Men do not usually define the troubles they endure in terms of historical change and institutional contradiction... They do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world. They cannot cope with their personal troubles in such ways as to control the structural transformations that usually lie behind them (Mills, 1959: 3-4).

These words by C. Wright Mills inspired many of us to go into sociology. We hoped to offer our students the opportunity to develop this quality of mind by teaching a sociology which was truly relevant to their lives. Critical sociology courses, however, rarely focus on the links between social trends and individual life histories. We talk about class, racial and ethnic groups, gender and age groups, but rarely about how all these and other social factors effect the life courses of individual people.

Introductory sociology books typically begin with sterile, impersonal capsule biographies of sociology's founders. Sociology texts, whether traditional or critical, typically tell nothing of how sociology's founders grasped the interplay between man and society in their own lives. Although the term "founding fathers" is not used, the textbooks present sociology's founders as icons complete with "chairman-of-the-board" type photographs. Students are implicitly encouraged to revere them as wise men who created the great ideas which inspire the discipline. Critical sociology texts differ more in their choice of the figures offered - Marx and Mills instead of Durkheim and Weber - than in the depth of their analysis of the interplay of biography and history in the founders' lives.

In recent years, however, the relevance of canonical figures has been under assault throughout the academic curriculum. Feminists and minority activists object to being required to read the works of so many "dead white men" instead of more contemporary and "relevant" works by people from their own groups. All students may question why, as we approach the twenty-first century, critical sociology remains so firmly rooted in ideas created in the nineteenth.

Mills distinguished between personal troubles and public issues and urged sociologists to probe the links between them. One might think that, of all people, the most eminent sociologists would have been able to use their sociological imagination to enrich their understanding of their personal troubles. Biographical information about eminent sociologists, however, suggests that this was
frequently not the case. Indeed, in some cases our founders seem to have used sociological ideas as a defense against self-understanding. In her biographical study of William F. Ogburn, for example, Laslett (1990: 428) argued that "Ogburn's struggle to control emotion in his personal life, to distance himself from the early relationship with his mother, was a key to his passionate commitment to objectivism in sociology." More generally, Laslett argued that the dominant scientific paradigms in sociology have been shaped by male sociologists' need to define and defend their masculinity.

This is only one of the many exciting issues that can be raised in sociology courses when the founders are discussed as people instead of as disembodied founts of abstract concepts and perspectives. Many instructors may find, however, that their own background is thin in this area. Even graduate social theory courses often include little serious biographical discussion. In this paper, therefore, I offer biographical vignettes of five "founding fathers" frequently mentioned in the first chapter of introductory sociology texts: Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. No critical evaluation of their work is intended, nor can a brief summary pretend to a comprehensive analysis of their life histories. What the vignettes offer is essential biographical information which can be used to supplement the scholastic biographical sketches in most texts.

Auguste Comte: 1798-1857

Isidore-Auguste-Marie-Françoise-Xavier Comte's father was a civil servant who was too honest and nonpolitical to earn more than a modest living (Standley, 1981; Dumas, 1905; Gouhier, 1931; Goertzel, 1992). His mother was twelve years older than his father and was the dominant figure in the family. She doted on her "pet Isidore." Young Isidore won a scholarship to the Lycée, a drab military school, when he was only nine years old. He was unhappy in school because he missed his family and found the atmosphere dreary. He was small, his face was scarred from smallpox, and he got into a lot of fights. But he did well academically, aided by a phenomenal memory, and won admission to the mathematics department at the Ecole Polytechnique. There he participated in a student movement against authoritarian grading practices. When the movement escalated and the students went on strike, the government shut the school down for the rest of the term. For some reason, Comte never applied for readmission when the school reopened and never got his degree.

This lack of credentials led him to a job as secretary to Henri de Saint-Simon, whose disciple he became. He also fell in love with the mistress of a wealthy lawyer. He married the woman and the lawyer signed up with Auguste for algebra lessons. His wife was registered as a prostitute and went back to this profession when funds were short.

Comte undertook his massive Course in Positive Philosophy as a way of making a living without a university appointment. He proposed to cover all of scientific knowledge in seventy-two lectures. He worked so hard on this project that he had a nervous breakdown characterized by violent rages and irrational attacks on his wife and other people. He spent eight months in a prestigious
mental institution which treated him with leeches, enemas, cold and hot baths, and supportive talk therapy. The hospital released him as incurable, but he was nursed back to health by his wife and mother.

In the "personal preface" to the last volume of his Cours de Philosophie Positive Comte (1908: viii) explains that his illness was the result of the "fatal concurrence of great mental or moral pain (peines morales) with a violent excess of work." He thought his illness would have cured itself if not for the treatment at the mental hospital. He attributed his recovery at home to the "intrinsic power of his own organization assisted by affectionate domestic attention."

