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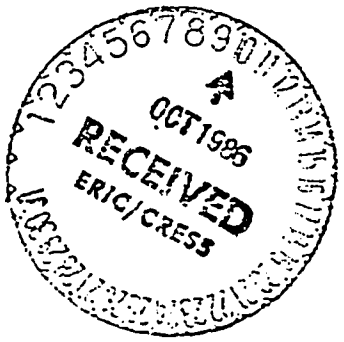
ABSTRACT

Because negative stereotypes have direct implications for social scientists' functioning and inclusion on multidisciplinary teams working in international development, rural sociologists should be aware of these stereotypes, identify their sources and modes of perpetuation, and utilize strategies to dispel unflattering characterizations. Common/current stereotypes which contribute to the widely-held archetype of social scientists as being "lousy team players" are the "know-it-all" and "know nothing," "Lone Ranger," "holier than thou," and "nay-sayer." Sloppy researchers, scatter-brains, and ditherers are stereotypes which surround the credibility of social scientists' work. Strategies to help correct general misapprehensions of the social scientist's role and usefulness include producing and disseminating reports for the public media documenting social scientists' concrete contributions to development projects; participating as a status equal in all phases of project design, start-up, implementation, and evaluation; and establishing frequent, open, in-depth, multi-channeled communication at all levels of project functioning. To confront teamship and credibility issues, it is helpful to explain to teammates the guiding concepts and principles of the discipline and detail how these approaches inform research methodologies and specific project activities. Academic programs must be redefined and expanded for students of rural sociology and anthropology to prepare them for the multi-disciplinary arena. (NEC)

ROLE, STATUS, AND STEREOTYPE: SOCIAL SCIENTISTS IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT[1]



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ABSTRACT

Rural sociology's increasingly active but changing involvement in international agricultural research and in the planning of development projects represents one of the ways in which it is a "discipline in transition." Along with cognate disciplines like anthropology, this has meant increasing participation on multi-disciplinary R&D teams. Yet members of these most "social" of the social sciences frequently encounter difficulties communicating and integrating with economic and technical researchers on development projects. Often, the social analysts' relative status is low, and their role in the R&D effort may be only vaguely defined and understood. Moreover, they may be subject to a number of negative stereotypes attaching to their discipline and its practitioners. This paper describes the most salient of such stereotypes, outlines some of the reasons for their existence, and explores strategies and needs for combatting them.

INTRODUCTION

The role of rural sociology in international development has changed substantially over the past 15 years in response to such events as: the New Directions amendments to the Foreign Assistance Act in 1973 and 1975, and USAID's consequent requirement for social soundness analysis on all projects; innovative R&D designs such as the Title XII Collaborative Research Support Programs (CRSPs); and the popularity of Farming Systems approaches to agricultural research. Rural sociologists now fill a variety of new and different roles on development projects. No longer are they primarily extension or land tenure experts. Instead, along with anthropologists, they increasingly form part of multi-disciplinary research and planning teams.

Yet members of these two most "social" of the social sciences frequently encounter difficulties communicating and integrating with economic and technical researchers on development teams. Typically, the social analysts'[2] relative status is low, and their role in the R&D effort may be only vaguely defined and understood. Moreover, they may be subject to a number of negative stereotypes of their discipline which unfortunately are widely held by members of other disciplines with whom rural sociologists and anthropologists are teamed on development or other projects. Negative images of the social scientist in turn feed back on her/his[3] role assignments and status standing.

This paper describes some of the most prevalent of such stereotypes, and related subtypes. It also addresses their validity -- i.e., how and to what extent do we, too, subscribe to, encourage, or "act out" these perceptions, and why? In this regard, we offer a few thoughts on the possible historical and academic underpinnings of these characters. These underpinnings can lead us, consciously or unconsciously, to reinforce certain stereotypes because they in fact embody basic elements of anthropological and sociological worldviews.

WHAT ARE THESE GUYS GOOD FOR, ANYWAY?

