

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Michaelmas 2025

Dr Michael Biggs

Theoretical Perspectives

5. Social integration

[http://users.ox.ac.uk/~sfos0060/
SociologicalTheory.shtml](http://users.ox.ac.uk/~sfos0060/SociologicalTheory.shtml)

Methodological holism

- Durkheim (1895/1901): treat social facts as things
 - ‘manners of acting or thinking ... capable of exercising a coercive influence on the consciousness of individuals’
 - ‘not naturally penetrable by the understanding’
 - contrast Weber!

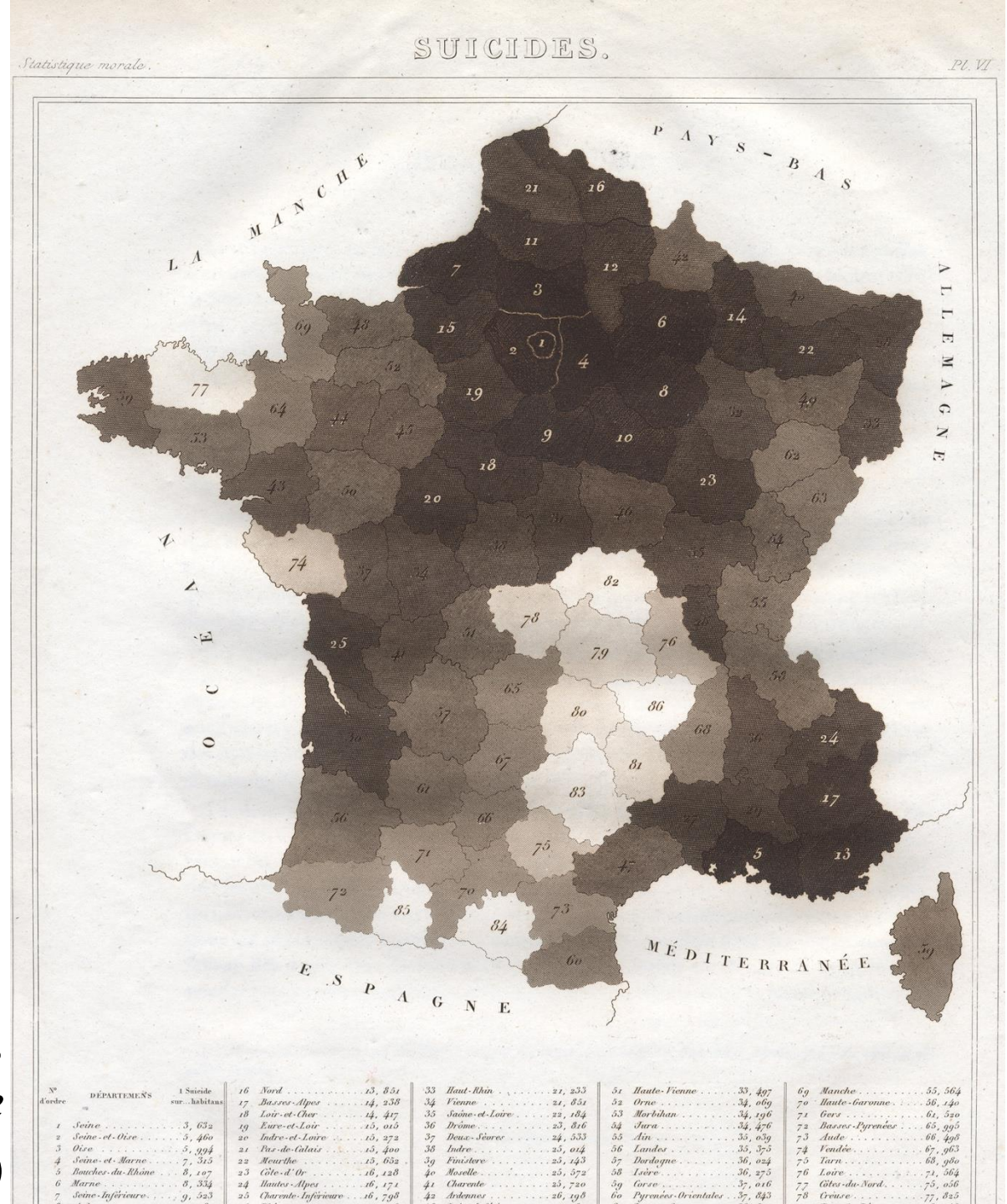




Statistics (1820s—) as
new way of seeing

- *rate of crime or suicide is stable*

André-Michel Guerry,
*Essai sur la statistique morale
de la France* (1833)