His psychiatrist diagnosed him as a megalomaniac, noting symptoms including grandiose thinking, disorientation with regard to time and space, disparate associations of ideas, belief in bizarre images, a tendency to strange discourse, and an inclination to the most ridiculous actions (Dumas, 1905). He needed hospitalization because he was a danger to himself and others. He made several suicide attempts.

After recovering from acute illness, Comte kept his manic tendencies largely under control with strenuous mental discipline, although he had episodes of excessive rage and minor breakdowns throughout his life. He thought much of the world was conspiring against him. He never succeeded in obtaining regular university employment, despite his great eminence as a scholarly writer. Throughout his life, he believed that the forces of theology and metaphysics in the academic world were conspiring against him.

Comte's personal troubles had little to do with the kinds of macrosociological problems which C. Wright Mills had in mind in The Sociological Imagination. Comte could have had a comfortable career as a distinguished professor if he had been able to keep his emotions under control. His troubles can more readily be explained in psychodynamic terms. Being sent away to boarding school at nine years of age interrupted the normal working out of his relationship with his parents. This may have led him to direct his aggressions towards his teachers and school authorities. This is consistent with Comte's own understanding of his childhood. As an adult, he still resented having been "torn as a child from the normal emotional environment of his home and placed in a baneful (funeste) scholastic environment" (Gouhier, 1931: 40). He had little respect for his father, thinking him unworthy of having been the sire of the High Priest of Humanity.

Comte frequently formed close friendships with other men, only to break angrily with them if they contradicted him in any way. His relationship with Saint-Simon ended in this way when he accused Saint-Simon of not giving him credit for his contributions to their joint work. Saint-Simon was 38 years older than Comte and may have been a father figure. Comte dropped the name Isidore, which he had used up until then, when he met Saint-Simon, which may have signaled a desire to form a new identity with a new father figure.

Two years after he finally divorced his wife, Comte fell madly in love with a woman who was terminally ill and unwilling to consummate a relationship with him. He idolized her for a year as she died, spending much of his time at her bedside. This seems to
have been a cathartic experience which improved his spirits and
lessened his commitment to serious scholarly work. His work rapidly
became more bizarre and eccentric.

Throughout his life, Comte idealized and idolized women, was
devoted to them, and sought to keep them on a pedestal. He wanted
to deny them the right to earn their own living so that they would
be dependent on their husbands and fathers. A Freudian might
interpret this pattern as unconscious effort to finish his rebellion
against his father and win his mother's attentions. The worship of
women was a central focus of his Religion of Humanity. He wrote a
catechism which replaced father, son and holy ghost with mother,
wife and daughter.

Herbert Spencer: 1820-1803

Herbert Spencer was the sickly child of an English
schoolteacher (Peel, 1971; Kennedy, 1978; Schoenwald, 1968). His
father was sincerely devoted to his work and to his principles but
often lacking in personal sympathy or sensitivity. Herbert thought
that his father had:
one great drawback--he was not kind to my mother.
Exacting and inconsiderate, he did not habitually
display that sympathy which should characterize the
marital relation. His uniform habit of deciding on
a course of conduct and persisting in it regardless
of circumstances, was here injuriously displayed
(Spencer, 1904, Vol 1: 61).

His father seems to have been disappointed when, after their
marriage, his wife lost interest in his schemes to reform the
world. She may have been preoccupied with raising Herbert and a
sister one year younger who died at the age of two, as well as
giving birth to five other children none of whom lived more than ten
days. She had a strong religious sense of duty and Herbert thought
that she sacrificed herself unduly for others to the point of being
chronically exhausted.

Two or three years after their marriage, Spencer's father's
chronic irritability and headaches became disabling. He had to give
up school teaching, although he continued with private lessons. He
hesitated to visit his brother for fear that "I shall tire you with
my petulance and irritability. I have at times scarcely any command
over my feelings--they carry me away before I am aware" (Spencer,
1904, Vol. 1: 75).

Perhaps because of his own illness, and the death of his other
children, Spencer's father was solicitous of his son's health and
chose not to submit him to the rigors of conventional schooling.
Herbert studied at home and was allowed considerable latitude in his
studies. He had little discipline for subjects such as foreign
languages, which he found boring, but great energy for his own
scientific interests.