Monkeys and Bones, Socialites and Social Workers

Along with "the sexual life of savages," "monkeys and bones" references anthropological archetypes. These represent subject matters within the discipline which historically were among the first to fire the popular imagination. But these perceptions are not limited to the general public. As Rhoades (1983:32) notes, even fellow scientists identify anthropologists "as students of the exotic, quaint, and outdated" whose "thing should be headhunting." This image is familiar to all of us. Indeed, it may well fit a few of our mentors and colleagues. While hardly the image we might wish to foster, we may unwittingly promote this stereotype in recounting particularly juicy

fieldwork stories or arcane bits of cross-cultural trivia to students and co-workers. Moreover, as Bishop (1985) documents, these stereotypes are continually reinforced in the modern mass media; and they color conceptions about all social scientists working in the rural Third World.

As for "socialites and social workers," these constitute common, and closely related, misapprehensions of the sociologist on development projects. The reasoning is that, because sociologists study social phenomena, they should take charge of maintaining good public relations, both within and without the project and of organizing things like conferences, informal get-togethers, and itineraries (the socialite). For the same reason, they should also help handle personnel and management problems (the social worker). As Moris and Hatfield (1982) have observed, expectations of this genre can become so heavy, it is often impossible for project social scientists to find time for their analytic and planning functions.

The "socialite" image is aptly illustrated in the following anecdote. "One day one of my colleagues (an animal breeder) told me I must be a 'good sociologist'... I was curious as to the basis for his judgment since he knew nothing of what I have done... Well, he said, I seem to be a pretty friendly fellow and a lot of people stop in my office to talk with me each day. And, he continued, since sociology is the study of 'socializing,' I must be pretty good at my business!" (Gaylord 1985:1).

Excess Baggage

Closely linked to some of the foregoing stereotypes is the highly pervasive view of social scientists as "excess baggage." This essentially glosses the old song title, "Anything you can do, I [economists, agronomists, geneticists, etc.] can do better." Or at least, just as well. The song's refrain also all-too-often represents our best counter to this claim: "No you can't; yes I can. No you can't; yes I can."

A telling report of this stereotype is provided by one of our university colleagues, from whom we borrow the label. Describing his frustrations on a USAID project among the Maasai in the 1960s, he writes:"

> It was not clear to anyone what I was expected to contribute to the project... In fact, one of the agricultural technicians was so convinced that I was unnecessary and anyone could do my job that he tried to come up with sociological conclusions based on some interviews he conducted (Hamilton 1973:126, 130).

Another apt illustration of this view of social scientists--and perhaps, too, of our own inarticulateness on the subject--is provided by the sole social analyst on a large farming-systems

project in West Africa. She was asked by an agronomist, "Why do we need social scientists? I have lived several years in this culture; I know the people and I can ask them any questions I need to myself." Her tart reply was, "Well, why do we need agronomists? I've kept a garden all my life and I know how to grow things!"

This exchange occurred only three years ago. To take an even more recent example, a 1985 World Bank state-of-the-art review of farming systems research opines that adding anthropologists and their ilk to the development team is "merely an expensive way of avoiding a few, not very costly, mistakes," and that there may be little to distinguish us "from the economist with well-developed social perceptions" (Simmonds 1985:51; see also Cernea and Guggenheim n.d.).

Numerous examples of the excess baggage stereotype could be adduced, but the foregoing are highly illustrative. The last example -- that of the World Bank in 1985 -- stands as powerful testimony to the fact that we must do more to delineate, validate, and communicate precisely what we are "good for." Moreover, we must do this both at the macro-level of our disciplines, and at the micro-level of the individual who joins a multi-disciplinary team.

We may suffer "articulatory defects" in this regard for a variety of reasons. The first that comes to mind is conceptual and linguistic barriers between disciplines. The social scientist may believe he has clearly articulated what he is "good for," only to discover that his arguments are incomprehensible to teammates. This situation often results from jargonism, of which we are frequently -- and often justifiably -- accused. Along with many other types of communicative breakdowns common to multi-disciplinary teams, this problem has been much commented in the literature (e.g., Esslinger and McCorkle 1985, Shaner et al. 1981).

