

The Myth of the Asocial Ascetic: A Critical Examination of Sociology's Role in the Cultivation of Discipline

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study critically examined sociology's role in constructing understandings of discipline, with particular focus on whether the discipline challenges or reinforces myths of asocial asceticism that obscure the fundamentally social character of disciplinary practices. The research employed a three-phase design integrating systematic literature review of 150 classical and contemporary sociological texts on discipline, ethnographic fieldwork across six institutional sites (two religious communities, two educational institutions, and two professional organizations) involving 450 hours of participant observation and 72 in-depth interviews, and quantitative survey analysis of 800 respondents stratified by demographic and experiential characteristics. The study investigated how sociological theories have conceptualized discipline from Durkheim and Weber through Foucault to contemporary scholarship, documented the specific social mechanisms through which discipline is actually cultivated in diverse institutional contexts, and assessed how sociological insights have been appropriated or distorted in popular self-help discourse. Univariate analyses revealed that while respondents demonstrated moderate awareness of discipline's social dimensions ($M=52.3$, $SD=18.6$), they scored significantly higher on individual orientation measures ($M=61.7$, $SD=19.2$; $t=12.47$, $p<0.001$), indicating systematic bias toward individualistic explanations despite recognition of some social factors. Bivariate analyses demonstrated that formal sociological training was strongly associated with socially-oriented understandings (64.8 vs. 48.6 for untrained respondents, $d=0.94$), while heavy self-help consumption showed opposite patterns (45.2 vs. 55.4 for light consumers, $d=0.57$), suggesting competing influences on popular consciousness. Multivariable regression models controlling for demographics, educational attainment, and various exposure variables confirmed that sociological training independently predicted increased social orientation ($\beta=6.34$, $p<0.001$), reduced individual orientation ($\beta=-4.12$, $p<0.05$), enhanced recognition of institutional scaffolding ($\beta=0.82$, $p<0.001$), and decreased odds of extreme individualistic attribution by 42% ($OR=0.58$, 95% CI: 0.39-0.86). Self-help book consumption showed inverse relationships across all outcomes ($\beta=-0.72$ for social orientation per book annually, $p<0.001$), while participation in institutional disciplinary programs and peer accountability structures demonstrated independent positive effects comparable to formal training. Significant interactions between sociological training and self-help consumption ($\beta=1.89$, $p<0.001$) and between institutional participation and peer accountability ($\beta=3.21$, $p<0.05$) revealed that sociological consciousness provided partial protection against individualizing narratives and that combinations of social mechanisms produced synergistic effects. The ethnographic data documented rich arrays of mentorship relationships, collective rituals, peer observation practices, and institutional meaning-making systems through which discipline was transmitted in religious, educational, and professional contexts, revealing substantial disjuncture between how discipline actually operates and how it is understood in popular consciousness. Content analysis of self-help literature confirmed systematic patterns of appropriating sociological terminology while stripping away structural analysis, recasting fundamentally social processes as matters of individual willpower and psychological techniques. The findings demonstrated that sociology possesses powerful conceptual resources for dismantling myths of asocial asceticism, with medium to large effect sizes for primary predictors (standardized β s of

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0.34-0.54), but these resources operate within a contested cultural field where individualistic discourses actively work to reinforce the very myths that empirical sociology challenges. The study concluded that combating the myth of the asocial ascetic requires both cognitive reframing through sociological education and structural embedding in social practices that make discipline's collective character experientially evident, with implications for pedagogical practice within sociology, institutional design across various organizational contexts, and public engagement strategies aimed at reshaping popular understandings of self-regulation and human flourishing.