At the age of thirteen, Herbert was sent to live for a summer
with his uncle, Reverend Thomas Spencer, who was prepared to
exercise the discipline necessary to prepare Herbert for admission
to Cambridge. Herbert became so distressed that he ran away. He
covered ninety-five miles on foot in two days with almost no money
for food or expenses and surprised his parents by showing up at
home. His parents allowed him to remain with them for a time but
eventually persuaded him to stay with his uncle for three years, returning home for summers.

In addition to drilling him on Latin, Greek, French, mathematics and physics, Uncle Thomas gave Herbert a role model as the author of twenty-three pamphlets on social issues each of which sold about 10,000 copies. Uncle Thomas was a crusader for the temperance movement and encouraged Herbert to become involved in politics. Herbert's early political and economic ideas were developed in discussions with his uncle who also encouraged him to consider engineering instead of teaching as a career.

Perhaps because of his parents' unhappy marriage, Spencer never married. He feared getting tied down by the financial responsibility for a wife and children and he found flaws in all the young women who were introduced to him. In his own words: It seems probable that this abnormal tendency to criticize has been a chief factor in the continuance of my celibate life. Readiness to see inferiorities rather than superiorities, must have impeded the finding of one who attracted me in adequate degree (Spencer, 1904, Vol 2: 520).

By the age of twenty, he had formulated the libertarian principles which "much of my energy in subsequent years was spent in justifying and elaborating" (Spencer, 1904, Vol. 1: 225). He believed that government should interfere with people as little as possible, allowing social institutions to develop freely through a process of competition. He had an eventful career as an engineer and investor before turning to journalism and writing as a career.

At the age of thirty, he published his first book, Social Statics: The Conditions essential to Human Happiness specified, and the first of them developed. Its essential argument was that the human happiness depended on the state leaving people alone to compete and struggle for survival. His later books were guided by the same fundamental principle, as he felt obliged to show how his general philosophical principles could explain everything in biology, psychology and sociology. He clung to doctrines such as the inheritance of acquired characteristics and missed discovering the principle of the "survival of the fittest" until he read Darwin (Spencer, 1904, v. 1: 451-452).

Before he was thirty, Spencer had taken great pride in his cleverness in making inventions and mathematical discoveries. He reprinted a number of these as appendices to his Autobiography, including a mathematical proof of some hitherto unnoticed properties of the circle, an instrument for calculating the velocity of railway trains, and some ideas for a universal language. Once he became obsessed with his philosophical ideas, however, he ceased to puzzle over problems (Spencer, 1904, Vol 1: 463). He had no further interest in unsolved mysteries. Instead, he sought instances or examples to confirm his convictions. He defended his ideas relentlessly and effectively, an approach which made his books quite popular with a general audience which was eager for clear and unambiguous answers to complex problems. As a child Beatrice Webb had the opportunity to watch Spencer at work: she was fascinated to watch the way in which Mr. Spencer used the specimens brought to him to prove
this or that theory. Her sharp eyes were quick to spot that he only noted those which endorsed the point he was making. The rest was discarded. All his theories were built up in this way. He began with his proposition or principle and found the facts to prove it afterwards. His method of writing a book was unique. He would arrange his title headings on foolscap paper on the floor in a semicircle about his chair. Seated in the centre, he threw, from a pile collected by his secretary in order to prove his point, each "fact" on its appropriate chapter. Any unwanted ones fluttered away to oblivion (Muggeridge and Adam, 1968: 42).

This process involved considerable strain, and he had a nervous breakdown in 1855, from which he never fully recovered. He became something of a recluse, finding it difficult to bear the stress of spending time with other people. As a writer his lasting contribution was as a "dogmatist of genius" (Houghton, 1957: 139-140) who took one basic idea, evolution, and developed all of its ramifications. He was profoundly unhappy in his old age because his individualist ideas were out of touch with the ascendance of collectivist thinking, particularly in intellectual circles. In his last days, he begged Beatrice Webb to become his literary executor, but she felt she could not because of her commitment to socialism. Ironically, his ideas seem to be coming back into vogue today (Rule, 1991; Smith, 1991: chapter 13).

Karl Marx: 1818-1883

As a student, Karl Marx was preoccupied with the quest for a belief system to give meaning to his life (Siegel, 1978; Goertzel, 1992). This need may have originated in empathy for his father's experience of having been forced to renounce his Jewish religion in order to continue practicing his profession as a lawyer. There is, however, no evidence of how Heinrich Marx communicated his feelings about his conversion to his son. In his letters to Karl when Karl was away at college, Heinrich seemed ambivalent. He wanted Karl to have a successful career, but also to be true to his beliefs. Heinrich died when Karl was only twenty, so the relationship between them may never have been resolved. David Felix asserts that "Karl Marx never consciously connected his contempt for the liberals in general with his feelings for the liberal gentleman Heinrich Marx" (Felix, 1983: 3). If so, this contempt must have been deeply buried in Marx's unconscious. Their letters were quite friendly. When Heinrich was ill, Karl wrote of "the deep affection, the immeasurable love, which I often have not been able to express as I should like; in the hope that you too, dear and eternally beloved Father, mindful of my storm-tossed feelings, will forgive me when my heart must often have seemed to have gone astray as the burdens of my spirit stifled it" (Marx, 1967 [1837]: 49-50). Karl did have some open animosity toward his mother, who controlled his inheritance after Heinrich died and who is remembered for expressing the wish that Karl would stop writing about capital and accumulate some.

