CALVIN F. SCHMID
and the Giddings Tradition
at Washington

By

Frank Miyamoto

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Considering that Calvin F. Schmid was one of the most a-theoretical sociologists I have known, it may seem an anomaly that I discuss him within the context of developments in American sociological theory. I hope by the time I am through you will agree that this perspective helps to understand and appreciate him as a sociologist. To explain my view of Calvin Schmid, I need to review the history of the Department of Sociology at the University of Washington with which he was actively associated from his undergraduate days in the early 1920s through most of his professional career until his retirement in 1971.

During the first half century of American sociology--the fifty years before World War II--the field was dominated in a degree difficult to imagine today by two departments, Chicago and Columbia, and by its two major figures, Albion Small at Chicago and Franklin H. Giddings at Columbia. The Department of Sociology at the University of Washington was somewhat unique in clearly reflecting both influences, a result of having strong faculty appointees from both traditions.

The Department at Washington was first established in 1917 and its first departmental chairman was William F. Ogburn. Ogburn, it may be recalled, was perhaps Franklin H. Giddings' most distinguished product. He stayed no more than a couple of years before Columbia snatched him back, but he left a permanent impress on Washington sociology by seeing that Howard Brown Woolston, another Giddings product, replaced him as chairman. Woolston served as chairman for only two years, but he remained at Washington for the rest of his professional career and

exerted a considerable influence on the deparment. The chairmen who followed were Roderick D. McKenzie and Jesse F. Steiner, both Chicago products who gave a different emphasis to the department, but we should continue our attention on Woolston to understand how he may have shaped Calvin Schmid's career.

When Calvin Schmid was an undergraduate at Washington in the early 1920s, it was Woolston who drew him into sociology. Just as Schmid was beginning his graduate studies in sociology, Woolston was able to bring George Lundberg to the Washington faculty, and Lundberg, who had received his doctorate at the University of Minnesota under Stuart Chapin, another Giddings disciple, thus joined forces with Woolston in imprinting the Giddings point of view on Schmid. As it happened, Schmid received a very attractive opportunity to complete his graduate studies at the University of Pittsburgh under Manuel C. Elmer, another Giddings disciple, so he went there for his doctorate. But after short faculty stints at Pittsburgh and Minnesota, Schmid returned to Washington in 1937, undoubtedly again with Woolston's assistance. Thereafter he continued at Washington for three decades and more. To complete the picture of the Giddings influence at Washington, we should note that Woolston and Schmid were instrumental in bringing George Lundberg back to Washington in 1945, and ultimately of bringing in Stuart Dodd.

Space permits only passing mention of the fact that the Chicago influence at Washington was also substantial, and that the sociologies of Charles Horton Cooley as well as of Karl Marx were also represented.

What was this Giddings tradition to which I say Calvin Schmid belonged? Giddings was, in the terminology of philosophy, a *Nominalist*, and as such stood in sharp contrast to the *Realists* represented by

Albion Small and the Chicago School. The difference between them turned on the question of what is knowable about the world around us. Setting aside the subtleties which surround this question, it might be said that the Realists, being keenly aware of the degree to which perceptions of objects vary depending on the perceiver's background of experience, were inclined to emphasize the concepts reported about objects as the reality. By contrast, the Nominalists, who distrusted the subjectivity implied by the Realist's conceptual emphasis, claimed there exists a knowable objective reality that may be determined by noting widely agreed upon resemblances in objects.

Sociology in the Giddings tradition thereby took on certain characteristic features. First, the variables chosen for study tended to be those for which there already existed wide agreement regarding their empirical referents. Demographic characteristics of people fitted this criterion especially well. Second, the unit of investigation was invariably individual persons, especially in the initial phases of study, and the data collected were generally quantitative and enumerative. Third, it followed that the preferred mode of analysis was the statistical method, and correlational methods were used for understanding the more complex aspects of society.

So, how did Giddings play out at Washington? George Lundberg found in Giddings' philosophy and methodology the bases for his own more sophisticated statement of a positivist approach in sociology, and became a brilliant spokesman for the point of view. Woolston and Stuart Dodd were also effective prophets of Giddings' philosophy, but their primary effort was directed toward a more ambitious project, to elaborate a theory of society based on ideas proposed by Giddings.

Giddings had the idea that enough was already known about the social world to identify its significant variables, all of an empirically observable and quantifiable kind, which would outline the main structural and processual features of society. The task of sociology, therefore, was to identify those variables, get quantitative descriptions of them, and determine the intercorrelations which would establish the laws of society. Woolston and Dodd, each in his own way, attempted to realize Giddings' plan, but my personal judgment is that this endeavor proved for both men to be relatively sterile undertakings.