Key Words: Sociology and Discipline

Introduction

The figure of the ascetic has long occupied a paradoxical position within sociological discourse. Traditionally conceived as a solitary practitioner of self-denial, withdrawn from social intercourse and devoted entirely to spiritual or intellectual pursuits, the ascetic appears to represent the antithesis of the social being that sociology takes as its fundamental object of study. Yet this very image of asociality may itself be a social construction, one that obscures the deeply relational and institutionally embedded nature of disciplinary practices (Frey et al., 2022; Julius & Godfrey, 2025; Samtani et al., 2020). From Max Weber's analysis of Protestant asceticism and its role in capitalist development to Michel Foucault's examination of monastic discipline as a precursor to modern forms of social control, sociological theory has grappled with the apparent tension between individual self-regulation and collective life (Dolan et al., 2018; Tellmann, 2022; Zhao et al., 2022). This study challenges the prevailing notion of the asocial ascetic by interrogating how sociology itself has participated in constructing, maintaining, and sometimes dismantling myths about discipline and its social dimensions. Rather than treating ascetic practices as purely individualistic phenomena, this research positions them within broader networks of social relationships, institutional frameworks, and cultural meanings. The cultivation of discipline, whether in religious communities, educational institutions, or professional settings, emerges not from isolated acts of willpower but from complex social processes involving mentorship, peer observation, institutional rituals, and culturally specific conceptions of the self (Julius & Geoffrey, 2025; Kohnke & Ting, 2021; Sadik, 2018). By critically examining sociology's role in shaping our understanding of disciplinary practices, this study seeks to illuminate how the discipline has both revealed and concealed the fundamentally social character of what appears to be the most private and individual of human endeavors: the regulation of one's own conduct, desires, and aspirations.

Background of the Study

The relationship between discipline and social life has been a central preoccupation of sociology since its emergence as a distinct field of inquiry. Classical sociologists recognized that the modern world required new forms of self-regulation that differed markedly from traditional modes of social control. Émile Durkheim's analysis of moral education emphasized the role of social institutions in cultivating disciplined individuals capable of functioning within increasingly complex divisions of labor (Arthurs, 2019; Davidesco & Milne, 2019; Kakooza et al., 2019). Weber's comparative study of world religions demonstrated how specific forms of religious asceticism generated psychological dispositions conducive to rational economic activity, thereby linking individual discipline to large-scale social transformation. However, these foundational insights have often been overshadowed by competing narratives that emphasize individualism, voluntarism, and the autonomy of the disciplined subject (Cruz et al., 2021; Loughran, 2009;

Rodriguez & Welsh, 2022). The twentieth century witnessed the proliferation of self-help literature, personal development programs, and productivity methodologies that frame discipline as a purely personal attribute, divorced from social context. This individualization of discipline has been reinforced by neoliberal ideologies that celebrate entrepreneurial selfhood while obscuring the institutional scaffolding that makes disciplinary practices possible and meaningful (Dečman & Rep, 2022; Hong et al., 2024; Sitopu et al., 2021).

Contemporary sociological research has begun to reclaim discipline as a properly social phenomenon. Studies of professionalization have shown how occupational communities transmit tacit knowledge and behavioral norms through apprenticeship and socialization (Audrey & Nancy, 2025; Jiang et al., 2023; Mpinga et al., 2022; Ooi et al., 2025). Research on educational institutions has revealed the hidden curriculum through which students learn not just academic content but also the bodily hexis and temporal orientations required for success in stratified societies. Investigations of new religious movements, fitness cultures, and digital productivity communities have demonstrated the continuing relevance of collective practices in shaping individual conduct (Kazaara & Nancy, 2025; McBrady, 2022; Nancy & Audrey, 2025). Despite these advances, sociology has not fully reckoned with its own role in perpetuating myths about asocial asceticism. Theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and rhetorical conventions within the discipline may inadvertently reinforce individualistic interpretations of disciplinary practices, even as empirical research reveals their social dimensions (Ammar et al., 2024; Julius, 2025; Newsome et al., 2022). This gap between sociological knowledge and sociological discourse creates an opportunity for critical reflection on how the discipline represents, analyzes, and potentially transforms our understanding of discipline itself.

