centers' results be duplicable in this country? There is very little doubt that a general attitude continuum ranging from conservative to radical exists here as well as in the U.S.A. This has been formally demonstrated by the writer [6, 7] in a factorial study of the attitudes of 250 conservatives, 250 liberals and 250 socialists, all of whom were middle-class, urban, white adults tested individually by means of a forty-item questionnaire. Factor-analysis of the intercorrelations between these forty questions showed the existence of a general conservatism-radicalism factor running through practically the whole set of questions. It was found that conservatives differ from radicals (the liberals almost always showing attitudes intermediate between the other two groups) on a large variety of items, many of which seem to have very little relation to politics. Conservatives, for example, show the following beliefs: that coloured people are inferior, that present laws do not favour the rich, that war is inherent in human nature, that the marriage bar on female teachers should not be removed, that persons with serious hereditary defects should be compulsorily sterilized, that our treatment of criminals is not too harsh, that our present difficulties are due to moral rather than to economic causes, that even in the interests of peace we should not give up part of our national sovereignty, that Sunday-observance is not old-fashioned,

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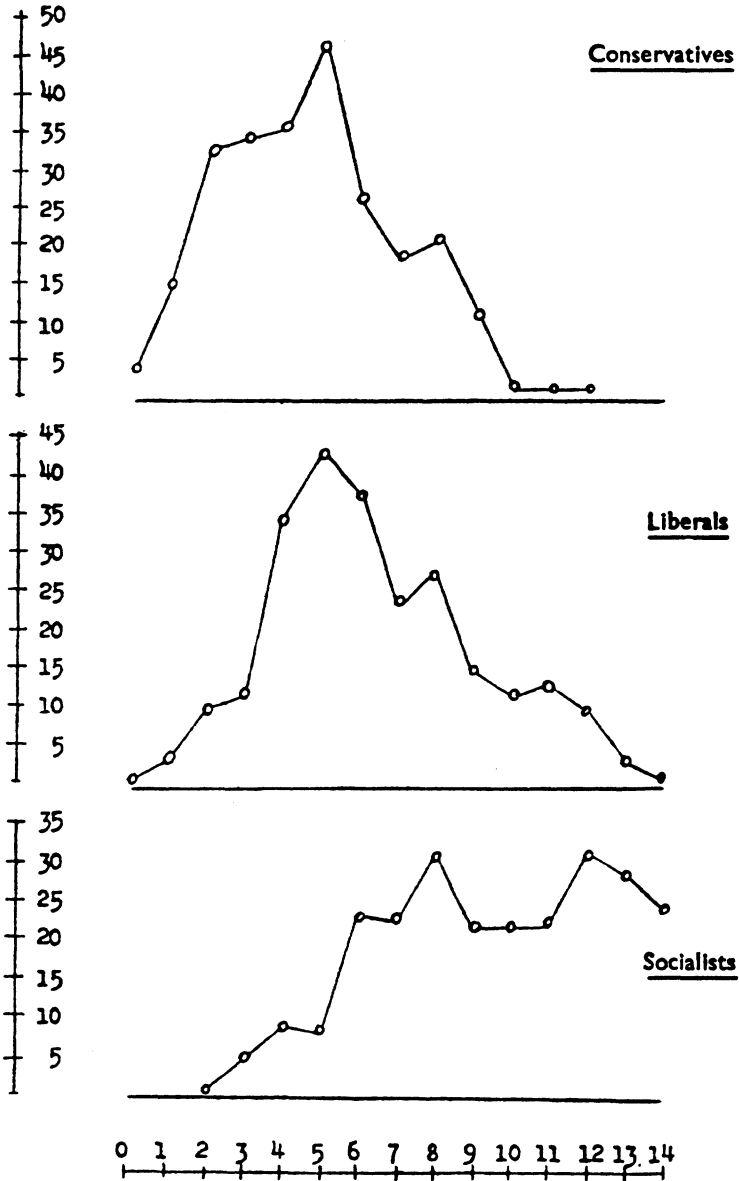
that it is not wrong that men should be permitted greater sexual freedom than women, that unrestricted freedom of discussion is not desirable, that private property should not be abolished, that conscientious objectors are traitors, that sex education should not be given to all boys and girls, that the laws against abortion should not be abolished, that only by going back to religion can civilization hope to survive, that miscegenation should be discouraged, that Jews are not as valuable, honest and public-spirited citizens as other groups, that there should be less controversial and political discussion over the radio, that present licensing laws should not be altered so as to remove restrictions, that all human beings are not born with the same potentialities, that divorce laws should not be altered so as to make divorce easier, that patriotism in the modern world is not a force working against peace, that crimes of violence should be punished by flogging, that nationalization is liable to lead to inefficiency, that religious education should be compulsory, that companionate marriage is not desirable, that "spare the rod" is a good principle, that women are not equal to men in intelligence, that experiments on living animals should not be forbidden, that Jews have too much power and influence in this country, that equal pay should not be introduced, that birth control should be made illegal, that the death penalty is not barbaric, that there will be another war within twenty-five years, that scientists should not take part in politics, that the Japs are by nature a cruel people, and that only people with a definite minimum of intelligence and education should be allowed to vote.