Durkheim's *Suicide* (1897)

Suicide is a social fact

- *any* act where the individual willingly dies, including self-sacrifice
- understanding intentions is irrelevant; actors are unaware of the force of society

‘At any given moment the moral constitution of society establishes the contingent of voluntary deaths. There is, therefore, for each people a collective force of a definite amount of energy, impelling men to self-destruction. The victim’s acts[,] which at first seem to express only his personal temperament[,] are really the supplement and prolongation of a social condition which they express externally.’

—instead use statistics

Social integration

Integration

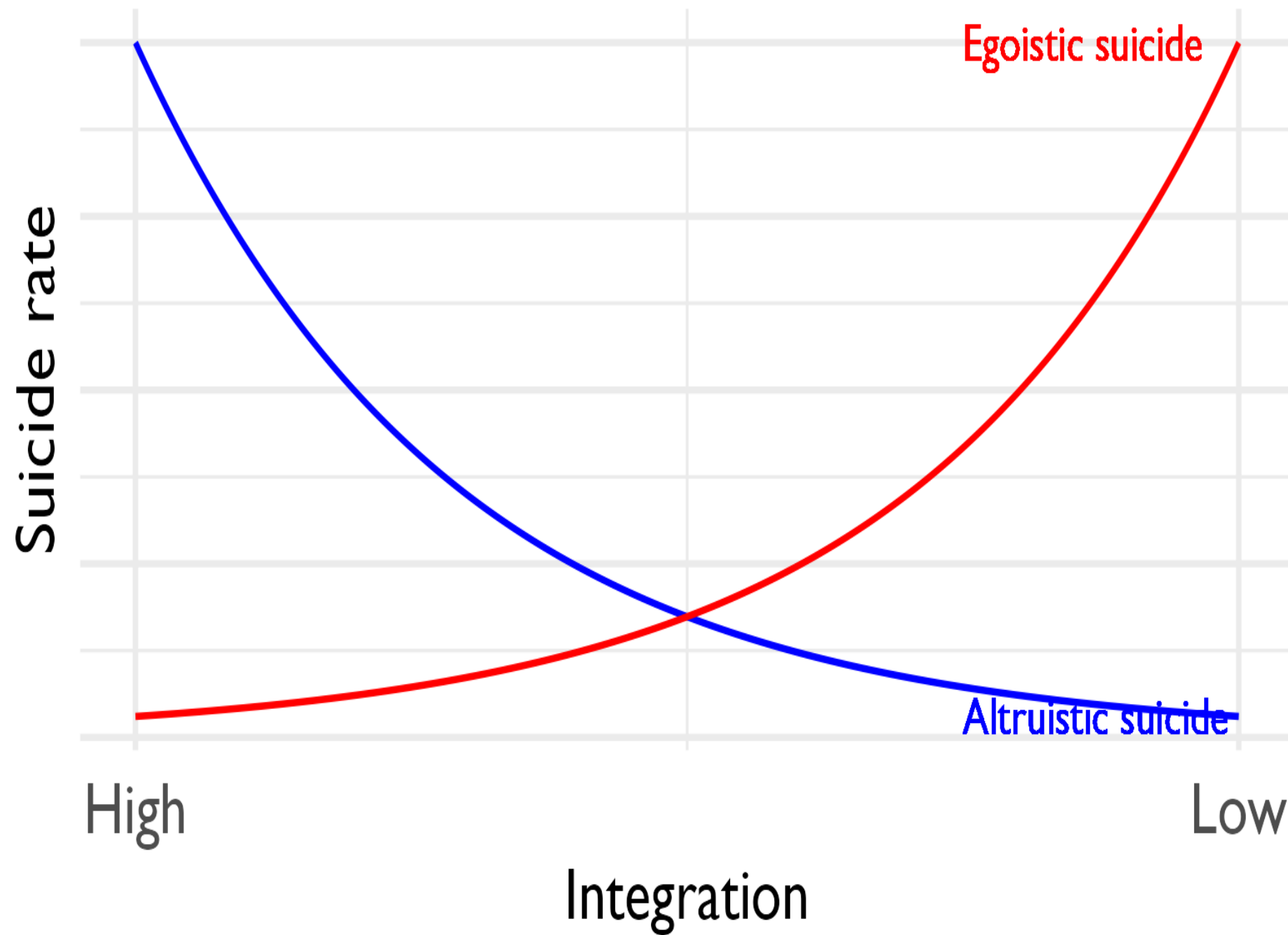
1. the extent to which people *interact/associate* with each other—social density
2. the extent to which people *identify* with something beyond their individual selves

Regulation

- the extent to which society constrains our (boundless) natural appetites
- (Separable?)

