“Drawing Boundary Lines Between Journalism and Sociology, 1895-1999.”

C.W. Anderson, Assistant Professor, Department of Media Culture, College of Staten Island (CUNY)

Introduction

In 1905, the American Journal of Sociology (AJS), the official academic journal of the then-emerging profession of sociology, published a rather remarkable first-person article by George Edgar Vincent. In this article, Vincent, who would go on to serve as the sixth president of the American Sociological Association (ASA), described at length how he turned his undergraduate sociology class at the University of Chicago into a full-time news bureau that produced a finished newspaper and gave students “under university auspices, a practical introduction to the technique of newspaper work.”¹ Vincent originally conceived the seminar as consisting in both lectures on sociological theory and actual day-to-day newspaper production; journalists would become versed in the science of society and thus become better reporters. But he found that this was actually a terrible idea—sociology had more to learn from journalistic production techniques, he claimed, than the reverse. “The sum of the whole matter,” Vincent concluded, “is to bring practical newspaper men into the lecture and seminar room, not for mere general address on the importance of the press to civilization, but for … clinical, laboratory work.”² Perhaps even more shocking than this startling conclusion, however, is the basic notion that a leading sociologist would find it a worthy use of his time to have his students produce a popular newspaper as part of a sociology class.

More than a century later, timed to the launch of his wildly anticipated website Five Thirty Eight, political journalist and quantitative modeler Nate Silver released a manifesto in which he decried the ad-hoc, evidence-free nature of much political reporting. “The problem [with this
reporting] is not the failure to cite quantitative evidence. It’s doing so in a way that can be anecdotal and ad-hoc, rather than rigorous and empirical, and failing to ask the right questions of the data.” And while Silver went on to note that his “methods [were] not meant to replace ‘traditional’ or conventional journalism,” and while he nuanced his data-driven, causality-oriented model in a number of interesting ways, he fundamentally set up a contrast between quantitative and qualitative forms of evidence-gathering, and between what he called anecdotal (read: journalistic) and rigorous (read: social scientific) forms of analysis. In short, Silver made a basic argument that journalism—by embracing data, by seeking to determine causality, by showing more openness to quantitative approaches—should be more like social science, not less.

In the move from a world where a leading sociologist could embrace notions of industrial truth production in the journalistic style to a world where a renegade journalist called on his profession to be more like sociology and political science, much has obviously changed in the fields of both journalism and sociology over the past hundred years. One of these things has been the emergence of a boundary between journalism and social science, one that we take for granted today, but one whose contours were far, far less evident at the turn of the twentieth century. In this chapter I want to map the divisions and boundary markers that have driven the knowledge-building occupations of journalism and sociology apart for more than a century, but also trace the threads that still link, however tenuously, George Vincent and Nate Silver’s very different professional worlds.

As should be obvious from my introduction, this question—how did different knowledge occupations distinguish themselves during the formative years of standardization and growing occupational coherence—is of more than simply antiquarian interest. One of the many
underlying rhetorics of twenty-first century data journalism seems to be an urge to become more “socially scientific,” or at least socially scientific without the jargon, the slow production cycles, and the over-reliance on abstract theory. But this rhetoric of data and empiricism is far from new. As far back as the 1960s (and even before, as I hope to show in this chapter), scholars like Philip Meyer were calling for an “application of social and behavioral science research methods to the practice of journalism”: what Meyer called precision journalism. There seems to be a half-articulated desire on the part of some in the data journalism world to embrace more contextual, temporally flexible, or explanatory form of knowledge.

To be united, of course, something must have been separate in the first place, but when we examine the history of journalism and sociology in a relational sense we find this sharp division is far from a historical given. From the turn of the twentieth century well into the 1930s and even the 1940s, the line between a journalistic ontology and a sociological one was far from straightforward, particularly when we extend the range of exactly what we consider to be a properly journalistic publication. In this chapter I want to explore the processes of boundary work through which academic sociology and journalism were constructed as separate professions in the period between 1920s-1950s, decades that happened to coincide with formative period of professionalization across a wide range of knowledge disciplines.