Problem Statement

Despite sociology's fundamental commitment to understanding human behavior as socially constituted, the discipline has inadequately addressed its own complicity in perpetuating myths about discipline as an asocial, individualistic achievement. This paradox manifests in several problematic ways. First, sociological analyses of discipline often employ conceptual vocabularies and analytical frameworks that emphasize individual agency, psychological states, and personal transformation while marginalizing the social relationships, institutional contexts, and cultural systems that make disciplinary practices intelligible and effective (Julius & Sula, 2025a; Salvo-Garrido et al., 2022). Second, the growing popularization of discipline through self-help movements, productivity culture, and wellness industries has appropriated and distorted sociological insights, stripping them of their critical edge and recasting fundamentally social processes as matters of individual willpower and character (Julius & Desire, 2025; Kazaara & Audrey, 2025b; Nizhenkovska et al., 2022). Third, and perhaps most troubling, sociology's failure to systematically examine its own representations of discipline limits the discipline's capacity to contribute to public understanding of how self-regulation actually operates in contemporary societies (Abulela & Bart, 2021; Julius & Sula, 2025b; Kazaara & Desire, 2025). When sociologists leave unchallenged the myth of the asocial ascetic, they cede interpretive authority to frameworks that obscure power relations, naturalize inequality, and place unrealistic burdens of self-transformation on individuals while ignoring structural barriers to flourishing. The consequences of this gap are both intellectual and practical. Intellectually, it hampers our understanding of how discipline functions as a mechanism of social reproduction, how it varies across different social contexts, and how it might be reimagined in more egalitarian and humane ways (Julius & Gracious Kazaara, 2025; Julius & Sula, 2025c; Kazaara & Audrey, 2025a; Mercader & Gairín,

2020). Practically, it undermines efforts to design institutions, develop pedagogies, and create communities that support sustainable and meaningful forms of self-regulation. There is therefore an urgent need for a critical examination of sociology's role in constructing, challenging, or reinforcing myths about the nature of disciplinary practices and their relationship to social life.

Main Objective of the Study

To critically examine and evaluate how sociological theory and research have constructed understandings of discipline, with particular attention to the ways in which the discipline has either challenged or reinforced myths of asocial asceticism, and to propose alternative conceptual frameworks that more adequately capture the fundamentally social character of disciplinary practices.

Specific Objectives

1. To analyze classical and contemporary sociological theories of discipline in order to identify the conceptual assumptions, rhetorical strategies, and theoretical emphases that shape representations of disciplinary practices as either social or individualistic phenomena.
2. To investigate empirical cases of disciplinary cultivation across diverse institutional settings—including religious communities, educational institutions, and professional organizations—in order to document the specific social mechanisms, relational dynamics, and collective practices through which discipline is transmitted, maintained, and transformed.
3. To assess the influence of sociological discourse on popular understandings of discipline by examining how sociological concepts have been appropriated, translated, or distorted in self-help literature, organizational management theory, and contemporary wellness culture.

Research Questions

1. In what ways have classical and contemporary sociological theories of discipline either reinforced or challenged the myth of the asocial ascetic, and what conceptual resources does sociology offer for reimagining discipline as a fundamentally social accomplishment?
2. What specific social mechanisms, institutional arrangements, and relational practices enable the cultivation of discipline in different contexts, and how do these mechanisms vary across religious, educational, and professional settings?
3. How have sociological insights about discipline been appropriated and transformed in popular discourse, and what are the implications of these transformations for both sociological knowledge production and public understanding of self-regulation in contemporary societies?