Modernity = reduced integration/regulation

	Integration	Regulation
<i>high</i>	<u>altruistic</u> suicide	<u>fatalistic</u> suicide
<i>low</i>	<u>egoistic</u> suicide	<u>anomic</u> suicide

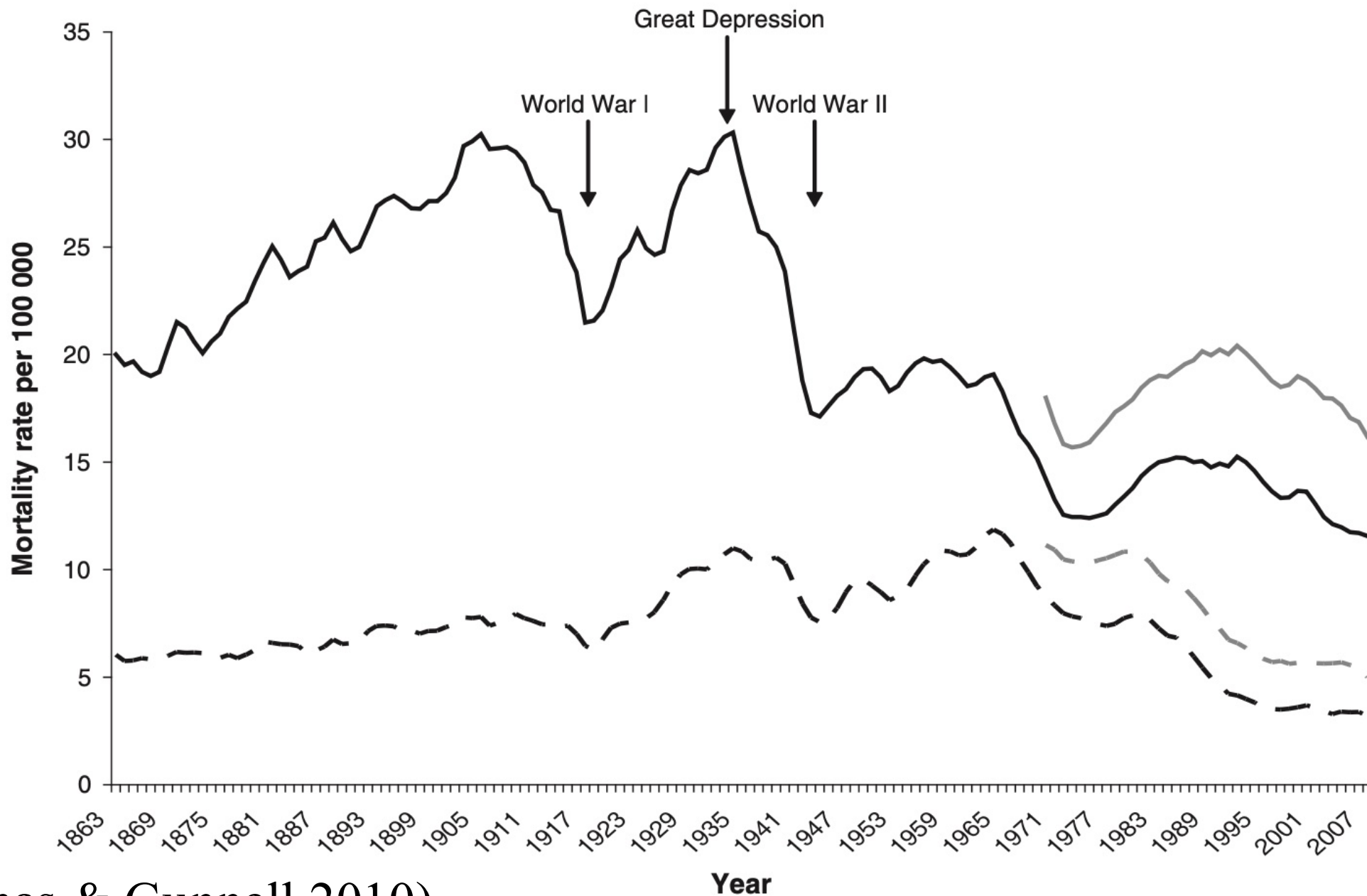


Style of explanation: egoistic suicide

Suicide rate:

- Protestant > Catholic > Jewish
 - Protestantism allows 'free inquiry'; it emphasizes 'religious individualism' (*not* explicit doctrine regarding suicide)
[society promoting the right to die!]
- unmarried > married
- normal times > wars and political turmoil

Overall age standardized suicide mortality rates by sex 1861–2007



(Thomas & Gunnell 2010)

Problems

I. Statistics aggregate interpretations (Atkinson 1978)

- the death of Durkheim's friend as 'a miserable and tragic accident'
- suicide rates rose in the 19th century, when secular authorities took over recording
- *BUT* cross-national patterns across Europe have remained stable for over a century; persist after emigration; confirmed within Prussia (Becker & Woessmann 2018)

2. How to avoid mystical holism?

- where is “society”—nation, religion, family, institution?
- contextual effect: individual i 's outcome depends on average characteristics of all other individuals in the unit, after accounting for i 's characteristic (Blau 1960)
 - e.g. risk of suicide lower where religious % is higher, regardless of your own religion (Tubergen et al. 2005)

Emergent properties

- Macro structures can emerge from the interaction of individuals at micro level
- Conway's life: cellular automata (cell = 1 or 0) with 4 simple rules where $cell_{t+1} = f(cell_t; \text{sum of adjacent cells}_t)$

- flying “glider” is emergent property

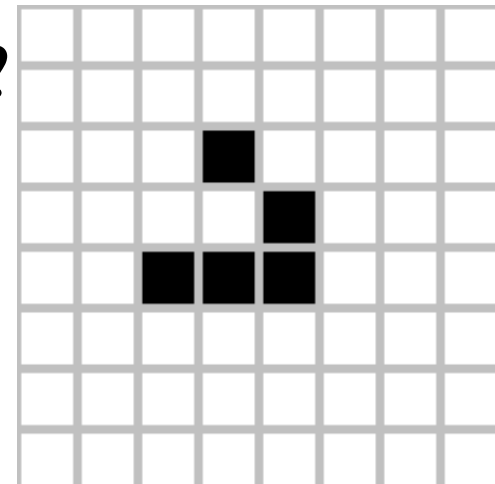
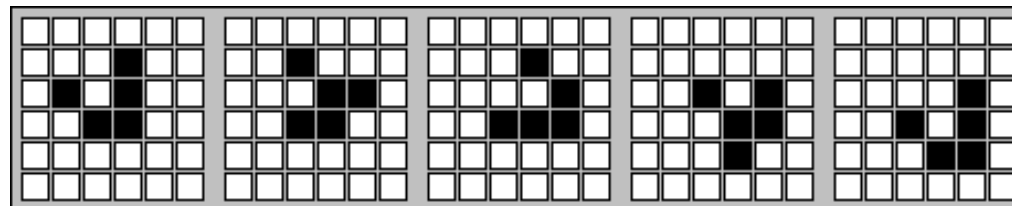
- macro property

- shape created—but not predicted!—by cellular rules

- does the shape “determine” individual cells (à la Durkheim)?

=> Problems lecture I

		<i>sum of adjacent_t</i>				
		0	1	2	3	4+
<i>cell_t</i>	0	0	0	0	1	0
	1	0	0	1	1	0



Two approaches to organizations

- Methodological individualism:
 - approximate organization as individual—usually headed by one leader, *or*
 - analyze decision-making among individuals
- Methodological holism:
 - organizations select/attract different sorts of individuals
 - organizations situated within larger structures, e.g. Oxford within prestige hierarchy of universities

Rediscovering integration

Social capital: ‘networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit’ (Putnam 2000)

Collective efficacy: ‘social cohesion combined with shared expectations for social control’ (Sampson 2012)

1. ‘People in this neighborhood can be trusted’ Agree/disagree

2. ‘How likely could your neighbors be counted on to do something if ... happened?’