While at university, Karl communicated his concerns about low self esteem to his father. He wrote Heinrich that "self-contempt
is a serpent which eternally gnaws in one's breast, sucks out the heart's lifeblood, and mixes it with the poison of misanthropy and despair" (Marx, 1967: 38). He tried law, philosophy and poetry as professions, but was dissatisfied with his work. He abandoned a lengthy treatise on the philosophy of law and decided that his poetry was worthless: "the realm of true poetry flashed open before me like a distant faery place, and all my creations collapsed into nothing." He was so vexed that "I was for several days quite unable to think. Like a lunatic I ran around in the garden" (Marx, 1967: 46, 47).

Marx finally hit on Hegelian philosophy as the answer to his search for meaning. His father thought little of Hegel, believing that Hegelians "screw their words up so tightly that they cannot hear themselves; because their torrent of words conveys no thoughts, or confused ones, they baptize it as a birth of genius" (Siegel, 1967: 60). Karl had at first found Hegel's "grotesque craggy melody unpleasing," but turned again to Hegel with "the definite intention of discovering our mental nature to be just as determined, concrete, and firmly established as our physical" (Marx, 1967: 46).

Hegelianism seems to have given Marx the confidence that his anguish was not merely his own personal problem but a part of the dialectic of history. Despite his doubts, Heinrich recognized the sincerity of his son's convictions and accepted them since "your philosophy satisfactorily agrees and harmonizes with your conscience" (Marx, 1967: 60).

Hegelian philosophy also offered Karl the prospect of a secure career as a university professor without having to compromise his convictions as his father had done. As an adolescent he had written in a school essay that a poor choice of vocation was "an act which can destroy a man's entire life, defeat all his plans, and make him unhappy" (Marx, 1967: 36).

He was, however, unable to find an academic post when he had finished his degree and went instead into radical journalism. When his newspaper was suppressed, he emigrated to Paris and became involved in revolutionary political circles. He never abandoned journalism entirely, however, spending many of his precious hours on stories for American newspapers. After emigrating to England, he developed the synthesis of Hegelian philosophy, French socialism and English economics which gave his life meaning as part of the struggle for socialist revolution.

Marx's vision of socialism was one where no one would have to do any work he did not wish to do. His famous portrait of socialism as a society where he could "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind" (Marx and Engels, 1947: 22) was taken from French utopian socialist Charles Fourier (1971: 277). Unlike Fourier, who had an elaborate theory of psychological types which purported to show why such a system would work, Marx and Engels refused to give a detailed description of their utopia (Kumar, 1987).

Marx struggled to be a rigorous scientist, not a visionary painting wishful portraits of an idyllic future. Nevertheless, he was adamant in predicting the inevitability of socialist revolution. He also disdained making moral or ethical judgments, yet his
writings are filled with moral condemnation of the capitalist social order.

Marx married a woman from his home town and had a number of children, several of whom died in childhood. The Marxes refused to abandon middle class standards in their personal life and the family always had a servant. Karl's income at all times was several times that of a skilled worker but they were continually in financial difficulty and had difficulty paying for medical care or the seaside vacations the doctors recommended for their children. They depended on charity from Engels, who ran his family's textile business in Manchester, supplemented with inheritances and Karl's part-time journalism.

The worse things got for his family personally, the more Karl became committed to his theories. His body was covered with caruncles. The doctors prescribed rest, exercise and a good diet, but Marx refused to follow their advice. He could not explain to his doctors "the causes that compel me to these extravagances" (Seigel, 1978: 384). He smoked incessantly, despite a lifelong affliction with the lung disease which had killed his father and which kept him out of the Prussian army as a young man.

Despite all his efforts, he was never able to complete Das Kapital. He knew his general theories about the capitalist economic relations were "contentless" if they could not explain actual trends in profits and wages. He wrote and rewrote, never satisfied with the results, yet never questioning the philosophy which gave his life meaning.