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design that integrated qualitative and quantitative approaches to comprehensively examine sociology's role in constructing understandings of discipline and ascetic practices. The research was conducted in three interconnected phases between January 2024 and December 2025. In the first phase, a systematic literature review was undertaken to analyze classical and contemporary sociological texts on discipline, covering works from Durkheim, Weber, and Foucault through to recent scholarship on self-regulation and institutional socialization. This involved critical discourse analysis of 150 seminal texts to identify recurring themes, conceptual

frameworks, and rhetorical patterns that either reinforced or challenged asocial conceptions of asceticism. The second phase consisted of ethnographic fieldwork across six purposively selected sites: two religious communities (one Buddhist monastery and one evangelical Christian discipleship program), two educational institutions (a military academy and a graduate professional school), and two professional organizations (a law firm and a medical residency program). Over 18 months, 450 hours of participant observation were conducted, supplemented by 72 in-depth semi-structured interviews with practitioners, mentors, and institutional leaders to document the social mechanisms underlying disciplinary cultivation. Field notes were coded using NVivo 12 software through an iterative process of thematic analysis that identified patterns of social transmission, collective reinforcement, and relational accountability. In the third phase, a content analysis was performed on 300 self-help books, 50 organizational management texts, and 200 wellness industry publications to trace how sociological concepts had been appropriated into popular discourse. Additionally, a quantitative survey was administered to 800 respondents stratified by age, educational background, and occupational category to assess public understandings of discipline's social versus individual dimensions. Univariate analysis using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequency distributions) characterized the sample demographics and baseline perceptions of discipline across different population segments. Bivariate analysis employed chi-square tests and independent samples t-tests to examine associations between exposure to sociological education and attitudes toward discipline as a social phenomenon, as well as correlations (Pearson's r and Spearman's ρ) between consumption of self-help literature and individualistic conceptions of self-regulation. Multivariable modeling utilizing hierarchical linear regression and binary logistic regression was conducted to identify predictors of socially-oriented versus individualistically-oriented understandings of discipline while controlling for confounding variables including educational attainment, religious affiliation, occupational status, cultural capital, and prior participation in institutional disciplinary programs. These models revealed that formal sociological training ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.001$) and sustained involvement in collective disciplinary practices ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$) significantly predicted recognition of discipline's social dimensions, even after adjusting for demographic factors, while heavy consumption of self-help media (OR = 2.47, 95% CI: 1.85-3.29) was associated with increased likelihood of endorsing purely individualistic explanations. Structural equation modeling was subsequently employed to test hypothesized pathways through which sociological knowledge, institutional participation, and cultural consumption patterns jointly influenced conceptualizations of discipline, with model fit assessed using standard indices (CFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.05) (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). Qualitative and quantitative data were integrated through a convergent parallel design, with findings triangulated to provide a comprehensive understanding of how sociology both illuminates and obscures the social character of disciplinary practices. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board, and all participants provided informed consent with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity in reporting.

Results.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Univariate Analysis of Sample Characteristics and Perceptions of Discipline (N=800)

Variable	n (%) / Mean (SD)	Range
Demographics		

Age (years)	38.4 (12.7)	18-72
Gender (Female)	428 (53.5%)	-
Educational Attainment		
- High School or Less	156 (19.5%)	-
- Some College/Associate Degree	224 (28.0%)	-
- Bachelor's Degree	268 (33.5%)	-
- Graduate Degree	152 (19.0%)	-
Exposure Variables		
Formal Sociological Training (Yes)	187 (23.4%)	-
Participation in Institutional Disciplinary Programs (Yes)	312 (39.0%)	-
Self-Help Books Read (past year)	4.2 (3.8)	0-24
Heavy Self-Help Consumer (≥ 6 books/year)	243 (30.4%)	-
Outcome Measures		
Social Orientation Score (0-100)	52.3 (18.6)	8-97
Individual Orientation Score (0-100)	61.7 (19.2)	12-99
Recognition of Institutional Scaffolding (0-10)	5.8 (2.4)	0-10
Attribution to Personal Willpower (0-10)	7.2 (2.1)	1-10
Disciplinary Practice Engagement		
Religious/Spiritual Practice Frequency (days/week)	2.8 (2.6)	0-7
Professional Development Activities (hours/month)	8.4 (6.9)	0-40
Peer Accountability Structures (Yes)	334 (41.8%)	-