Journalism, in short, once included a plethora of material and methods that we would today consider “sociological.” Increasingly, it may be including this sort of material again. But this chapter hopes to demonstrate that the line between “journalism” and “social science” is not one of unalterable forward progress. It is a line with zigs and zags, moments of embrace and moments of revulsion. In their days of professional infancy, journalists and sociologists were once far more closely aligned than seems possible today—and yet both groups may have had
compelling reasons for expelling the other group from their club. Journalism once included sociologists and people like sociologists in their ranks, but they chose to move away from such a position. This boundary-analysis perspective can help us understand journalism and journalistic culture in the digital age, as well.

Drawing on theories of knowledge that understand professional expertise as both material and networked, this chapter moves between an analysis of the processes of boundary drawing (in which clear divisions and well-articulated categories and temporalities of evidence are reified) and an analysis of a messy, hybrid world of journalism/sociology (in which clear occupational divisions are both rhetorically unsettled and repeatedly transgressed in practice). I begin by briefly setting out the social-technical context of the early twentieth century, a world in which journalistic and sociological practice were deeply entangled. I then undertake a qualitative discourse analysis of the American Journal of Sociology, the American Sociological Review, and the Columbia Journalism Review in order to examine the techniques through which this entanglement began to be sorted out through the erection of boundaries through rhetoric. I focus, in particular, on the different ways that sociology imagined and represented journalism within its scholarly journals. The chapter concludes with a return to the present and to the world of modern data journalism, asking what we might understand about the knowledge boundaries of our own time in light of this excavation of past practices.

**Hybrid Practices, Entangled Commitments: Journalism and Sociology in the early Twentieth Century**

I want to begin by briefly setting out the social-technical context of early twentieth century journalism and sociology, a world in which the evidentiary methods of both groups were deeply entangled. I want to touch on three threads in particular, each of which could amount to a chapter
or even book of its own: (1) early forms of religiously inclined “problem sociology,” (2) the work of journalists-turned-sociologists like Robert Park and Franklin H. Giddings, and (3) the *Survey Graphic*, which represented an attempt to represent sociological knowledge in a visually sophisticated, publicly appealing format. This is not to say that journalism and sociology were the same thing—far from it. Indeed, from the very earliest days of social science, its practitioners took pains to distinguish themselves from their reportorial brethren. Nevertheless, divisions were certainly far murkier than they would eventually become, and we can only understand the process of rhetorical separation outlined in the bulk of this paper if we first understand earlier phases of more substantive entanglement.

First, we should note that the earliest forms of sociology were what Andrew Abbott and others have called “problem sociology.” A number of reform oriented groups, often religious in nature and embedded within of the larger currents of the progressive era, sought to gather empirical data on the conditions of urban and rural neighborhoods for the purposes of social reform. Much of this empirical data collection fell under the rubric of the “social survey,” about which Shelby Harrison of the Russell Sage Foundation would write in 1930 that it was “not scientific research alone, nor journalism alone, nor social planning alone, nor any one other type of social or civic endeavor; it is a combination of a number of these.” I have chronicled the journalistic linkages to the social survey movement elsewhere; for now I can only mention that the surveyors made extensive use of a combination of *journalistic distribution tactics*, *empirical evidence gathering*, and a crude form of *data visualization* in order to agitate for a variety of urban reforms.

Second, we should note the links between some of the founding fathers of sociology and the newspaper profession. The key figure here, of course, is Robert Park, and historians of
sociology such as Rolf Linder have devoted entire volumes to the thesis that it was Park’s background as a city reporter that helped shape his sociological habitus and his belief in the academic value of “nosing around.” These blurred boundaries apply not simply to Robert Park, however; even early sociologists now known for their statistical approaches, such as Franklin Giddings, began their careers as journalists. As we will see below, one of the presidents of the American Sociological Association not only had an impressive journalistic career before becoming a sociologist but even turned his sociology classroom into a working newspaper production center for a time in 1909.

Finally, social scientific and journalistic practices were entangled on the material level as well. For the first few decades of the twentieth century, a variety of newsletters, magazines, and special reports made use of both journalistic and sociological methods and authors, many of these volumes growing out of the activity of the Social Survey Movement mentioned earlier. While the muckraking magazines are well known, less famous is the work of settlement workers like Jane Addams whose reports and visualizations were replete with both journalistic and sociological language, and of magazines like the *Survey Graphic*, which probably represents the finest flowering of the hybrid techniques of reporting, empirical research, social reform, and data visualization before the 1980s.