One might think that Marx's theories of economic exploitation could have offered him an understanding of his financial plight. But his problems were not imposed on him by the system but by his refusal to accept paid employment. He once remarked that the difficulties which were agonizing his family would disappear "tomorrow, if tomorrow I decided to engage in some practical business" (Siegel, 1978: 385). Other radicals took jobs to pay their bills. Marx stuck to journalism even though it paid poorly for the time and effort expended.

Although Marx was not suicidal, he insisted on a life style which was damaging to his health. Wilhelm Liebknecht was "convinced--and the physicians who last treated him were of the same opinion--that had Marx made up his mind to a life in keeping with nature, that is, with the demands of his organism and of hygiene, he would still be alive today [1895]" (Liebknecht, 1978: 63). His wife endured their financial problems stoically, even when they endangered the children's health, and tolerated his affair with the family's servant. Rather than compromise the family's respectability, Marx's illegitimate son was raised by foster parents (Johnson, 1988). His youngest daughter, Eleanor, carried on his commitments after his death. She took her own life when she became frustrated by the decline of the socialist movement, complicated by the persistent unfaithfulness of her boyfriend who was a prominent socialist speaker (Kapp, 1976).

Emile Durkheim: 1858-1916

Emile David Durkheim was the son of the Chief Rabbi of the Vosges and Haute-Marne, a post which paid his father no more than his mother was able to earn from an embroidery workshop she
maintained in their home (Lukes, 1972: 40; Mes’trovic’, 1988). His father and grandfather had also been rabbis and he may have been expected to continue the tradition. While still a schoolboy, however, he decided to pursue a secular career.

Fortunately, his parents were supportive of his decision. Secularization and modernization were in vogue among the French Jewish community at the time and being a good Jew meant blending in with the rest of the society. Emile’s parents had showed their sympathy with this trend by giving him a French first name. They had no objection when his older brother chose a business career and they were proud of Emile’s brilliance and success in the secular schools. He received a baccalauréat in letters in 1874 and did so well in the national examinations that he had hope of entering the prestigious École Normale Supérieure in Paris. This would give him entrance into the elite of French society. His father was ill at the time and he was needed at home, but the family made the sacrifices needed to send him to Paris to prepare for the rigorous entrance examinations to the École.

He felt lonely and isolated in Paris, anxious about his family's welfare and frustrated with the tedious literary curriculum. He had no desire to study Latin verse and rhetoric, preferring scientific subjects. The examiners did not share his priorities, however, and after one year of preparation he failed to win admission to the École. He failed again the next year, only being admitted after his third try in 1879. He suffered from a great deal of anxiety during this period, a problem which was to continue to plague him throughout his life even when his circumstances were objectively much more secure (Lacroix, 1981).

Fortunately, the École proved to be a warm atmosphere where his creativity was valued, ending the emptiness of his three year preparatory ordeal. Freed from the need to study obsessively for his examinations, he developed an academic interest in the relation of the individual to society. This interest was clearly relevant to the stress he felt in separating from his closely knit provincial Jewish community. Strongly inspired by the ideals of Comte and Spencer, however, he had little interest in literary or philosophical speculations on the topic. He advocated a rigorous scientific approach to all problems including social and psychological ones. In his view, both Comte and Spencer had preached more about science than they had practiced it. He thought that French sociology was "too thin, too meager, too fond of simplicity," and admired scholars who collected massive amounts of evidence before venturing to draw conclusions (Lukes, 1978: 85).

After graduation, he did the customary stint of teaching in the provinces, where he felt the lack of intellectual excitement. So he immersed himself in his work. He was a gifted and hard working teacher who wrote out each of his lectures in great detail. He also wrote prodigiously for publication. He had little time for mundane chores, let alone frivolity. He found great happiness in his marriage, in 1887, to Louise Dreyfus, the daughter of a foundry owner from Alsace. She kept his home, raised his children, and even helped out with the chores of editing his sociological reviews.

Despite his career success and happy marriage, Durkheim suffered from what he called "neurasthenia" or what today might be
called an adjustment disorder with anxious mood. He also had a tendency to obsessional thinking, although the exact nature and severity of his symptoms is not known (Lacroix, 1981: 143). He had particularly severe episodes of neurasthenia in 1902-1903 and 1916-1917. His psychological problems were, however, manageable and he continued to work productively.

Lacroix (1981) and Filloux (1976) believe that Durkheim became more interested in the sociology of religion as the result of these anxious episodes. Following Freudian theory, Lacroix argues that Durkheim failed to resolve his Oedipal crisis because his father, who was in his fifties when he was born, was too distinguished to challenge. His father's name was Moses, and his occupation made him a God-like figure. They argue that Durkheim's unresolved Oedipal guilt was exacerbated when his father died. Besnard (1982) and Mes'trovic' (1988), however, doubt that any radical discontinuity can be found in Durkheim's work and note that Durkheim's acute psychological crisis and increased interest in religion came five years after his father's death in 1896.

