

International Clinical Sociology

CLINICAL SOCIOLOGY: Research and Practice

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CLINICAL SOCIOLOGY AN AGENDA FOR ACTION

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HANDBOOK OF CLINICAL SOCIOLOGY SECOND EDITION

Edited by John G. Bruhn, *New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico* and **Howard M. Rebach**, *University of Maryland/Eastern Shore, Princess Anne, Maryland*

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International Clinical Sociology

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Foreword

Sociology always has had various paradigms, and this has meant tensions and, frequently, intellectual and, sometimes, political conflicts. One constant conflict always has opposed the perspective of the actor, and the perspective of the system, even if important sociologists, those who gained the more sustainable intellectual influence, have generally tried to articulate or combine these two points of view. Sometimes the same social thinkers or scientists have known, in their intellectual life, moments when the first one dominated their work, and moments when it was the second one. In the 1960s, for instance, the French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser proposed that Karl Marx be seen as two different people: the young one was subjectivist and interested much more in the perspective of action, while the old one was science oriented and developed the analysis of capitalism as a system of domination.

We are, at the present time, in an era when the notions of actor, subjectivity, and subject have much more room in the social sciences than thirty or forty years ago, and this intellectual and general conjuncture plays in favor of clinical sociology, which is frequently on the side of the actor or the subject. This was not the case when structuralism was stronger, and, in some extreme cases at least, was not embarrassed in declaring the “death of the subject” and would only deal with instances, structures, apparatus, mechanisms, and contradictions.

Clinical sociology is now an important field or specialization in sociology. One of its strengths is its interest in individuals as human beings, their everyday lives, their histories and trajectories, their knowledge, and their hopes and fears as well as their capacity to build an understanding of their situation and to change it. Another strength is that clinical sociology entails intervention by researchers, who do not remain in their ivory tower. Under the influence of psychologists or social psychologists, starting with Kurt Lewin, and with a deep interest in psychoanalysis, most of the clinical sociologists develop practical interventions where they contribute to improving the capacity of persons or groups to develop a critical understanding of their own situations and problems, and then to change their situations and possibly reduce or solve their problems.

Let us say it differently: Clinical sociology proposes a close relationship between theory or analysis and action. This means that sociologists are not neutral characters; rather, they are part of the situation that they are studying, and part of the process of change that their intervention will induce. Such a perspective should lead to very important debates that are not often heard or sufficiently developed. For instance, for clinical sociology, the proof—the demonstration or the tests of an analysis—is not, or not only, in the scientific rigor or the procedure, or in the judgment of peers connected with some academic journals. It is in the very process of transformation that the analysis contributes to creation or activation. This means that research can be scientific and directly connected with social needs and demands and also that it can be developed by academics, with a real involvement of the people who are studied and their active and conscious participation in the analysis. This is why clinical sociologists, such as the contributors to this very interesting book, are so successful not only among social scientists, but among social workers, teachers, psychologists, consultants, and others involved in concrete social activities dealing with real individuals.

As the president of the International Sociological Association, my duty is to encourage all schools of sociological thought in their own development and in their capacity to debate. But as a researcher, I always have felt closer to clinical sociology than to many other ways of doing sociology. Like clinical sociologists, I consider the relationship between researchers and their “object” is a central issue, and that the test of any sociological research is related to its capacity to modify the level of understanding of people.

I welcome this new book on the history and state of the art of clinical sociology. Its international and comparative perspective make it a particularly useful volume.

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