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# Outline for the Sociological Study of an Occupation

(doi: 10.2383/32716)

Sociologica (ISSN 1971-8853)

Fascicolo 2, maggio-giugno 2010

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# Outline for the Sociological Study of an Occupation

by Everett Cherrington Hughes

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## I. The Natural History of the Occupation

- A. The occupation as it is. Its name, and the significance attached to it. The actual complex of tasks and skills, social and technical. Its economic and social standing.
- B. The rise of the occupation to its present condition and standing. Precursors of the present occupation. Its technological history. Its social and economic history. Its conventionally accepted history (real and mythical founders, heroes, villains, enemies, turning points.) Social movements from within or outside.
- C. Current trends, problems and conflicts (What makes it of interest now?)

## II. The Institutional Matrix (social organization)

- A. The institutional complex in which the work is done (e.g. Medicine: formal state licensing system, medical schools, hospitals, clinics, the doctor's private office, professional associations, specialty boards, professional journals, insurance schemes, etc. Industrial work: colleges, graduate schools, learned societies, research institutes, foundations, etc.)
- B. The economic complex:
  1. Ownership and control of tools and facilities of the trade (private ownership by each worker, corporations, non-profit organizations, public bodies, etc.) Changes in ownership, cost, and in manner of getting access to the tools and facilities.
  2. Methods of paying for work (fees paid by individuals for service rendered, fees paid by others; salaries, commissions, bonuses, profit from sales.) The economic incentives.

*Source:* "Sociological Study of an Occupation", in *E.C. Hughes Papers*, Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago, Box 16, File: "Occ. n.d." This was the original reference, which is however no more valid after the reorganization, in mid 1990s, by archival staff of the Hughes collection. Unfortunately, no cross-references have been provided from the original finding aid to the new one. The text has been originally collected, in 1991, by Rick Helmes-Hayes and is here published, edited by Marco Santoro, with the permission of Helen Hughes Brock and Elizabeth Hughes Schneewind.

3. Competition:
  - a. between individuals (for customers or clients, for jobs, for positions in the appropriate organizations.)
  - b. Institutional competition – clinics with private practitioners, competition of colleges for classes of students, etc.
  - c. Competition of one service, product or occupation with others (e.g. competition of medicine with osteopathy.)
- C. The system of authority, ranking and status in which the work is done.
  1. The categories of persons involved and the relations among them. (E.g. School teaching: school boards, voters, other institutions and agencies in the community, administrative officers of the school, teachers of various ranks, pupils, parents, Industry: Owners, managers, line and staff people of various specialties and ranks, supervisors, inspectors, workers, union officials, stock-holders, etc.)
  2. The formal prerogatives of each, and conflict concerning them.
- D. Formal arrangements concerning entry to the occupation, learning of the techniques (see section on Career), hiring, promotion, discharge, etc. The basic work situations, as conceived ideally and as they occur in practice.
  1. The smaller work drama. This refers essentially to the more common, day-by-day interaction. (E.g. interaction between waitress and customer in restaurant, involving also the kitchen help, the owner, the head-waitress, etc. Interaction between teacher and pupils, occasionally complicated by parents, principals, other teachers, etc.)
  2. The larger work drama. Interaction in the larger institutions and with people outside.

### III. Collegueship (relations between fellow-workers)

- A. Formal criteria for inclusion or exclusion, for internal differentiation (specialties, etc.); marginal and moot cases.
- B. Informal criteria (expected auxiliary characteristics of colleagues – age, sex, social class<sup>a</sup>, ethnic, religious, racial, personality, etc.) and informal collegueship.
- C. The obligation of collegueship, in theory and in practice, and in relation to obligation to other persons, institutions and society at large. Conflicts of obligation.
- D. The occupational culture: Lore, secrets, jokes and their functions. Ethos: general philosophy of the occupational group, its conception of its rightful place, its sense of common problems, its image of the lay world, of the obligations of colleagues to each other and to the world.

### IV. Occupational control

- A. License. Who is allowed to do the work, and what is it that they are allowed to do – explicitly or by implication?
  1. Degree of monopoly and how enforced.
  2. Conflicts over the license, its nature and extent. (e.g., the right of teachers to study communism, to express views contrary to those of the community at large, etc.)
- B. The folkways, mores (rules) and sanctions of the colleague-group.
  1. The recurring situations for which rules grow up.
  2. The rationale of the rules.
  3. Sanctions in the power of the group and actually applied.

- C. Direct and indirect control from outside (clients, employers, other occupations, public opinion, government) in relation to colleague control (e.g., who decides when a mistake has been made, and who applies sanctions?)

#### V. The Person and his Career

- A. The process of choosing and getting into an occupation.
  - 1. The perspective of family, class, race, sex – what occupations are brought to one's attention in early childhood and at successive stages of one's life, schooling, etc.
  - 2. Influence of school, peers, etc., in encouraging and discouraging various choices and ambitions. Social barriers.
- B. The career line. Learning and initiation, relation of technical learning to role-playing. Crucial points of decision and action. Styles of career. Career orbits. Success and status cycles in relation to age, marriage, experience and other factors. Mechanisms of success and failure.
- C. Work and the self. Sense of identification with occupation and with fellow-workers. Sense of mission, of success. The setting of personal goals and expectations. Counter-identification: relations of work-self to family, race, nationality, religion, etc.

#### VI. Occupations and Society (occupational and professional politics)

- A. The mandate and the struggle to define it and put it into effect (e.g., the medical profession seeks to define disease and health, to say how medical practice shall be organized and services distributed, etc.) The claims of the profession in relation to society and the state.
- B. Conflicts of the occupation with others, with society at large, with other institutions.
- C. The internal politics of the occupation.
- D. Occupational associations; selection of members, purposes, policies, and action. Relation to informal organization, cliques, etc.
- E. Modes of collective action in relation to the state, social change, and crises. (Strikes, pressure, boycott, propaganda, force.)
- F. The problem of freedom and professional neutrality.

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<sup>a</sup> In the original text, "social" and "class" are separated by a comma (editor's note).