Durkheim's sociology helped him cope with the stress of abandoning the religious certainties of his youth. He decisively broke with his family's religious beliefs during his period at the Ecole, although he continued to identify as ethnically Jewish. His doctoral dissertation, on The Division of Labor in Society, explored how social order in complex societies is maintained through a complex division of labor where everyone depends on everyone else to fulfill specialized tasks. The strong normative consensus of the primitive community is no longer be necessary. This doctrine provided a justification for abandoning his cohesive Jewish community for a specialized academic career.

His social theories stressed the importance of social facts which people must accept as objective "things." He argued against no-fault divorce, for example, on the grounds that his study of suicide showed that single people were more likely to take their lives. His goal was to provide a scientific basis for social order and morality to replace the narrow religious beliefs of more primitive communities.

Concern with morality and social order is a persistent theme in Durkheim's sociology. His work was shaped by a need to find a basis for order and morality in the secular world. His analysis of industrial society emphasized the tendencies towards order and harmony. He was well aware of social problems, conflicts and class struggles, but he assumed that they were temporary growing pains which would go away in the normal course of social development. This contrasts sharply with Marx who viewed the same phenomena as the very essence of capitalist societies and assumed that they would get progressively worse.

Max Weber: 1864-1920

Max Weber's father was the son of a well-to-do German lawyer and Liberal political leader (Mitzman, 1969; Weber, 1988). His mother was a cultured and pious woman whose humanitarian and religious interests were not shared by her husband. She was extremely devoted to Max, her first child, who was followed by seven brothers and sisters of whom two died. Max was always conscious of being a privileged first born son and his mother's special favorite.
At the age of two, he contracted meningitis which threatened his life and intelligence. He had to be put in a padded bed. His head grew large in comparison to his body and no one knew whether he was a frail genius with a large brain or a victim of hydrocephalus.

His mother hovered over him for years while he continued to be a small, clumsy and weak boy. But he became an avid reader with a lively intelligence. He put on too much weight and only got into good physical shape when he was forced to endure the rigors and discipline of compulsory military service.

He found military service extremely tedious. His ankles were too weak to support his corpulence and at first he was too exhausted to even think about scholarly topics. With time he lost weight and became an exemplary soldier, but he was delighted to return to the world of books and intellectual debate as soon as his term was up.

He lived with his parents for the seven years between military service and his marriage, since he had no income while devoting himself to academic study. He passed his law exams and went on to begin a brilliant academic career in law and legal history.

During these years, Max continually urged his mother to assert herself more with his father. Sympathy for his mother may account for his exceptionally progressive views on women's rights. He felt that a married woman should insist on enough free time for her own interests and not slavishly devote herself to husband and children. At the same time, he was personally attracted to traditionally feminine young women who appealed to his need for nurturance. In 1893, at the age of twenty-nine, he finally left his parents' home to marry an intelligent young woman who eagerly joined in many of his intellectual interests. Mitzman (1969: 92) interprets Weber's letters of the time as showing that Weber on some level identified his wife with his mother. In any event, he allowed his wife the degree of independence that he thought his mother should have had, and encouraged her to develop her own interests as a feminist scholar (Roth, 1985). His own career moved ahead rapidly. In 1894 he became a full professor of economics at Freiburg and in 1896 he moved to the University of Heidelberg.

This idyllic existence came to a crashing halt in the fall of 1897 when Max suffered from a series of illnesses. He was overcome with exhaustion, became feverish and could not sleep. His doctors thought he was simply overworked and recommended a sanatorium over the summer break. He followed the medical regimen scrupulously but it did not seem to help. As soon as he resumed his lectures, the symptoms returned. For months on end he could not read, let alone write or teach. Only travel offered diversion, especially when he could get away from the gloomy German winter.

Weber's breakdown came just after his father's death. His mother had been in the habit of spending several weeks each summer with her grown children, away from her husband. This summer, her husband objected and she was not able to come until he was able to accompany her for a short time. Max took his mother's side in this dispute and publicly stood up to his father in front of the family. He insisted that:

We demand that Mama should have the right to visit us alone quietly for four to five weeks each year at a time that is convenient for her. As long as this
is not done, any family relationship with Papa is meaningless to us and its outward maintenance has no value for us (Weber, 1988: 231).