Variation across Chicago neighbourhoods helps explain—controlling for poverty—

- health, e.g. birth weight
- altruism—lost letter experiment
- crime

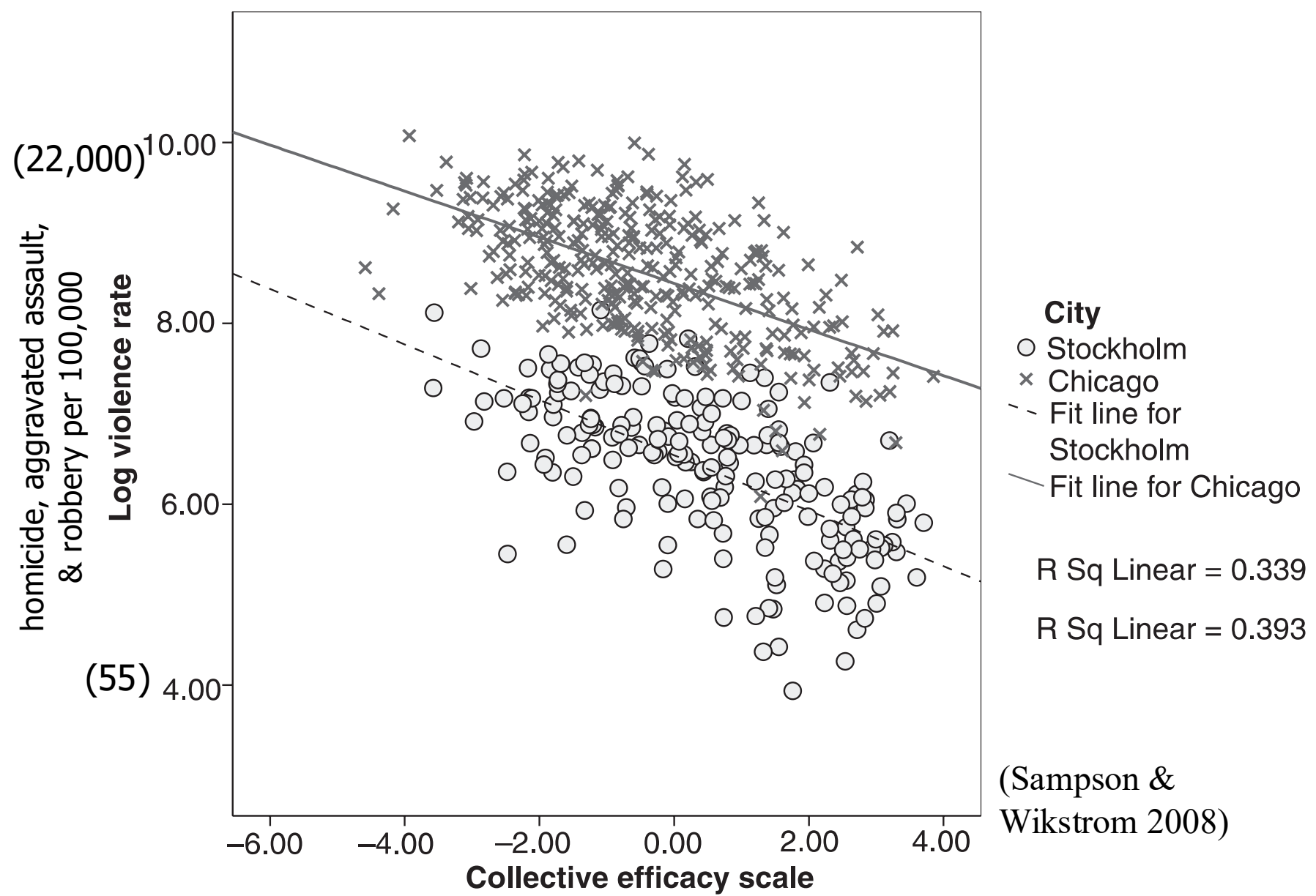


Figure 5.5 Similar collective efficacy–violence link by city

But less so for London (Sutherland, Brunton-Smith, & Jackson 2013)