In short, while journalism and sociology were always divided by a variety of social and organizational factors, the boundaries between them were less stable and more permeable in the early part of the twentieth century than they would become 50 years later. How that rhetorical boundary work was deployed in practice is the subject of the next section.

In his introduction to this volume, Carlson invokes Gieryn’s understanding of rhetoric as one of the means through which retroactively proper demarcations between different forms of expert knowledge are fixed. “It is through rhetorical means that various groups engage in ‘boundary-work’ to compete publicly for ‘epistemic authority’: ‘the legitimate power to define, describe, and explain bounded domains of reality.’”

One of the strategies of boundary-work is *expulsion*, in which deviant group members, deviant practices, and deviant values are all publicly cast-out and branded as no longer acceptable to the expert group. This chapter also examines a process of expulsion through rhetorical “othering”—in this case, the changing sociological understanding of journalism between 1899 and 1999. As we have seen, the distinction between journalistic and sociological techniques and values was far from self-evident in the early years of the twentieth century; to build the boundary between them required, among other things, active rhetorical work. In this chapter, I am examining more of a process of historical discourse formulation than I am Gieryn’s individuated expulsions, though the two concepts differ more in emphasis and method than they do in their underlying understanding of knowledge practices.

How did sociology come to distinguish itself from journalism, and vice versa? My approach to answering that question involves, first, trying to understand how sociologists talked about journalism in their professional journals, specifically the *American Journal of Sociology* (AJS) and the *American Sociological Review* (ASR), from 1899 until 1999. Using a JSTOR search, I downloaded every article in AJS and ASR containing a major reference to either “journalism” or “newspaper[s],” giving me a total of 564 articles. Each of the articles was categorized according to a set of themes that came to light after each piece been read and analyzed several times. These themes can be understood as representative of different
understandings of sociology’s relationship to journalism, and are detailed below. Do particular article types or particular clusters of article themes emerge at different moments in time, and if so, when? Can we point to any provisional patterns in the way that different theme clusters emerged at different moments? And, if so, what does this say about the way journalism came to be understood from the perspective of social science?

The second piece to the puzzle, of course, is to flip the question on its head and examine social science from the journalistic point of view. To accomplish this I undertook a similar exercise, this time using the *Columbia Journalism Review* as my data set and searching for all articles that mentioned “social science” or “sociology.” Unlike the AJS and ASR dataset, the value of this data is fairly limited, in part because of the small number of results but primarily because *CJR* is not the most important professional journal within the journalistic field and has only existed since 1963. Nevertheless, there is useful data here as well, and it is important to keep in mind that boundary construction is always, at least in part, a mutual process of exclusion.

The analysis of the *American Journal of Sociology* and the *American Sociological Review* led to a differentiation between three article types and four thematic categories of article. The first category, *a discussion of journalistic methods or a direct comparison of journalism to social science*, is the key one for our analytic purposes insofar as it represents a moment when AJS or ASR authors were specifically reflecting the methodologies of journalistic practice or comparing journalistic methods and values to those embraced by social scientists. This can and does include anything from an offhand in remark in a book review on public opinion that “the present volume, wherein a professor of journalism presents ‘a guide for newspaper men and newspaper readers’ … will leave most social scientists annoyed” to more extensive but less self-conscious
reflections on the relationship between journalism, social science, and the Pittsburgh survey, a touchstone of early sociological and reform-oriented qualitative science.\textsuperscript{13}

The second category, \textit{journalism or ‘the news’ as an object of empirical inquiry}, represents what we today would consider part of the sociology of news. Some of the most famous articles in journalism studies are part of this category, including Tuchman, Sigelman, and Molotch and Lester.\textsuperscript{14} The third category, \textit{news content as empirical evidence for analyzing other social phenomena}, features news content not as an object of analysis in and of itself but as data for investigating other sociological phenomena, such as ecological institutional evolution (using local newspapers as a case study.)\textsuperscript{15} One of the most interesting articles in this category actually reflects upon and tests the reliability and validity of using news coverage of urban unrest as a data source.