They left Max's home without reconciling. Weber's mother was very upset but she felt that this was a principle she had to stand up for. She hoped that eventually her husband would make up with her. But before it could be resolved he died suddenly of a gastric hemorrhage.

Given the fact that Max was in apparently good mental and physical health before this incident, it requires no great psychological acumen to suggest that guilt over his father's death may have contributed to his nervous breakdown. This seems not to have occurred to him or his physicians at the time, however, although Weber was aware of the compulsive and even pathological nature of his drive to work (Mitzman, 1969: 49). As Mitzman (1969: 101) remarks, "when the fuses of logical connection blow in the mind of a man of genius, one can only assume an emotional overload." In any event, he apparently received no counseling to deal with either the grief or his depression. He was only able to sporadically begin working again after four years had passed. His mental health gradually improved over the years, perhaps facilitated by a passionate love affair which he conducted in his fifties with a somewhat younger woman who was a family friend (Roth, 1988: xlii). As a gentleman of traditional values, he concealed the affair from his wife believing that:

Rarely will you find that a man whose love turns from one woman to another feels no need to legitimate this before himself by saying; she was not worthy of my love, or she disappointed me, or whatever like 'reasons' exist. This is an attitude that, with a profound lack of chivalry, adds a fancied 'legitimacy' to the fact that he no longer loves her and that the woman has to bear it (Weber, 1946: 117).

Weber's academic interests changed after these emotional experiences. In his earliest work on the economic problems of German peasants, as a young scholar, he had tended to project his psychological problems onto the farmers, assuming that they were driven from the land by psychological rather than purely economic forces (Mitzman, 1969: 101). After his breakdown, he was less concerned with class struggles and more focused on epistemological problems. He became interested in the role of sympathetic understanding in generating sociological ideas. At the same time, he opposed reliance on subjectivity and sought to objectively test his insights. As Marianne Weber (1988: 316), his wife and biographer, observed:

In Weber's attitude we also see the struggle, lifted onto a suprapersonal plane, between his equally strong active and contemplative tendencies: between an intellect oriented toward an unprejudiced, universal, cerebral mastery of the world and an equally strong ability to form convictions and stand up for them at all costs. His logical investigations had shown that the cultural sciences
were based on unverifiable premises but that they nevertheless supplied valid insights.

Weber's sociology can be seen as a pursuit, in the external world, of problems which he found difficult to deal with on a personal level. In a letter written late in his life he observed that (Weber, 1978: 533):

Nature did not make me an open person, and this has often made many people whose love I had and still have suffer, and some may be suffering still. And because I very emphatically say what I think about objective matters--for I can bring myself to talk about personal matters only in rare, good hours.

Personal Troubles and the Founding of Sociology

These biographical vignettes raise some provocative questions about the relationship between personal troubles and public issues in the lives of the founders of sociology. Each of the founding fathers sought to suppress and control his emotional difficulties and thought of his work as a separate realm. In the vignettes, I have highlighted the ways in which they reacted to personal stresses caused by this splitting of their feelings from their life work. Comte abandoned scientific sociology when it failed to offer definitive answers to his problems, creating instead a role as the High Priest of the Religion of Humanity. Spencer became more and more unhappy as an aging bachelor whose theories were going out of style. Durkheim, whose personal troubles were less severe and less rooted in family or marriage problems, became a workaholic who relied on his wife to handle personal matters. He was, however, the happiest of the founding fathers, and the one whose sociological theories were most applicable to his personal life. Marx was sustained by a vision of revolutionary apocalypse. Weber resisted thinking about his personal and family problems, and may have intellectualized them by writing extensively about epistemological and value issues.

In large part, the founders' personal troubles were rooted in family relationships and in their relationships with women. They were certainly well aware of this on a personal level. When Herbert Spencer briefly visited with Auguste Comte, for example, Comte advised him to get married "saying that the sympathetic companionship of a wife would have a curative influence" (Spencer, 1904, v. 1: 578). He received similar advice from his friends Richard Potter and Thomas Huxley. Huxley even coined the phrase "gynopathy" to refer to this form of therapy (Peel, 1971: 23). Spencer demurred on the grounds that "the remedy had the serious inconvenience that it could not be left off if it proved unsuitable" (Spencer, 1904, v. 1: 578).

Despite the importance of these gender issues for them personally, only Durkheim took a serious professional interest in the sociology of marriage and the family. None of them made gender a major focus of their theorizing. They were all reticent to talk about intimate personal relationships, even with friends. These attitudes clearly reflected male gender role socialization prevalent in their historical period, and made life much more difficult for them and their families. The result, in my view, was that they tended to project their personal troubles into their sociological
In fairness, it must be emphasized that none of the fathers of sociology claimed that his theory was an answer to his or anyone else's personal troubles. They were men of their times and cannot not be faulted for lacking some of the sensitivities of ours. Yet, to the extent that sociology continues to be defined by their ideas, their limitations and idiosyncracies are still influencing us today.