When a combined score was made up for each respondent, from his answers to the most diagnostic questions, it was found that conservatives, liberals and socialists showed highly significant differences in their scores (as might have been expected), as well as a surprising amount of overlap. The figure shows score distributions for the three parties; it should be noted that the three groups were equated for age, sex and education, so that these variables could not have introduced such differences as are apparent. As it is well known from Gallup Polls, as well as from common observation, that working-class people tend to vote on the conservative side much less frequently than do middle-class people (some figures regarding this statement were given earlier in this paper), it would seem to follow that opinion and attitude differences between social classes are as marked here as in the United States, and perhaps even more so. A direct investigation in which attitude responses of middle-class and working-class people could be compared would certainly be of great interest in this connection.

Superficially, Centers' work would appear to present a very well-fitting, widely useful generalization, established on the basis of the much-praised hypothetico-deductive method. From an original hypothesis, certain deductions are made which are then verified; this verification serves to establish the original hypothesis more firmly, although of course in the nature of the case it cannot "prove" the hypothesis to be correct. But critical consideration suggests that the studies reported by him do not really follow this method at

all, and reveals certain all-important lacunae and error of methodology and interpretation which very much reduce the value of his demonstration.

In the first place, Centers' theory states that a person's status and role



impose upon him certain attitudes ; in other words, a causal chain is implied in which a person's status is cause, and his attitudes are the effect. But his demonstration shows nothing but a certain amount of *correlation* between the two, and it is well known that it is not permissible to interpret correlation

directly as evidence of causation. It might be replied that the fact of correlation was predicted on the basis of the causal hypothesis, and that the verification of the deduction surely strengthens our belief in the hypothesis. This, however, would only be true if the fact of correlation could not be deduced from alternative hypotheses, and if it had not in truth been known before the enunciation of the hypothesis! But, as already pointed out, the fact that economic groups differ with respect to their social attitudes had been demonstrated by Kornhauser, Gallup, Roper and many others; in other words, the so-called deduction was already known to be a fact before Centers began his work, and probably played an important part in suggesting both the hypothesis and the method of proof advanced by him. As Centers gives no further proof of causation, we cannot consider that he has advanced social science in any systematic way, apart from demonstrating once again the existence of a correlation between attitude and economic position well known beforehand.

Discussion of Centers' second claim must be equally critical. He believes to have shown that "the status and role of the individual in relation to the means of production and exchange of goods and services gives rise in him to a consciousness of membership in some social class which shares those attitudes, values and interests". We may accept his criticism of previous work, which tended to show a high proportion of working-class people claiming membership of the middle class, as being due to biased wording, and his demonstration that most middle-class people, when asked which of the four main classes (upper, middle, working, lower) they belong to, answer "middle", while most working-class people answer "working". Does this finding establish his case?

Two errors seem to be involved in this demonstration. In the first place, Centers takes as a genuine expression of firmly-held opinion what a person says in a forced-choice type of situation. The error of this belief has been demonstrated by the present writer in his studies of social stereotypes [8], in which it was shown that a person's reply to a forced-choice question may be quite contrary to his true opinion. In one experiment, subjects were asked which five out of a large number of adjectives were most characteristic of the Italians (as well as of many other nations). The most frequent answers were: Musical, lazy, artistic, religious, unreliable. From this it might be concluded (and has been concluded in similar experiments by other authors) that there exist strong stereotyped views in most people's minds regarding national characters. Yet when the subjects in the experiment were asked to discuss their replies to this forced-choice test, a high proportion disowned any such belief; they pointed out that they didn't know any Italians, couldn't really answer the question, and in any case did not believe in the doctrine of national character. However, when confronted with the position of having to give an answer they fell back on certain beliefs which they knew to be mere stereotypes, and which in truth they did not hold. To interpret these answers as indicating that subjects who gave them really held views of this kind would

be quite erroneous ; the only conclusion to be arrived at is that the experimental method is not the appropriate one for the purpose.