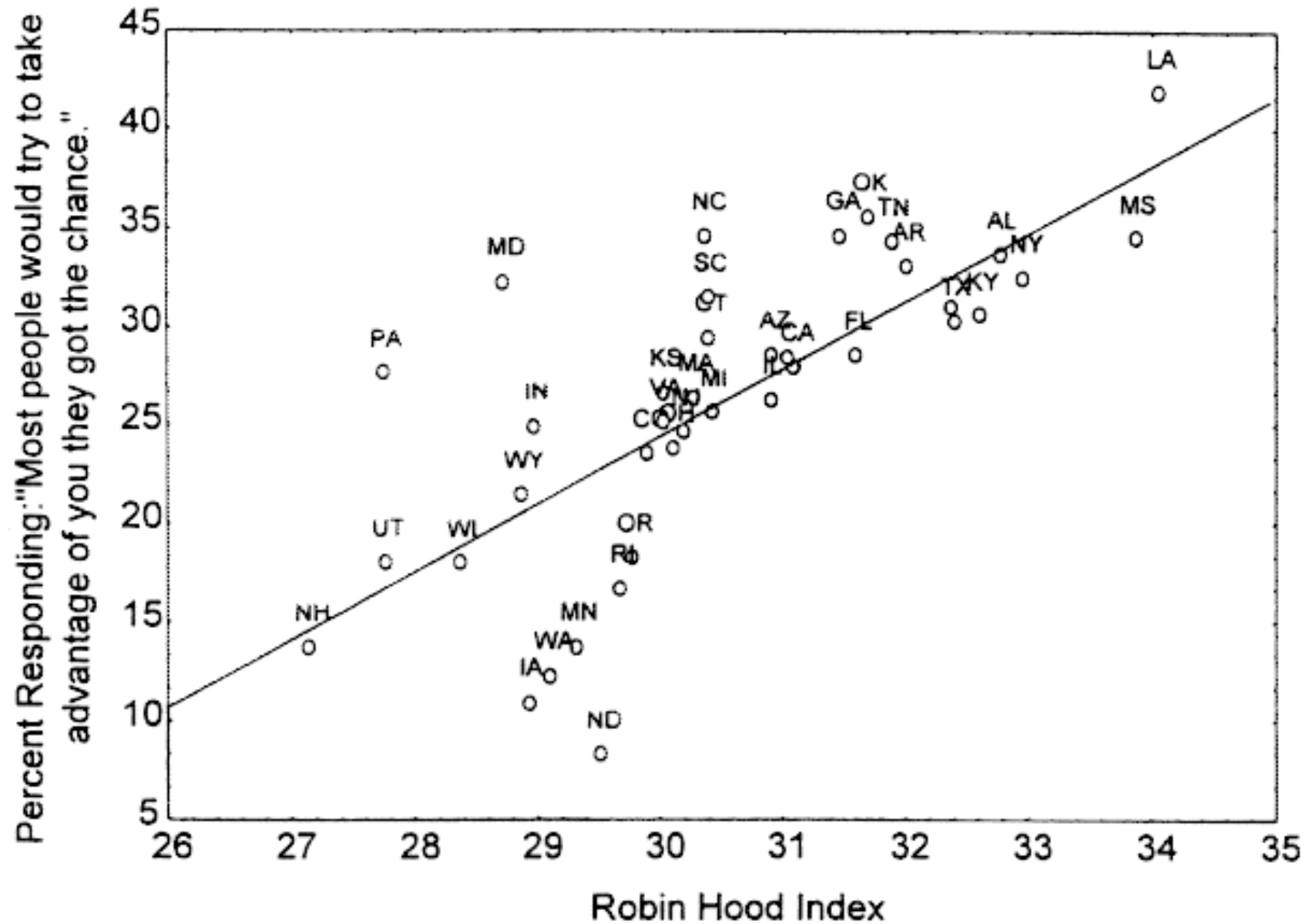
How to explain integration

Collective efficacy reduced by (Sampson 2012)

- poverty
- crime—circularity!
- residential instability
- ethnic heterogeneity (Putnam 2007)