The final category, \textit{journalism as an object for non-empirical inquiry or moral speculation}, might appear to be the most unusual to our twenty-first century eyes. Suffice it to say that the \textit{American Journal of Sociology} of 1899 resembles today’s scientific journal insofar as it has the same title, and little else. Quite often in these articles, journalism is “the object” of rambling, moralistic discourses. These articles include little in the way of empirical evidence and display titles like “Is an Honest and Sane Newspaper Press Possible?”\textsuperscript{16} And this very fact helps point to the value of this kind of discursive genealogy: By studying how sociology understood journalism, we are not simply studying the relationship between two professional groups; we are studying how sociology understood itself and how that understanding was transformed over the course of the modern era.

A deeper engagement with a subset of 125 particularly relevant articles highlights the emergence of three key trends in the sociological framing of journalism: a normative concern
with the relationship between journalistic and sociological methods and values between 1899 and 1926; a casual or condescending dismissal of “journalistic scholarship” in the 1940s, 50s and 60s; and a turn toward journalism and journalistic practice as an object of empirical inquiry in the 1970s. While I discuss these trends chronologically, it is important to keep in mind that there are not hard-and-fast lines between the clusters of articles discussed here. There may have been a turn toward the empirical study of journalism as a subject matter in its own right in the 1970s, but even as early as 1910, Frances Fenton would inquire as to the relationship between news framing and crime, and investigate the question “how and to what extent do newspaper presentations of crime … influence the growth of crime and other types of anti-sociological activity,” using content analysis and adding up newspaper column inches. Nevertheless, there are some real chronological shifts at play here, and all of them are relevant to understanding the boundary between journalism and sociology as it emerged over the course of the twentieth century.

Social Science and the Moral Cohesion of the Press (1895-1925)

The most interesting material from the American Journal of Sociology in its early years can be characterized by its persistent attempt to understand what sociology itself was—as an intellectual practice and moral commitment—running alongside a series of normative inquires into the various failings of the press. In addition to the aforementioned article “Is an Honest and Sane Newspaper Press Possible?” other pieces in AJS between 1899 and the mid-1920s complained that “the sociologist would be justified in hailing the modern press as a wonderful moral factor, were it not for that curse and pestilential nuisance, the ‘yellow’ variety of newspapers” and they praised “attempts at civic publicity represented by the municipal journals of Baltimore.” These pieces are not entirely context-free laments, however. Indeed, buried
within them, one can see an emerging understanding of journalism not as a system of
information provision but rather as a system of social control and cohesion. The spirits of Robert
Park and John Dewey, with their ideas of a society that exists in and through communication, is
much in evidence here.

The motive, conscious or unconscious, of the writers and of the [urban newspaper] press
is to reproduce, as far as possible, in the city the conditions of village life. In the village
everyone knew everyone else. Everyone called everyone by his first name. The village
was democratic. We are a nation of villagers … if public opinion is to continue to govern
as much in the future as it has in the past, if we propose to maintain a democracy as
Jefferson conceived it, the newspaper must continue to tell us about ourselves.20

Focusing on the newspaper as a socio-cultural object that fostered community integration
(or alienation) and directed “public opinion” would lead these early sociologists, “who
themselves marched within the still larger brigades of the charity organization movement and the
social gospel,” to consider what kind of integration and what kind of community the newspaper
made possible.21 It was thus roundly and mercilessly criticized, usually without empirical
evidence, for a variety of failings alluded to above.

There is a connection between this moral trepidation directed toward the social influence of
the newspaper and the existence of a number of articles, especially between 1899 and the 1920s,
which focused on the relationship between journalistic and sociological methods. This
connection is the struggle of a newly professionalizing sociology to define exactly what social
science was and what methods it ought to embrace. As we have already noted, sociology in its
early years was scarcely distinguishable from the various religious reform and “social gospel”
movements of the late progressive era, all of which saw the ills of the industrial era as at least
partly attributable to something called “society” rather than to solely individual failings. Given this reform-oriented background, what did it mean to be a sociologist, what were proper sociological methods, and how should college-level instruction in sociology take place? In fact, several articles in the early AJS document nothing more than the composition of sociology programs at different universities, as well as the various departments in which “Introductory Sociology” is taught. The question also arose as to how journalistic instruction and practice might be distinguished from sociological theories and methods.