The univariate analysis revealed a sample that was relatively balanced across demographic categories, with slight overrepresentation of women (53.5%) and individuals with bachelor's degrees (33.5%), reflecting the sampling strategy's focus on educated populations likely to engage with both sociological and self-help discourses. The mean age of 38.4 years (SD=12.7) indicated a mature sample with sufficient life experience to have encountered various disciplinary regimes. Critically, only 23.4% of respondents reported formal sociological training, suggesting that the majority of the sample's understandings of discipline were formed outside academic sociology, which was essential for assessing the broader cultural impact of sociological versus popular discourses. The exposure variables demonstrated considerable variation, with nearly four in ten respondents (39.0%) having participated in institutional disciplinary programs such as religious communities, professional training, or structured educational environments, while self-help book consumption showed a right-skewed distribution (mean=4.2, SD=3.8), indicating that while most respondents engaged moderately with this literature, a substantial minority (30.4%) were heavy consumers reading six or more books annually. The outcome measures revealed a paradoxical pattern that was central to understanding the myth of the asocial ascetic: while respondents demonstrated moderate awareness of discipline's social dimensions (Social Orientation Score: M=52.3, SD=18.6), they scored significantly higher on individual orientation measures (M=61.7, SD=19.2), and this difference was statistically meaningful. Paired samples t-test (not shown in table)

confirmed that individual orientation scores were significantly higher than social orientation scores ($t=12.47$, $p<0.001$, $d=0.50$), indicating a systematic bias toward individualistic explanations even among respondents who acknowledged some social factors. Furthermore, the high mean score on attribution to personal willpower ($M=7.2$, $SD=2.1$) compared to the moderate score on recognition of institutional scaffolding ($M=5.8$, $SD=2.4$) suggested that respondents defaulted to individualistic explanations when conceptualizing discipline, despite potentially recognizing structural supports when explicitly prompted. This pattern was consistent with the study's theoretical concern that popular consciousness, even among relatively educated populations, remained captive to myths of asocial asceticism that obscured the fundamentally social character of disciplinary cultivation.

Table 2: Bivariate Analysis of Associations Between Exposure Variables and Orientations Toward Discipline

Independent Variable	Social Orientation Score	Individual Orientation Score	Recognition of Institutional Scaffolding	Attribution to Personal Willpower
Formal Sociological Training				
Yes (n=187)	64.8 (16.2)***	55.3 (18.7)***	7.4 (2.1)***	6.1 (2.3)***
No (n=613)	48.6 (17.9)	63.6 (19.0)	5.3 (2.3)	7.5 (2.0)
Cohen's d	0.94	0.44	0.96	0.64
Institutional Program Participation				
Yes (n=312)	58.7 (17.4) ***	57.9 (19.8)**	6.8 (2.2)***	6.5 (2.2)***
No (n=488)	48.1 (18.3)	64.2 (18.4)	5.1 (2.4)	7.6 (1.9)
Cohen's d	0.59	0.33	0.74	0.53
Heavy Self-Help Consumer				
Yes (n=243)	45.2 (17.1)***	68.9 (17.6)***	4.6 (2.3)***	8.1 (1.8)***
No (n=557)	55.4 (18.5)	58.4 (19.3)	6.3 (2.3)	6.8 (2.1)
Cohen's d	0.57	0.57	0.74	0.66
Peer Accountability Structures				
Yes (n=334)	59.3 (17.2)***	58.2 (19.5)**	6.9 (2.1)***	6.4 (2.2)***
No (n=466)	47.2 (18.2)	64.2 (18.7)	5.0 (2.4)	7.8 (1.9)
Cohen's d	0.68	0.32	0.84	0.68
Correlations with Continuous Variables	r (p-value)	r (p-value)	r (p-value)	r (p-value)
Self-Help Books Read (past year)	-0.31 (<0.001)	0.38 (<0.001)	-0.29 (<0.001)	0.34 (<0.001)

Religious Practice Frequency	0.24 (<0.001)	-0.18 (<0.001)	0.21 (<0.001)	-0.16 (<0.001)
Professional Development Hours	0.19 (<0.001)	-0.12 (0.001)	0.17 (<0.001)	-0.11 (0.003)

*Note: Values are Mean (SD) for categorical comparisons. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$. Independent samples *t*-tests were used for categorical variables.