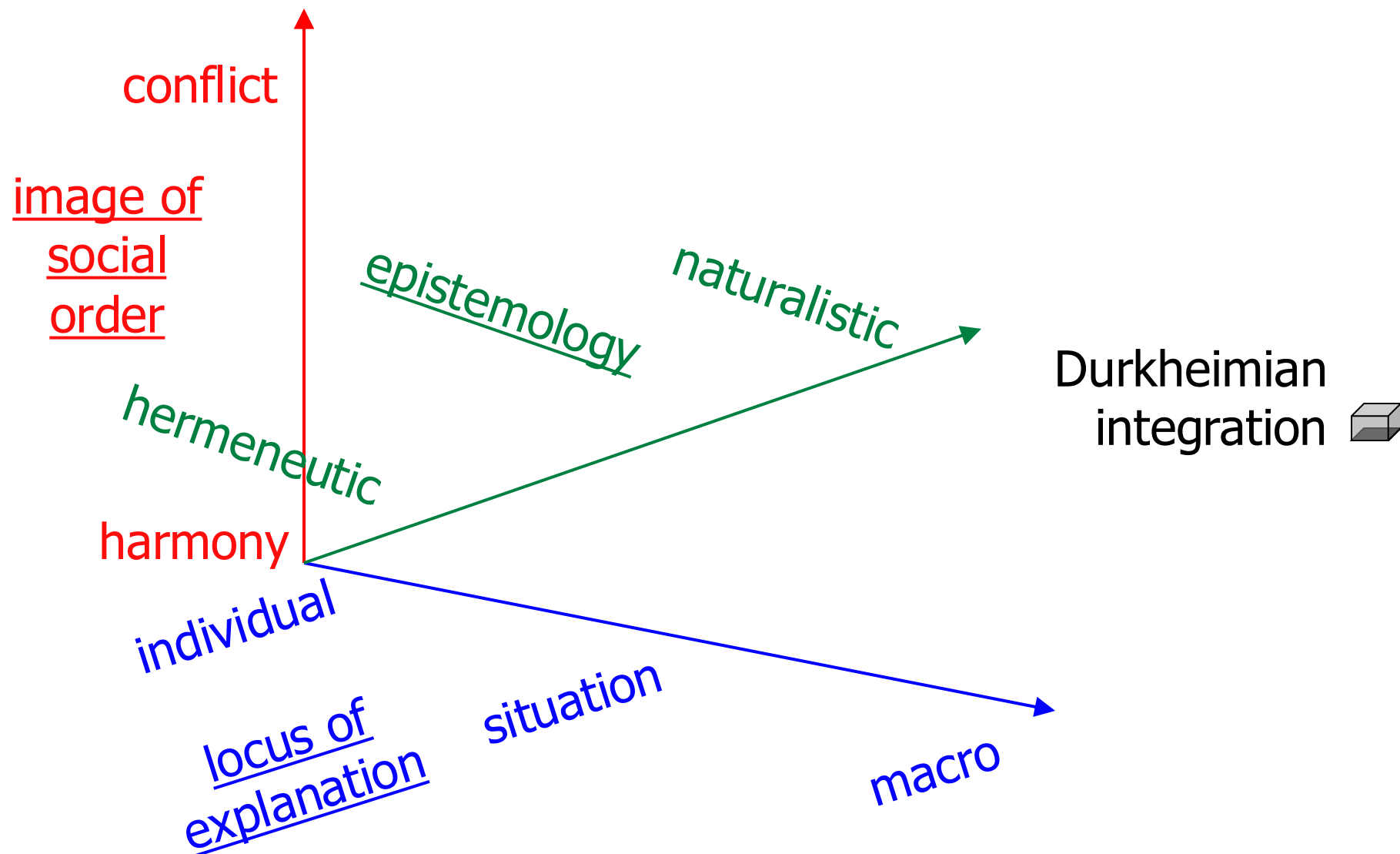
Suggestion that cross-sectional variation persists over time—decades (Sampson 2012), centuries (Putnam 1993)

Is integration the inverse of inequality? (Wilkinson 1996)



Summary

- Integration (or social capital or collective efficacy) focuses on individuals' social interactions and emotional attachment to something larger
- Integration used to explain
 - individual outcomes: suicide, crime, health, altruism, voting—even after accounting individual characteristics
 - aggregate outcomes: political performance, even economic growth
- Persistent concern that contemporary societies are “disintegrating”



Questions

- Is social integration possible without shared values?
- Can “social capital” explain anything?
- What is “social cohesion” and how can it be measured?
- ‘The success of Oxbridge is due primarily to the social integration provided by the college system.’ Discuss.
- How can “social capital” be measured?
- ‘Society is not the mere sum of individuals, but the system formed by their association represents a specific reality which has its own characteristics’ (Durkheim). Discuss.

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