Marxian macrosociological concepts are not very useful in helping us to understand the personal troubles of these men, although they certainly help to understand the social context in which they worked. Feminist ideas are much more directly relevant and help to explain many of these men's personal problems. Psychodynamic ideas, especially those focusing on interpersonal relationships (or "object relations" in Freudian terminology), are also helpful. If we are serious about trying to understand what happens to specific people in society, we need to be as open-minded as possible in drawing on all of these and other perspectives.

Teaching the Founders of Sociology

Sociologists who approach the discipline from a strictly scientific perspective (whether Marxian, Parsonian or Mertonian) are not likely to have much interest in teaching about the men who founded the discipline. They are interested in the ideas, not in the men who articulated them. In presenting the field in this way, however, they may find it difficult to explain how the discipline actually functions as a human group. If students are exposed to a diverse group of instructors in their own department, for example, they will quickly perceive that sociologists choose their fundamental theoretical orientations and interests on the basis of personal taste, ideological inclination or professional trendiness. Theories are thought of as alternative paradigms or perspectives which address different questions, not as competing answers to the same questions. This makes it impossible to evaluate alternative theories objectively with scientific methods.

The impersonal, scientistic model of sociology does provide any way to deal with this reality, other than to simply assert that one's own perspective is objective and scientific while the others are biased and distorted. Students are understandably skeptical of such claims.

Instructors who take a humanistic approach to the discipline, on the other hand, have a more adequate framework for dealing with the realities of the discipline. As Friedrichs (1987: 1) explains, humanistic sociologists do not "create an artificial wall between [their] professional and personal lives. A sociologist with a humanistic orientation generally acknowledges that experiences and values significantly shape the perspective we adopt and transmit to our students." Studying the lives of the founders of the discipline can be a useful way to help students understand the relevance of sociological ideas to people's lives. It can help them to understand why people think and feel differently about fundamental social issues, and perhaps to develop some of the self-understanding that C. Wright Mills promised sociology would bring.

The humanistic instructor will naturally contrast the biographies of sociology's founders with personal and biographical material about people from other classes and groups, including women.
and people of color, as appropriate during a course. The lives of eminent female sociologists, such as Harriet Martineau and Beatrice Webb, could be usefully compared to those of the founding "fathers" (Reinhartz, 1989). In making these biographical comparisons, the instructor can show how sociology has built on the ideas of the founders and made them relevant to contemporary society. She or he can also examine the question of whether the fact that sociology was largely founded by men has imparted a male bias or perspective to the field's core ideas.

In discussing the personal troubles of sociology's founders, it is important to point out that similar idiosyncracies can be found in the personal lives of creative people in all fields. Mindess (1988), for example, has made a very similar argument about the fathers of psychotherapy whose profound insights into human behavior were based largely on their own personal experiences. Johnson (1988) has shown that many eminent philosophers and writers were singularly inept in managing their personal lives. Goertzel (1992) extends this analysis to many important political figures. Students should be told that creativity in many fields can result from sublimation of emotional problems. The sociological concept of the marginal person can be usefully introduced at this point.

If the use of theories to meet emotional needs can be creative, however, it can also lead to doctrinal rigidity. It is difficult to modify or abandon erroneous theories if they are serving important emotional functions. Comte, Spencer and Marx were highly resistant to accepting empirical evidence which contradicted their theories or to recognizing the limitations of their theories in answering many problems. The longer they held out in defense of their doctrines, the more they had invested in them and the harder it became for them to acknowledge problems. Durkheim and Weber both made a deliberate effort to avoid repeating the rigidities of the earlier thinkers and both succeeded in being significantly more flexible and open in their work.

Overcoming rigidity in students' thinking is, of course, one of the major goals of sociology courses. Greater attention to the biographies of sociologists may be a good place address these concerns. After all, the fathers of sociology are less important for their contributions to sociology as a discipline than for their impact on history at large. The world is only now recovering from an experiment with Marxist utopianism which may have had more to do with ideas rooted in Marx's personal psychology than with his scientific work. Comte's scientism and Spencer's libertarianism also had significant popular followings which depended more on their ideological visions than on their social science. We sociologists may be better able to help our students approach the problems of the future if we come to terms with our own tendency to project personal troubles onto society at large.

REFERENCES
Dumas, George. 1905. Psychologie de Deux Messies Positivist. Paris: