American Sociological Association

Code of Ethics

PREAMBLE

Along with those in other scholarly and scientific disciplines, sociologists subscribe to the general tenets of science and scholarship. Teaching sociologists are also guided by ethical and professional principles that govern that activity. In addition, because of its specific subject matters, sociologists are especially sensitive to the potential for harm to individuals, groups, organizations, communities and societies that may arise out of the misuse of sociological work and knowledge.

As a discipline committed to the free and open access to knowledge and to self-regulation through peer review and appraisal, sociology shares with other disciplines the commitment to the pursuit of accurate and precise knowledge and to public disclosure of findings. However, because sociology necessarily entails study of individuals, groups, organizations and societies, these principles may occasionally conflict with more general ethical concerns for the rights of subjects to privacy and for the treatment of subjects with due regard for their integrity, dignity and autonomy. This potential conflict provides one of the justifications for a code of ethics.

The styles of sociological work are diverse and changing. So also are the contexts within which sociologists find employment. These diversities of procedures and context have led to ambiguities concerning appropriate professional behavior. These ambiguities provide another justification for this code.

Finally, this code also attempts to meet the expressed needs of sociologists who have asked for guidance in how best to proceed in a variety of situations involving subjects of investigation, relations with colleagues, and public authorities.

This code establishes feasible requirements for ethical behavior. These requirements cover many—but not all—of the potential sources of ethical conflict that may arise in scholarship, research, teaching and practice. Most represent prima facie obligations that may admit of exceptions but which should generally stand as principles for guiding conduct. The code states an associational consensus about ethical behavior upon which the Committee on Professional Ethics will base its judgments when it must decide whether individual members of the Association have acted unethically in specific instances. More than this, however, the code is meant to sensitize all sociologists to the ethical issues that may arise in their work, and to encourage sociologists to educate themselves and their colleagues to behave ethically. To fulfill these purposes, we, the members of the American Sociological Association, affirm and support the following Code of Ethics:

1. SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

A. Objectivity and Integrity

Sociologists should strive to maintain objectivity and integrity in the conduct of sociological research and practice.

1. Sociologists should adhere to the highest possible technical standards in their research. When findings may have direct implications for public policy or for the well-being of subjects, research should not be undertaken unless the requisite skills and resources are available to accomplish the research adequately.

2. Since individual sociologists vary in their research modes, skills and experience, sociologists should always set forth ex ante the disciplinary and personal limitations that condition whether or not a research project can be successfully completed and condition the validity of findings.

3. Regardless of work settings, sociologists are obligated to report findings fully and without omission of significant data. Sociologists should also disclose details of their theories, methods and research designs that might bear upon interpretation of research findings.
4. Sociologists must report fully all sources of financial support in their publications and must note any special relations to any sponsor.

5. Sociologists should not make any guarantees to subjects—individuals, groups or organizations—unless there is full intention and ability to honor such commitments. All such guarantees, once made, must be honored unless there is a clear, compelling and overriding reason not to do so.

6. Consistent with the spirit of full disclosure of method and analysis, sociologists should make their data available to other qualified social scientists, at reasonable cost, after they have completed their own analyses, except in cases where confidentiality or the claims of a fieldworker to the privacy of personal notes necessarily would be violated in doing so. The timeliness of this obligation is especially critical where the research is perceived to have policy implications.

7. Sociologists must not accept grants, contracts or research assignments that appear likely to require violation of the principles above, and should dissociate themselves from research when they discover a violation and are unable to achieve its correction.

8. When financial support for a project has been accepted, sociologists must make every reasonable effort to complete the proposed work, including reports to the funding source.

9. When several sociologists, including students, are involved in joint projects, there should be mutually accepted explicit agreements, preferably written, at the outset with respect to division of work, compensation, access to data, rights of authorship, and other rights and responsibilities. Of course, such agreements may need to be modified as the project evolves.

10. When it is likely that research findings will bear on public policy or debate, sociologists should take particular care to state all significant qualifications on the findings and interpretations of their researches.

B. Sociologists must not knowingly use their disciplinary roles as covers to obtain information for other than disciplinary purposes.

C. Cross-national Research

Research conducted in foreign countries raises special ethical issues for the investigator and the professional. Disparities in wealth, power, and political systems between the researcher's country and the host country may create problems of equity in research collaboration and conflicts of interest for the visiting scholar. Also, to follow the the precepts of the scientific method—such as those requiring full disclosure—may entail adverse consequences or personal risks for individuals and groups in the host country. Finally, irresponsible actions by a single researcher or research team can eliminate or reduce future access to a country by the entire profession and its allied fields.

1. Sociologists should not use their research or consulting roles as covers to gather intelligence for any government.

2. Sociologists should not act as agents for any organization or government without disclosing that role.

3. Research should take culturally appropriate steps to secure informed consent and to avoid invasions of privacy. Special actions may be necessary where the individuals studied are illiterate, of very low social status, and/or unfamiliar with social research.

4. While generally adhering to the norm of acknowledging the contributions of all collaborators, sociologists working in foreign areas should be sensitive to harms that may arise from disclosure, and respect a collaborator's wish and/or need for anonymity. Full disclosure may be made later if circumstances permit.

5. All research findings, except those likely to cause harm to collaborators and participants, should be made available in the host country, ideally in the language of that country. Where feasible, raw data stripped of identifiers should also be made available. With repressive governments and in situations of armed conflict, researchers should take particular care to avoid inflicting harm.
6. Because research and/or findings may have important political repercussions, sociologists must weigh carefully the political effects of conducting research or disclosure of findings on international tensions or domestic conflicts. It can be anticipated that there are some circumstances where disclosure would be desirable despite possible adverse effects; however, ordinarily research should not be undertaken or findings released when they can be expected to exacerbate international tensions or domestic conflicts.

D. Work Outside of Academic Settings

Sociologists who work in organizations providing a lesser degree of autonomy than academic settings may face special problems. In satisfying their obligations to employers, sociologists in such settings must make every effort to adhere to the professional obligations contained in the code. Those accepting employment as sociologists in business, government, and other non-academic settings should be aware of possible constraints on research and publication in those settings and should negotiate clear understandings about such conditions accompanying their research and scholarly activity.

E. Respect for the Rights of Research Populations

1. Individuals, families, households, kin and friendship groups that are subjects of research are entitled to rights of biographical anonymity. Organizations, large collectivities such as neighborhoods, ethnic groups, or religious denominations, corporations, governments, public agencies, public officials, persons in the public eye, are not entitled automatically to privacy and need not be extended routinely guarantees of privacy and confidentiality. However, if any guarantees are made, they must be honored unless there are clear and compelling reasons not to do so.

2. Information about persons obtained from records that are open to public scrutiny cannot be protected by guarantees of privacy or confidentiality.

3. The process of conducting sociological research must not expose subjects to substantial risk or personal harm. Where modest risk or harm is anticipated, informed consent must be obtained.

4. To the extent possible in a given study, researchers should anticipate potential threats to confidentiality. Such means as the removal of identifiers, the use of randomized responses, and other statistical solutions to problems of privacy should be used where appropriate.

5. Confidential information provided by research participants must be treated as such by sociologists, even when this information enjoys no legal protection or privilege and legal force is applied. The obligation to respect confidentiality also applies to members of research organizations (interviewers, coders, clerical staff, etc.) who have access to the information. It is the responsibility of the chief investigator to instruct staff members on this point.

II. PUBLICATIONS AND REVIEW PROCESS

A. Questions of Authorship and Acknowledgment

1. Sociologists must acknowledge all persons who contributed significantly to the research and publication processes.

2. Claims and ordering of authorship must accurately reflect the contributions of all participants in the research and writing process, including students.

3. Material taken verbatim from another person's published or unpublished work must be explicitly identified and referenced to its author. Borrowed ideas or data, even if not quoted, must be explicitly acknowledged.

3. In submission for publication, authors, editors and referees share coordinate responsibilities.

1. Journal editors must provide prompt decisions to authors of submitted manuscripts. They must monitor the work of associate editors and other referees so that delays are few and reviews are conscientious.
2. An editor's commitment to publish an essay must be binding on the journal.
3. Editors receiving reviews of manuscripts from persons who have previously reviewed those manuscripts for another journal should ordinarily seek additional reviews.
4. Submission of a manuscript to a professional journal clearly grants that journal first claim to publish, provided a decision on the submitted paper is rendered with reasonable promptness. Except where journal policies explicitly allow multiple submissions, a paper submitted to one English language journal may not be submitted to another journal published in English until after an official decision has been received from the first journal, although, of course, the article can be withdrawn from all consideration to publish.

C. Participation in Review Processes
Sociologists are frequently asked to provide evaluations of manuscripts, research proposals, or other work of professional colleagues. In such work, sociologists should hold themselves to high standards of performance, in several specific ways:

1. Sociologists should decline requests for reviews of the work of others where strong conflicts of interest are involved, such as may occur when a person is asked to review work by teachers, friends, or colleagues for whom he or she feels an overriding sense of personal obligation, competition, or enmity, or when such requests cannot be fulfilled on time.
2. Materials sent for review should be read in their entirety and considered carefully. Evaluations should be justified with explicit reasons.
3. Sociologists who are asked to review manuscripts and books they have previously reviewed should make this fact known to the editor requesting the review.

III. TEACHING AND SUPERVISION
The routine conduct of faculty responsibilities is treated at length in the faculty codes and AAUP rules accepted as governing procedures by the various institutions of higher learning. Sociologists in teaching roles should be familiar with the content of the codes in force at their institutions and should perform their responsibilities within such guidelines.

A. Sociologists are obligated to protect the rights of students to fair treatment.

1. Sociologists should provide students with a fair and honest statement of the scope and perspective of their courses, clear expectations for student performances and fair evaluations of their work.
2. Departments of Sociology must provide graduate students with explicit policies and criteria about recruitment, admission, courses and examination requirements, financial support, and conditions of possible dismissal.
3. Sociology Departments should help to locate employment for their graduates.
4. Sociologists must refrain from disclosure of personal information concerning students where such information is not directly relevant to issues of professional competence.

B. Sociologists must refrain from exploiting students.

1. Sociologists must not coerce or deceive students into serving as research subjects.
2. Sociologists must not represent the work of students as their own.

C. Sociologists must not use their professional positions or rank to coerce personal or sexual favors or economic or professional advantages from students, research assistants, clerical staff or colleagues.

D. Sociologists may not permit personal animosities or intellectual differences vis-a-vis colleagues to foreclose student access to those colleagues.

The Standing Committee on Professional Ethics, appointed by the Council of the American Sociological Association, shall have primary responsibility for the interpretation of this Code, for the investigation of complaints brought under it, and for recommendations to Council pertinent to such complaints.

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