Several articles before 1926 also discuss the Pittsburgh Survey, inevitably addressing the relationship between the journalistic and sociological aspects of the Survey. In a 1909 article summarizing the survey results, Edward Devine lists the findings and then goes on to lament that, as a surveyor and sociologist, he is “unable to set [our findings free] through yellow journalism methods… because these are not consistent with our traditions.” Park adds that the various urban surveys and reports sponsored by the Carnegie and Russell Sage foundations “are something more than scientific reports. They are rather a high form of journalism, dealing with conditions critically, and seeking through the agency of publicity to bring about radical reforms.”

In all the aforementioned examples illustrating the early days of the sociology -- journalism relationship, the questions of how to reform the press, what sociology is, how the profession of sociology relates to the problems of moral reform, and how sociology differs procedurally from journalism, remain entangled. While there is a vague notion that a boundary between journalism and social science does indeed exist, we cannot say that there is any boundary work per se. Or perhaps it is more accurate to note that the efforts at boundary work that did exist were themselves confused by the inchoate status of sociology itself. Over the next forty years,
however, the pace of professional separation would accelerate, and boundary-building would 
begin in earnest.

Condescension and Critique

It is quite obvious, even in the ASJ articles from the 1910s and early 1920s, that 
sociologists were groping toward a dividing line between so-called “higher” forms of journalism 
(like the social survey and even some kinds of muckraking) and social science. In these early 
days, however, the division was muddled and the sociological critique of journalism was less 
methodological and more normative in nature. A distinct change in tone, however, can be seen 
by the mid-1920s. Following Lannoy,\(^2\) we can see clear signs of this shift in the differences 
between the original and revised versions of Park’s “The City,” re-published in 1925. Whereas 
the first version of “The City” makes reference to the survey movement only briefly, describing 
it as a form of “high journalism,” the revised version injects both muckraking journalism and the 
social survey as teleological stopping points along the history of social science, of which 
sociology is the final and highest stage (Lannoy 51). “Social interest was first stimulated by 
polemics against the political and social disorders of urban life [i.e., muckraking journalism] … 
[while] sociology sought a surer basis for the solution of the problems from a study of the facts 
of city life.” In this spirit, government statistics provide citizens with data, community surveys 
gather masses of information and put them in readable form, and settlement writers like Jane 
Addams have produced “arresting and sympathetic pictures.”\(^2\) But only sociology, Park writes 
later, “yields generalizations of wide or general validity” (Park 1929).[U1]

A later AJS article on the Pittsburgh Survey puts this critique in even more sophisticated 
and methodologically confident terms. The survey movement is not social science, Hariett 
Bartlett argues in a 1928 article, insofar as its goal is practical action located at a specific time
and place rather than general hypothesis testing. In the articles on journalism, this is perhaps the earliest case in which we see alternate empirical practices contrasted with the scientific method per se. “In the minds of many persons the survey is confused with research,” Bartlett writes. “Both are techniques of investigation but should be carefully distinguished … the survey makes comparisons, but, instead of leading to generalizations, they are intended to bring out more clearly the particular problem.”

The Pittsburgh Survey, the most famous Survey of all, is tainted even in its origins insofar as it “started out as a journalistic project, undertaken by a committee of a charity organization journal,” Bartlett writes dismissively. Bartlett, like Devine in 1909, still draws a connecting line between muckraking journalism and the social survey—but by this time both journalistic and survey techniques are radically differentiated from sociology, rather than being seen as a somewhat uneasy contributors to a larger scholarly tradition of which sociology is also a part. Her concluding sentence is pointed: “most particularly [this article] does eliminate some of the confusion which exists as to the nature of the survey and brings it out as an essentially practical, not scientific, technique.”