A second and related problem lies in our academic programs. Typically, there is little in our professional training to prepare us for, or even alert us to, the problematics of multi-disciplinary development work. This often leaves the social scientist who is new to such work in the same boat as his teammates. I.e., he, too, is unsure what he can do in practical, project terms.

Another impediment is that sometimes we are asked to justify our presence or even to draw up workplans based on only a rudimentary knowledge of the overall aims and structure of a project or of its target audience. In such instances, we are perforce vague about how we can contribute to a team's performance.

Finally, as other authors have noted (e.g. Rhoades et al. 1984), a further factor in this stereotype is the social scientist's generally subordinate status on multi-disciplinary projects. This encourages "doubts...as to a particular discipline's usefulness...and deprecation of their discipline" (Rickson and Rickson 1982:97).

Rear/Advance Guard

Of course, the excess baggage stereotype does not always hold. Sometimes projects believe they know exactly what the social scientist is "good for." This gives rise to two further stereotypes. The first is that of "rear guard." These are troops mustered in at project's end to do ex post facto evaluations, or sometimes conscripted at emergency points when other disciplines are stymied and project failure threatens. Needless to say, these can be very frustrating missions for the individual recruit. They assign social scientists the thankless task of pointing out others' mistakes. This understandably can trigger a host of negative images.

The converse of the rear guard is naturally the advance guard. The dictionary definition expresses this stereotype well: "troops going before the main force to clear the way, guard against surprise, etc." Many projects see social scientists as "heavy artillery" useful for "softening up" the natives and smoothing the way for technological or other changes -- changes which often have been planned with no social science input. Hoben (1982) locates the origin of this notion in the International Cooperation Administration's (ICA) recruitment of social scientists in the early 1950s. He writes that, "From the ICA's perspective, the task...was to facilitate the diffusion of improved technology by overcoming resistance to change grounded in traditional values, institutions, and practices (Hoben 1982:353).

Predictably, anthropologists bridled at this task, leading to considerable conflict with the agencies employing them, and to the withdrawal of many anthropologists from international development in the '60s (see Hoben 1982). In contrast, for rural sociologists of the period, the advance-guard role provided their first major entree into the development world. Rural sociology felt more comfortable in this role due to its involvement in adoption/diffusion research, community development, and the modernization paradigm.

SOCIAL SCIENTISTS MAKE LOUSY TEAM PLAYERS

Leaving aside larger questions of role or usefulness, we now turn to more specific, negative stereotypes of anthropologists and sociologists. Here we discuss only the most common and current of these unflattering images, drawing upon recent

conversations, observations, and reports from development workers in both the social and the technical sciences. The following stereotypes all relate to a widely-held archetype of social scientists as "lousy team players" on multi-disciplinary projects.

Know-It-Alls and Know-Nothingism

At times, social scientists are accused of a condescending, know-it-all stance. It is easy to see how this image might develop in the case of an anthropologist who is a specialist on the ethnography and ethnology of an area, while his teammates may be encountering its peoples and cultures for the first time. Also, the social scientist typically has more frequent and direct interaction with the target people, perhaps even living among them for some period of time. Deeming that he is therefore more cognizant of their worldview, complex socioeconomic realities, and so forth, he may be prone to a "Father Knows Best" attitude when it comes to introducing new research directions or technical interventions.

On occasion, we also encounter the converse of the know-it-all image -- "know nothingism." Development colleagues complain that we sometimes refuse to share all our knowledge with them, or that the information we do offer is irrelevant, abstruse, overly detailed, or otherwise useless. Now, the accusation that we withhold information seems largely unfair. In fact, usually we are faulted for talking too much rather than too little. The only instance in which it may be justified is when sensitive information might prejudice the well-being of human subjects.

Complaints about the abstruseness and irrelevance of our data are more common. This problem can understandably arise because co-workers from different disciplines may lack sufficient grasp of the other sciences to identify what constitutes significant data to them. Often, what the social scientist regards as important information may seem trivial to the technical scientist, and vice versa.

The complaint that social science data are overly detailed is more difficult to evaluate. This stereotype may reference a true know-nothingism insofar as volumes of ethnographic minutiae or massive charts and tables of statistical survey data indeed signify little without pertinent and succinct interpretation.