The bivariate analyses revealed striking and theoretically significant patterns that directly addressed the study's central concern about sociology's role in challenging or reinforcing myths of asocial asceticism. Formal sociological training demonstrated the strongest associations with socially-oriented understandings of discipline, with trained respondents scoring 16.2 points higher on the Social Orientation Score compared to untrained respondents (64.8 vs. 48.6, $t = 10.83$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.94$), representing a large effect size that suggested sociological education substantially reshaped how individuals conceptualized discipline. Equally important, sociologically trained respondents scored significantly lower on Individual Orientation measures (55.3 vs. 63.6, $t = 5.12$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.44$) and showed dramatically higher recognition of institutional scaffolding (7.4 vs. 5.3, $t = 11.24$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.96$) while attributing less to personal willpower (6.1 vs. 7.5, $t = 7.43$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.64$). These findings provided empirical support for the proposition that sociology possessed conceptual resources capable of disrupting individualistic myths, though the persistence of moderate individual orientation scores even among trained respondents ($M = 55.3$) suggested that sociological education alone was insufficient to completely overcome culturally dominant frameworks. Participation in institutional disciplinary programs showed similar but somewhat attenuated patterns, with participants scoring higher on social orientation (58.7 vs. 48.1, $d = 0.59$) and lower on individual orientation (57.9 vs. 64.2, $d = 0.33$), indicating that direct experiential knowledge of how discipline operates through social mechanisms—mentorship, peer observation, institutional rituals—also cultivated more sociologically informed understandings, albeit with smaller effect sizes than formal training. The findings regarding heavy self-help consumption were particularly revealing and troubling from a critical sociological perspective: heavy consumers scored significantly lower on social orientation (45.2 vs. 55.4, $t = 6.79$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.57$) and higher on individual orientation (68.9 vs. 58.4, $t = 6.79$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.57$), with markedly lower recognition of institutional scaffolding (4.6 vs. 6.3, $d = 0.74$) and higher attribution to willpower (8.1 vs. 6.8, $d = 0.66$). These patterns suggested that self-help literature actively worked against sociological consciousness, reinforcing precisely the myths of asocial asceticism that empirical sociology sought to dismantle. The correlation analyses reinforced these patterns, with self-help consumption showing moderate negative correlation with social orientation ($r = -0.31$, $p < 0.001$) and positive correlation with individual orientation ($r = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$), while religious practice frequency and professional development hours showed weaker but still significant positive associations with social orientation, indicating that various forms of collective engagement oriented individuals toward more relational understandings of discipline. The presence of peer accountability structures showed large effects comparable to sociological training ($d = 0.68$ for social orientation, $d = 0.84$ for institutional recognition), suggesting that structural features of social life—not just cognitive frameworks—powerfully shaped consciousness

about discipline's nature, which had important implications for how sociology might intervene in popular discourse beyond formal education.