By the 1940s, barely more than a decade after Bartlett’s article and Park’s revisions to “The City,” the lines are set and references to journalism in the mainstream sociology journals can usually only be found in book reviews. There, it serves as an object of condescension, as a way of “othering” particularly well-written or methodologically unsound sociology books. Reviewing a book which calls for reporters to be “trained in the social sciences, notably sociology, psychology, and economics, in order to explain and interpret the deeper significance of events and utterances,” the ASR reviewer exclaims “god forbid!” and sarcastically notes that such a change would lead to the terrible prospect of newsboys tossing Ph.D. theses on the piazza every morning.
society, an AJS reviewer notes that the assembled texts are intended “for use by students in classes of journalism.”30 “Selections comprising [Part 1] … represent primarily contributions of social scientists, and contrast with those other parts of the book which are primarily the work of journalists.”31 For this reason, the book is fairly useless to sociologists as a primer on news but can serve as a primary document for sociologists looking for insights into the journalistic mindset as defined by journalists themselves.

By the 1950s, this review of a book on public opinion has become typical of the tenor of the (now nearly non-existent) journalism-related discourse in the *American Sociological Review* and the *American Journal of Sociology*:

almost all of the books recently published on [the] subject [of public opinion] are very uneven, reflecting the competence of the author in his own field and displaying his lack of knowledge in the related fields. Such is the case in the present volume, wherein a professor of journalism presents “a guide for newspaper men and newspaper readers” which equates public opinion with any and all social thought and action and which attempts to explain human behavior by a popular treatment of such topics as “The Nature of Man” (Chapter 2), and “The Nature of Society” (Chapter 3). As in the case of most such attempts, the oversimplification of basic concepts results in a volume which will leave most social scientists annoyed and displeased. While the present text may be useful in schools of journalism, it probably will be of limited value to social scientists.

Furthermore, in this reviewer’s opinion, the student of journalism would benefit more from a basic text in social psychology than from the present popular translation.32

By 1967, these reviews had reached a fairly high level of dismissive dudgeon. A book on a recent development in Boise, Idaho, is called “an extraordinarily commendable work of popular
journalism by a professor on that subject at New York University.” But “as social science, the
book makes only a minute contribution … it is, alas, not very coherently written, somewhat
hysterical in tone … and argues ‘statistically’ from an N of twelve—chosen we know not how—
about general awareness of deviance in the community. In other words,” the review concludes,
“the book falls sufficiently short of professionally acceptable standards of rigor in the
accumulation of data, the marshaling of evidence, and its interplay with relevant theory to
disqualify it as a tool of higher education.”

Data collection, evidence analysis, and the relationship of empirical work to theory. This is
the rhetoric of a mature science, one that has become confident enough in its procedures and its
apparatus to denigrate “an extraordinary commendable work of journalism” for its lack of rigor.
Boundaries, fortified by the strong professional conception of both journalism and sociology
itself, have been erected. The days when a future president of the American Sociological Society
would turn his classroom into a working newspaper office, and when a founder of the field
would ruminate on the similarities and differences between urban sociology and urban reporting,
are long gone.

Journalism as an Object of Sociological Inquiry

From the 1940s until the early 1970s, journalism as an object of sociological inquiry
almost entirely vanishes. There was scattered empirical investigation into news reporting in the
decades before the 1940s, amid all the moral speculation about the public failings of the press.
But after the 40s, we are limited to the occasional piece such as “Newspaper Circulation from
Small Metropolitan Centers.” In part, this can be traced to the general sociological
abandonment of mass communication research; in part, it should be attributed to the rise of
journalism schools and their affiliated “communications” programs. We should keep in mind,
however, that many of the articles on journalism in the early years of the AJS would barely be recognized as “sociology” today, even given the relative fondness for the Chicago School in sociology’s collective memory. In short, there is virtually no tradition of so-called “mainstream” journalism research in the sociology journals, up until the 1970s; the maturation of sociology into a “legitimate” social science and the establishment of academic communications programs run together in history.

In the 1960s and 70s, this would briefly change. As Stonbely puts it in her historical revisiting of the U.S. “newsroom studies,” “in the 1960s and 1970s, a number of sociologists ventured into newsrooms in American and England to conduct ethnographies on the production of news.” Of the four key studies identified by Stonbely in her article, only one of them (by Tuchman) would be originally published in the ASR or AJS; Gans garners a lengthy and praiseworthy review in the AJS, Fishman’s original piece on the reporting of crime waves is found in *Social Problems*, and Epstein’s work appears primarily in monograph form. Even outside of the ethnographic work, however, the 1970s and early 80s would see the publication of several other journalism-oriented articles, including two by Molotch and Lester that utilized content analysis and ethnographic research in combination.