The Lone Ranger

We borrow this label from Art Hansen (pers. com.). By definition, Lone Rangers make lousy team players. Yet ironically this is what "social"-science training prepares us to become. Anthropology offers the most dramatic example of the Lone Ranger syndrome. There, traditional training ideally culminates in solitary withdrawal for one to three years (and some students never do return) into an alien culture. During this period, the

novitiate engages in intensely independent research, possibly with the exception of a local assistant trailing Tonto-like after him. Theoretically, this own-culture hermit emerges only rarely, to collect basic supplies or to deal with medical or other emergencies. The again-often-years-long analysis and reporting process which follows this monk-like retreat is also essentially a lone endeavor.

Here, we exaggerate somewhat for the sake of argument. Of course, many advantages accrue to this intensive fieldwork approach. To name but a few, e.g.: damping of observer's paradox effects which might arise from hordes of outsiders descending upon one tiny village; a truly more profound and personal comprehension of the intricate social weave and rich cultural tapestry of human existence; and near-total flexibility and freedom of action in every aspect of research. Indeed, considerations such as these are what account for this approach's pride of place in the anthropological tradition.

Rural sociologists are less Hi-Ho as Lone Rangers, perhaps as a result of their frequent work with extension and experiment station personnel and a stronger tradition of joint research and reporting. Nevertheless, the disciplinary norm is still one of individual endeavor.

Naturally, Lone Ranger behavior is inappropriate on multi-disciplinary projects. To cope successfully with the demands of collaborative work, traditionally trained social scientists must modify their Lone Ranger outlook and methods.

Holier Than Thou

Another prevalent image of social scientists as poor team players is their "holier than thou" stance. Very often indeed we convey the impression that we inhabit a higher and purer moral plane than other disciplines when it comes to proposed changes in indigenous systems and to the needs and sensitivities of the typically powerless peoples with whom many development projects deal.

This stereotype is so real that we hesitate even to label it as such. Its underpinnings within our disciplines are multiple and manifest: anthropology's historical posture as protector of endangered human species, plus its frequently blind eye to normal processes of sociocultural and technological change; rural sociology's founding concern with rural activism and with equity issues; and both disciplines' strongly humanistic orientation. An added consideration is the social scientist's complex and sometimes conflicting responsibilities to informants and study communities, as versus to project co-workers, institutional authorities, and often one or more national governments as well.[3] A delicate balance must sometimes be struck between project demands and professional ethics.

Of course, from our side of the disciplinary fence, "holier than thou" looks more like "knight in shining armor." In either case, these epithets gloss our sometimes too-ready tendency to champion sundry causes -- both within and without the context of the project at hand -- to "protect" (petrify?) a people and/or traditional aspects of their culture and society. If we do so with little consideration for how our behavior will impact upon project functioning, our teammates may begin to ask themselves just whose team the social scientist thinks he is playing on--or even if he's in the right game! To the extent that co-workers perceive the social scientist's team loyalties as lying with various "theys" rather than with the "us-es," his integration into and impact upon the team effort will be impaired.

Nay-Savers

One of the most common stereotypes of social scientists as lousy team players is that of nay-sayers or Cassandras. These doleful souls are forever raising objections to proposed research foci and methodologies or to specific interventions, and prophesying project failure if their warnings are not heeded.

The nay-sayer stereotype at times derives from the rear-guard role. As noted earlier, the social scientist is often mustered into an on-going program in which he never formed part of the "general staff" who designed it. Moreover, he may be recruited because implementation problems have arisen. Insofar as these problems result from design failures, he is doomed to be a nay-sayer. An instructive case study of the dynamics of this stereotype is Moris and Hatfield's retrospective of the ill-starred Maasai project mentioned above. They detail how the social scientist "may be put in the awkward position of defining what should have been done" and of contributing "unwanted and tardy advice" which despite "the fact that he was correct...did not endear him to his hard-pressed colleagues and superiors" who find themselves contractually obliged to implement the very design the social scientist is criticizing (Moris and Hatfield 1982:51).