Table 3: Multivariable Regression Models Predicting Orientations Toward Discipline

Predictor	Model 1: Social Orientation Score	Model 2: Individual Orientation Score	Model 3: Institutional Scaffolding Recognition	Model 4: Willpower Attribution (Logistic: High ≥ 8)
	β (SE)	β (SE)	β (SE)	OR [95% CI]
Block 1: Demographics				
Age	0.08 (0.06)	-0.05 (0.06)	0.04 (0.01)	0.99 [0.97-1.01]
Gender (Female)	2.13 (1.28)	-1.87 (1.32)	0.22 (0.17)	0.84 [0.62-1.14]
Education (years)	1.24 (0.31)***	-0.89 (0.32)**	0.11 (0.04)**	0.92 [0.85-0.99]*
Block 2: Primary Exposures				
Sociological Training	6.34 (1.56)***	-4.12 (1.61)*	0.82 (0.21)***	0.58 [0.39-0.86]**
Institutional Program	4.28 (1.31)**	-3.04 (1.35)*	0.61 (0.17)***	0.64 [0.46-0.91]*
Self-Help Books (per year)	-0.72 (0.18)***	0.94 (0.19)***	-0.09 (0.02)***	1.11 [1.06-1.17]***
Block 3: Social Practices				
Peer Accountability	5.16 (1.33)***	-2.68 (1.37)*	0.73 (0.18)***	0.61 [0.43-0.85]**
Religious Practice (days/wk)	0.68 (0.26)*	-0.43 (0.27)	0.08 (0.03)*	0.96 [0.89-1.04]
Professional Dev (hrs/mo)	0.14 (0.09)	-0.08 (0.10)	0.02 (0.01)	0.99 [0.96-1.02]
Block 4: Interactions				
Sociology \times Self-Help	1.89 (0.47)***	-1.34 (0.49)**	0.19 (0.06)**	0.72 [0.56-0.93]*
Institutional \times Peer Accountability	3.21 (1.42)*	-1.98 (1.47)	0.41 (0.19)*	0.68 [0.45-1.03]
Model Statistics				
R ² (Adj R ²)	0.387 (0.378)	0.312 (0.302)	0.394 (0.385)	Nagelkerke R ² =0.298

F-statistic	42.34***	30.47***	43.68***	$\chi^2=187.43***$
ΔR^2 (Block 2 over Block 1)	0.285***	0.231***	0.289***	-
ΔR^2 (Block 3 over Block 2)	0.074***	0.051***	0.076***	-
ΔR^2 (Block 4 over Block 3)	0.028**	0.030**	0.029**	-

*Note: N=800. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$. Models 1-3 are hierarchical linear regressions. Model 4 is binary logistic regression with high willpower attribution (≥ 8 on 0-10 scale) as outcome. β = unstandardized coefficient; OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval.

The multivariable regression models provided robust evidence for the study's central thesis while revealing complex interactions that nuanced our understanding of how sociology both challenges and is undermined by competing discourses about discipline. Model 1, predicting social orientation scores, demonstrated that formal sociological training remained a powerful independent predictor ($\beta=6.34$, $p < 0.001$) even after controlling for demographic variables, other exposure variables, and social practices, indicating that the conceptual frameworks provided by sociology exerted effects beyond what could be explained by selection bias or confounding by educational attainment alone. The model explained 38.7% of variance in social orientation, with the primary exposures block (sociological training, institutional participation, self-help consumption) accounting for a substantial increment of 28.5% beyond demographics alone ($p < 0.001$), confirming that these theoretical mechanisms were empirically consequential. Self-help book consumption showed a significant negative association with social orientation ($\beta=-0.72$ per book per year, $p < 0.001$), meaning that each additional self-help book read annually corresponded to a 0.72-point decrease in social orientation scores, net of all other factors. Critically, the significant positive interaction between sociological training and self-help consumption ($\beta=1.89$, $p < 0.001$) revealed that sociological education provided some protective effect against the individualizing influence of self-help discourse, as sociologically trained individuals who consumed self-help literature maintained higher social orientation than would be predicted from the additive effects alone. This interaction suggested that sociological consciousness, once established, created interpretive filters through which individuals could engage with popular discourse more critically, though it did not eliminate self-help's influence entirely. The presence of peer accountability structures emerged as the second strongest predictor after sociological training ($\beta=5.16$, $p < 0.001$), and its significant interaction with institutional program participation ($\beta=3.21$, $p < 0.05$) indicated synergistic effects whereby the combination of formal institutional involvement and peer-based accountability mechanisms produced understanding of discipline's social character that exceeded what either factor could generate independently, supporting the theoretical proposition that lived experience of social mechanisms reinforced cognitive frameworks about discipline's nature.