Stonbely attributes this (brief) return of a sociology of news to overlapping intellectual and socio-political contexts, including the emergence of organizational theory in sociology, a growing critique of professionalism, the background of Berger and Luckmann’s work on the social construction of reality, a broader critique of institutional authority in general, and a liberal call for greater press pluralism. I agree, by and large, with her analysis, and would only add that even with all these factors working in favor of a sociological embrace of journalism studies the majority of the work in this vein did not appear in the central sociological journals and acted as
something of an outlier even when it did. Now that the boundaries between journalism and sociology are (relatively) secure, sociology can at last turn its analytical gaze upon its exiled cousin, the sense-making profession of news reporting; even here, however, a vague feeling of uncertainty about the ability of a mostly qualitative sociology to pass judgment on other qualitative workers lingers in the background.42

By the mid-1980s, this brief resurgence of interest would taper off. If I had to categorize a fourth phase of the sociological understanding of journalism, I would probably label it as an embrace of raw journalistic data and journalistic settings to understand other social phenomena (but not the news). But the literature in the 1990s is too scattered to make any broad claims, and perhaps we are too close to that era to fully map the meta-theoretical discourses that lie beneath the placid surface of the academic journal. Suffice it to say that interest in journalism remains low, and I would echo Katz and Pooley and here attribute this divide as an “unintended consequence of the handoff to journalism schools.”43 As for these journalism schools, they faced their own internal divisions and arguments about the relationship between the study of the news, social science methods, and journalistic practice. It is to the journalism side of the sociological -- journalism boundary work that I now briefly turn.

Through the Looking Glass: Journalism Considers Social Science

In considering how journalism understood itself in relation to social science, we face the challenge that while sociology is an academic discipline with occasional professional training embedded in its course of study, journalism is both a field of study (usually housed within communication programs) and a professional course of training.44 Quite often the fields of journalism (professional practice) and communications (the academic discipline)—while they may even share a university building—often have little or nothing to do with each other, and this
makes drawing a line between journalism and sociology partially a task of drawing a line between journalism, sociology, and communications. In many ways this is a major data point in and of itself. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this chapter, I will stick to a two-part analysis of the manner through which the profession of journalism discursively framed social science as well as its own relation to that science. To do this, as you will recall, I searched the *Columbia Journalism Review* for all articles that mentioned “social science” or “sociology,” resulting in 36 articles. In general, there are far fewer patterns to be found in the CJR’s treatment of sociology and social science than there is vice versa in the AJS and ARS. In part this may be because of differences in sample size, and in part it may have to do with the fact that CJR was not founded until the 60s (and, as we have already seen, perhaps the most interesting parts of the AJS and ARS come from the 1940s and 50s).

Still, there are patterns. Most of the relevant articles consisted of summarized or excerpted social science research papers in the CJR of the 1960s, or more narrative-driven “research reports” in the 2000s. A few other articles (again, mostly book reviews) directly looked at the relationship between the two empirical domains. And, finally, I discovered a key (perhaps the key) paper by Philip Meyer in 1971 called “The Limits of Intuition,” as well as two reviews of Meyer’s book, *Precision Journalism*, in 1973 and 2002.

Some of the most famous names in media sociology occasionally grace the pages of CJR. Kurt and Gladys Lang discuss the impact of televised hearings in a piece from 1973. Herbert Gans writes about “multi-perspectival news” in 1979, and Michael Schudson and a team of Columbia graduate students contribute a “research report” in the 2000s. Vincent Mosco writes an article on the institutional relationship between minority organizing groups and the FCC, and there is the occasional angry letter from Todd Gitlin. There are less well-known straight
academic studies as well, including at least one article adopted from a media sociology doctoral thesis published in CJR’s early days.49