Of course, a principal part of the social scientist's job on a development team may include suggesting appropriate research strategies, checking subjects' own view of their problems and needs against that of project personnel, anticipating difficulties or resistance to proposed changes arising from the human element, and identifying potentially deleterious impacts of project actions on the study group.

These are all very valid tasks, tasks which are imperative to true project success, and ones for which -- more than any other disciplines -- anthropology and rural sociology are best suited. But realistically, they are achieveable only if the social scientists is included in design decisions from project

inception. Otherwise, this "watch dog" (Rhoades 1983:27) or "conscience minding" (Campbell et al. 1981, Hansen and Erbaugh 1983) role may be interpreted as hypercritical of team efforts and aims, as a perverse proclivity on the part of the social scientist to block project progress, or even as personal attacks.

THE CREDIBILITY GAP

Assuming that issues of the social scientist's relevance, role, and teammanship can be resolved, one further question may still nag in teammates' minds: how credible is his work? A complex constellation of stereotypes surround this query, but we will deal with only two.

Sloppy Researchers

This stereotype applies to anthropologists and sociologists who depend upon participant observation and other qualitative methodologies. To some, this engenders an image of "ethnographic wool-gathering practiced by fuzzy thinkers who have an aversion to mathematics" (Trend, in Videlo 1980:344), who are so mentally under-endowed that they cannot even "understand the concept of 'opportunity cost'" (Rhoades et al. 1984:15), who spend long periods of time in a village "'having a good time' by socializing with the natives" (Hamilton 1973:126), "emerging at the end with the view that the villagers are all splendid chaps who ought to be allowed to get on...in their own way regardless of the fact that the world around them will not allow them to do so" (Simmonds 1985:51), and whose research techniques are biased by an incurable romanticization of indigenous cultures (cf. Aronson 1981:46 ff.).

This image is one of social science as Trivial Pursuit based on subjective, non-quantitative techniques that do not produce replicable, reliable results. But it hardly seems necessary to defend the use of qualitative methods. For one thing, we do not employ them exclusively. For another, applied by expert practitioners, many qualitative techniques are quite as rigorous as quantitative ones. Further, they are often more rapid and informative. These latter facts have lately gained broader recognition, with the result that qualitative research is rather in vogue in many circles, both social and technical. As for the claim that Rosseauean romanticism may obscure our research vision -- well, this leads us back to knight-in-shining-armor issues.

Scatter-Brains and Ditherers

A closely related complaint is that social scientists are "scatter-brained" or "unfocused." This stereotype is echoed above and in the discussion of know-nothingism. But here we refer specifically to the opinion that social scientists are very poor at concentrating their work on the concrete objectives of the project.

Anthropologists are particularly subject to this criticism. They are reputed to "have a tendency to follow leads that take them hither and yon" (Videlo 1980:349), and to "incline toward producing 600-page ethnographies, rather than concise, actionable sets of policy recommendations" (Trend, in Videlo 1980:344). Traditional sociologists are less frequently censured as scatter-brains due to their highly structured, largescale survey approach to data collection. However, they may be seen as ditherers, insofar as their massive statistical compilations -- while accepted as properly scientific -- often yield inconclusive results.

The foregoing stereotypes find a concrete basis in at least two disciplinary mores -- the principle of holism and traditional quantitative approaches in sociology. More broadly, social scientists may be thus perceived simply because many technical scientists do not acknowledge the importance of socio-cultural variables for project design and implementation.

CONCLUSION

Negative stereotypes have direct implications for social scientists' functioning, and even continued inclusion, on multi-disciplinary teams working in international development. It therefore behooves us to be aware of co-workers' stereotypes of our disciplines; insofar as possible, to identify the sources and modes of perpetuation of these stereotypes; and to work to change those which distort the image we wish to present to other disciplines. Below, we review and/or suggest some strategies for dispelling these unflattering characterizations.

One strategy to help correct general misapprehensions of the social scientist's role and usefulness is suggested by Bishop (1985:19). He urges greater use of the public media to broaden awareness of what we do, how we do it, and why. Lock et al. (1986) outline concrete ways to improve communication with the press and the public -- including academic incentives to publish in popular media, special press sessions at national meetings, and so forth.