In contrast to Woolston and Dodd, Calvin Schmid showed little interest in Giddings' theories, and concentrated instead on doing empirical research precisely of the kind which Giddings philosophy called for. I confess I have no direct evidence that Schmid was influenced by Giddings--no evidence, in fact, that he ever read anything by Giddings--but his teachers and close associates were strong advocates of the Giddings view, and I believe I can show that Schmid's research reflected the Giddings tradition.

First, Schmid's choice of research problems fitted neatly into the Giddings mold. Invariably, his interest was directed to social problems in the real world rather than to abstract issues--to problems such as suicide, social trends in a city community, population trends of local towns and cities, school enrollment trends, trends among non-white races, and crime in the state of Washington. This had the effect of ensuring that the variables investigated would have concrete empirical referents in the real world and that, because of society's concerns about such problems, hard data on their incidence would already have been collected. Furthermore, the problems were generally so stated that

the data were drawn from local areas: the city of Seattle, King County, or the state of Washington. The latter ensured that the data were of a kind which the investigator could firmly control. In short, Schmid showed unusual concern for the empirical integrity of his data.

Second, Schmid typically directed his studies toward the analyses of social trends rather than of causes. Trend studies have the advantage that the investigator may give significant interpretations of his data strictly at the descriptive level. In contrast, causal analyses require not only that correlations be shown, but also demonstrations that some variables have unique effects on the dependent variable. Giddings suggested that the latter type of analysis could be achieved by correlational methods, and today we in fact have highly sophisticated multivariate techniques for adducing causal relationships. But in Schmid's time there were no high-speed computers to run complex correlational analyses. To be sure, Ogburn, Dorothy Thomas, and others employed partial correlational methods to approximate causal analysis, but Schmid chose the more conservative approach of asserting no more than the descriptions of trend analyses indicated.

Third, a comment is needed regarding Schmid's method of data analysis and data presentation. Graphic presentation was a hallmark of Calvin Schmid's research reports, so much so that I have wondered why he was so strongly attracted to this mode of presentation. I feel sure he had a very strong visual sense, and I wonder if relationships displayed in visual form might not have had for him more meaning than it had for most researchers. Even more important to him, perhaps, was the fact that data when graphically displayed tend to reinforce the sense of their empirical reality.

When I first met Calvin Schmid in 1937 I confess I did not understand his research aims and did not appreciate him. One might say I was a Platonist and he an Aristotelian, and there was a vast gulf between us intellectually. For him there existed an objective world the enduring features of which could be defined by commonsense: for example, human beings with determinable age, sex, occupational, and other differences, the distributions of whom could be determined by the simple process of counting. Furthermore, his assumption was that by tabular, graphic, or statistical methods, correlations among these distributions could be determined, and by sensible analyses of those correlations, understanding of human behavior could be achieved. The foregoing was, in fact, the principal message contained in Giddings' Inductive Sociology, that sociological knowledge is to be built only by a systematic inductive process starting from simple knowable facts about the social world, and this it seems to me was precisely the way in which Calvin Schmid chose to develop his sociology. Retrospectively, it now seems to me that Schmid's was a formidable plan of research. Suppose a hundred American sociologists with the research discipline and skill that Schmid possessed had devoted a fair amount of their career to accumulating data on social trends in their respective cities in the manner that Schmid did for the Twin Cities and for Seattle, the cities of the United States might today have had far better knowledge of how American cities behave than they in fact possess.

If any other measures are needed for judging the worth of Calvin Schmid's contributions to sociology, demography, and the Department of Sociology at Washington, we should note his remarkable feat of single-handedly establishing and maintaining an Office of Population Research

(today the Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology) at Washington for twenty-five years, and note also the unusually large number of talented doctoral products he trained in his laboratory. These feats are the more remarkable because in the 1930s when he initiated these undertakings, there existed almost no funding agencies, either governmental or private, which supported sociological research, and virtually no fellowships with which to support graduate students.

I am sure his students recognized and valued Calvin Schmid for all that he offered, not only as a sociologist but also as a human being, but for others it was easy to misunderstand and undervalue him. The uncompromising empiricism of his sociology put him out of step with the dominant style of the field. His stubborn positivism, his unwillingness to generalize beyond conclusions warranted by the data, made him appear unimaginative. And his conservatism, which carried over into his politics, gave the mistaken impression that he had little appreciation of those who did not have an established status in society. Incidentally, because I am a Japanese American, I can speak specifically regarding the concern he showed for fair treatment of the Japanese minority during World War II, in fact before the war as well as after. In short, seen from a different perspective, a Giddings perspective, Calvin Schmid may be appreciated for qualities that, as I say, were easily misunderstood.