By and large, however, such articles are rare. Even more rare are articles looking directly or obliquely at the journalism -- sociology relationship. One of the few can be found in a review of a collection of essays honoring David Riesman, “Journalism and Social Science: Continuities and Discontinuities,” by Gerald Grant. The reviewer notes that Grant attempts to absolve journalism from claims that it is intellectually lightweight, suggesting that it is “to social scientists like Nathan Glazer, Daniel Bell, James Coleman, and David Riesman that [an actually-existing form of] analytical journalism turns to for models.” The reviewer, while not entirely dismissive of Grant’s claim that could journalism can approach the subtlety and sweep of public sociology, does seem to resent “[Grant’s] implicit assumption that [journalists] represent a lower link in the great chain of informational being” than public-minded sociologists. The review also begins with a passive attack on some unnamed writers who wish to make journalism more sociological or analytical, wryly noting that “every once in a while someone discovers an analogy between the practice of journalism and some other discipline—an archaeological dig, say, or a psychoanalytic probe.” It seems clear that this swipe is directed against Philip Meyer and his call in the 1970s, in the pages of CJR and elsewhere, for journalism to become more like a social science than an anecdotal, ad-hoc collection of more-or-less random data points.50

It is here, with Meyer and the first appearance of his notion of precision journalism in the pages of the professional journalism press, that we reach a turning point in the journalism social science relationship—and it is here that we must bring our analysis to a close. Meyer, with his aggressive attempt to fuse journalistic and social science methods, straddles the dividing line between the distant past and the near past of the journalism -- social science genealogy that I
promised to undertake in this chapter. By the 1980s, sociology had abandoned its concern with journalism (both as an object of empirical inquiry and as grist for methodological speculation), and ceded the field to journalism to further examine the exact location of its occupational boundary line. It is perhaps not surprising that sociology, as it became increasingly confident in its own theoretical, professional, and analytical moorings, could feel less of a need to inquire more deeply into its epistemological scaffolding than its once-sibling journalism, a profession that has always had far less confidence in its own intellectual underpinnings.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have attempted to outline the process by which a firm, thick boundary was drawn between journalism and social science in the early to mid-twentieth century. We have seen that sociology began by uncertainly engaging with journalism, in part because of its view of journalism as a community-binding social actor and it part because of its own epistemological uncertainty about the exact nature of sociology. There would be a radical shift in this posture after the 1920s, however, as sociology began to find its footing as a legitimate, increasingly professional social science. From the 1940s through the 1960s, references to journalism and the news would be scarce in the most prestigious sociological journals; to the degree these references appeared at all, they were usually in book reviews where they were deployed as a slur to “other” improperly sociological works. Sociology, in short, moved to abandon any interest in attaining the kind of wide, popular accessibility that journalism possessed in exchange for gaining status as a science. Partly this relates to sociology’s own understanding of relevant data and the emergence of the “variable revolution,”51 and partly it relates to sociology’s attempt to distance itself from its reformist roots.52 In the 1970s and early 1980s, this neglect abated somewhat as sociologists turned their attention to the empirical investigation of news practices. Even here,
however, journalism was treated more as specimen on a laboratory bench than as anything resembling a kindred spirit in empirical investigation.

It would be journalism, starting with Philip Meyer in the 1960s, that would attempt to re-
bridge the boundary divide that had opened up in the ensuing debates, but it would do so almost entirely on the terms and in the vocabulary of social science. We need to remember that this was a reversal in the epistemological hierarchy, or at the very least a reversal in professional self-
confidence. Sociology entered the occupational arena in the 1900s as the little brother to journalism, at least in terms of age and power, and early sociologists adopted an ambiguous attitude toward their reform-minded cousins. By the 1960s, however, the shoe was on the other foot, at least for a vocal minority of empirically minded reporters. The consequences of that turn toward precision journalism and computational journalistic practice, and the role that movement played in the larger history of data journalism, will be the subject of a future work.

**Bibliography**

An Independent Journalist (1909). “Is an Honest and Sane Newspaper Press Possible?”


2 Ibid, 311.
5 Harrison, “Development and Spread of Social Surveys”
9 Carlson, this volume, citing Gieryn 1999, p. 1
11 The article types included traditional research articles, book reviews, and abstracts of articles and bibliographies.


Andrew Abbott (1999). *Department and Discipline: Chicago Sociology at 100*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), 81


ibid, 343

ibid, 345


ibid, 274

49 Grey 1966