These strategies would also help address excess baggage images. With specific reference to our place in international development, as a further move to educate the non-social-science professional community, we need to produce reports documenting social scientists' concrete contributions to development projects.[6] Moreover, such reports should be widely disseminated not only through social science outlets, but also in the professional journals and newsletters of other disciplines with whom social scientists are regularly teamed.

Clearly, social scientists must be included in all phases of

project design, start-up, implementation, and evaluation. Furthermore, as many authors have pointed out (e.g., Rhoades 1983, Rickson and Rickson 1982), to be effective, the social scientist must function as a status equal of other team members. Where these conditions are not met, perhaps we need to be more selective about the projects we accept. Often, stereotypes like the nay-sayer can be avoided only by rejecting a project with an innately faulty design. At the very least, honestly articulating caveats or potential contradictions to prospective employers should precede acceptance of a questionable project. At this point, too, mutual expectations about the social scientist's role and status should be aired.

To confront a variety of teamship and credibility issues, it is helpful to: explain to teammates the guiding concepts and principles of our disciplines; detail how these approaches inform our research methodologies and the specific project activities in which we are engaged; in turn, relate these to the larger team effort; and wherever possible, jointly design and implement the R&D. Certainly, this interactive approach has worked well in several instances known to the authors. Throughout this process, we should re-check make sure our actions do respond to project priorities, and that we have not in fact taken off on a disciplinary-specific tangent or a pet theory.

Relatedly, the importance of frequent, open, in-depth, and multi-channeled communication at all levels of project functioning cannot be overemphasized. As many experienced development workers have noted, this is key to successful multi-disciplinary research. Improved communications alone will go far towards dispelling negative stereotypes of the social scientist and enhancing his teamship skills.

At a broader level, for students of rural sociology and anthropology who are planning careers in international development, academic programs must be redefined and expanded to prepare them for the multi-disciplinary arena. Such programs must include access to hands-on experience in teamworking, whether through internships, participation in on-going projects, or other means.

As a final admonition here, we would like to suggest that a similar review of stereotypes that <u>we</u> may hold of other disciplines and their practitioners would prove equally instructive -- as would, too, a study of <u>their</u> professional "cultures." With the insights gained from this dual perspective, our influence and effectiveness on multi-disciplinary teams will be strengthened; and the transition into new roles for social scientists in international development will be eased.

NOTES

1 An earlier version of this paper dealing only with anthropologists was presented at the Annual Meetings of the Society for Applied Anthropology, Washington DC, March 1985. Preparation of the present version was supported by the Title XII Small Ruminant Collaborative Support Research Program (SR-CRSP) under Grant No. DAN-1328-G-SS-4093-00 through the SR-CRSP's Rural Sociology Project; additional support was provided by the University of Missouri-Columbia.

2 Throughout the text "social scientists, researchers, analysts" should be understood as (rural) sociologists and anthropologists only.

3 Hereafter, "he/his" refers equally to females and males.

4 It is only fair to note that anthropologists and sociologists are not always alone in this stereotype. Economist Douglas Horton remarks that, among technical scientists at the International Potato Center, "some confused economics with accounting and assumed that anyone with common sense and a hand calculator could do the necessary economic analysis" (Rhoades et al. 1984:14, quoted with permission of principal author).

5 Again in fairness, non-social-scientists are also embedded in the same sorts of complex structures. But their involvement with the target community is typically less intimate; and unlike anthropology and sociology, their disciplines may not have evolved specific ethical codes for such interactions.

6 Examples of such efforts to date include DeWalt (1983, 1985), IRRI (1982), Rhoades (1983), a collection of articles about the Collaborative Research Support Programs (CRSPs) in the July 1985 Rural Sociologist, and the newsletter Culture and Agriculture. This last example is particularly apt. The Anthropological Study Group on Agrarian Systems funds the newsletter's distribution gratis in order to publicize and to illustrate with case studies the discipline's usefulness in agricultural research and development.

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