The same criticism appears to apply in Centers' case ; many respondents may have answered a forced-choice question with mental reservations which completely invalidate any interpretation such as Centers makes. Only much more detailed questioning, along the line of the "open end" question technique, could serve to counter this criticism. In any case, the fact that a person says, in effect, "I belong to the working class", hardly implies very much regarding the "extent to which members of the group are aware of the reality of the group and of their own membership in it". Such a statement may mean anything from a factual acknowledgment that the respondent works at a job which he has often heard referred to as being taken up by working-class people, to a fully class-conscious, Marxian statement far transcending the bounds of factual restraint. It is the obvious weakness of Centers' approach that such vitally important qualitative distinctions are not brought out in the questioning ; even a forced-choice type of approach could have elicited more information than is vouchsafed us by Centers. In the absence of such information, it is impossible to accept Centers' interpretation, or to use his statistical data for any scientific purpose whatever ; where the meaning of a reply is at issue the statistical manipulation of these replies is clearly irrelevant. Qualitative clarification must precede, or at least go hand in hand, with quantitative analysis ; Centers gives us too much of the latter, while omitting the former.

The present writer could go further than this and maintain that those formal features which make Centers' work so attractive superficially—the hypothetico-deductive approach—are precisely the points of greatest weakness. As Northrop [10] has pointed out, scientific method is not one and indivisible, but varies according to the stage which a particular science, and a particular problem within that science, has reached. The attempt to use a method appropriate to a more advanced science in one which is only just beginning may result in very little advance ; it may even cloud the issue rather than clarify it.

Rather than put the question in the form of a formal hypothesis the writer would prefer to approach the issue in terms of a problem : What are the main determinants of social attitudes, or, in this connection perhaps, what are the main determinants of conservative-radical opinion ? Certain obvious causes suggest themselves—age, sex, education, social status, economic position, rural-urban location, parental attitude and many more. These variables could all be dealt with in quantitative terms, either separately, or, preferably, simultaneously in some form of analysis of variance design in which we would obtain information not only on the significance of the contribution of each factor, but also of their relative importance, and of their interaction. A design of this kind would of course necessitate the abandonment of those false idols of the tribe—representative samples, for instance, and use of percentages, and single-question types of opinion statement—and require instead analytic sampling, unidimensional scales and proper scores using some meaningful

metric. Research along these lines might finally enable us to reach a position where proper hypotheses could be set up, and deductions from them tested along orthodox lines.

It is interesting to reflect that experimental designs of this kind could be set up in this country with much greater ease than in America; the existence of a much more homogeneous population, the absence of large bodies of immigrants or foreign-speaking groups, the existence of a well-structured political party system which corresponds more clearly than the American system to socio-economic cleavages, the relative uniformity of educational standards throughout the country—all these combine to make the task of the social investigator much easier. It seems sad that hitherto these advantages have not been seized upon by social investigators eager to study the formation of social attitudes; neither the sociologist nor the social psychologist has seized his opportunity in any convincing large-scale manner. When such research is initiated, it is to be hoped that it will not imitate slavishly the errors, as well as the excellences, of American work, but will learn to transcend the one, and to improve on the other. But it is doubtful if such research can ever be initiated here on the requisite scale until we take a leaf out of the book of American social science and realize that just as the physicist needs his cyclotron, or the astronomer his 200-inch lens, so the research worker in the field of social attitudes needs facilities such as those provided by the Office of Public Opinion Research for Centers' study. A number of trained interviewers in various parts of the country, a staff of trained social scientists to stratify samples for various requirements, a Hollerith department to deal with the ensuing calculations—these are minimum requirements for the sociologist or psychologist who wishes to do worth-while, large-scale work in this field. Until our Universities provide such support, we shall have to look to the United States for the major part of our knowledge.

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