Model 2, predicting individual orientation scores, essentially mirrored Model 1 with reversed signs, as theoretically expected, though with somewhat smaller effect sizes and lower overall variance explained ($R^2=0.312$), suggesting that individual orientation was influenced by additional unmeasured factors, possibly including broader cultural narratives,

media exposure beyond self-help books, or psychological dispositions toward individualism. Sociological training ($\beta=-4.12$, $p<0.05$) and institutional participation ($\beta=-3.04$, $p<0.05$) both significantly reduced individual orientation, while self-help consumption strongly increased it ($\beta=0.94$, $p<0.001$), patterns that reinforced the competitive relationship between sociological and popular discourses. Model 3, examining recognition of institutional scaffolding, showed the strongest overall explanatory power ($R^2=0.394$) and revealed that sociological training had particularly large effects on this specific cognitive dimension ($\beta=0.82$, $p<0.001$), suggesting that sociology's pedagogical strength lay especially in making visible the usually invisible institutional infrastructure supporting disciplinary practices—a finding with important implications for how sociological knowledge might be translated for public audiences. The multivariable models also revealed that educational attainment per se showed independent positive associations with social orientation ($\beta=1.24$, $p<0.001$) and negative associations with individual orientation ($\beta=-0.89$, $p<0.01$) beyond the effects of specifically sociological training, indicating that general education cultivated some capacity for structural thinking, though these effects (approximately 1.24 points per additional year of education) were considerably smaller than those of sociological training specifically (6.34 points), highlighting sociology's distinctive contribution.

Model 4, the logistic regression predicting high attribution to personal willpower, provided a different analytical lens by examining the odds of endorsing strongly individualistic explanations (scores ≥ 8 on the 0-10 scale, representing the top quartile). Sociological training reduced the odds of high willpower attribution by 42% (OR=0.58, 95% CI: 0.39-0.86, $p<0.01$), while each additional self-help book increased these odds by 11% (OR=1.11, 95% CI: 1.06-1.17, $p<0.001$), effects that remained significant after adjusting for all covariates. The significant interaction term (OR=0.72, $p<0.05$) indicated that sociological training moderated the relationship between self-help consumption and willpower attribution, though the protective effect was only partial—sociologically trained heavy self-help consumers still showed elevated individualism compared to trained individuals who avoided such literature. Institutional program participation and peer accountability structures both significantly reduced odds of extreme individualistic attribution (OR=0.64 and 0.61 respectively, both $p<0.05$), reinforcing the finding that direct experience with social mechanisms of discipline cultivated awareness that challenged purely voluntaristic explanations. Taken together, these multivariable analyses demonstrated that sociology possessed powerful tools for disrupting myths of asocial asceticism, with effect sizes ranging from medium to large (standardized β s of 0.34 to 0.54 for primary predictors when converted), but that these effects operated within a broader cultural field where competing discourses—especially those promulgated through self-help literature—actively worked to reinforce individualistic understandings. The interactions between sociological training and self-help consumption, and between institutional participation and peer accountability, suggested that combating the myth of the asocial ascetic required both cognitive reframing through education and structural embedding in social practices that made discipline's collective character experientially evident, a finding that had significant implications for both pedagogical practice within sociology and the discipline's public engagement strategies.

Conclusion

This study provided compelling empirical evidence that sociology possesses substantial conceptual resources for dismantling the myth of the asocial ascetic, yet these resources remained unevenly distributed and contested within a broader cultural field dominated by individualistic discourses about discipline and self-regulation. The multivariable analyses demonstrated that formal sociological training exerted significant independent effects on orientations toward discipline, increasing social orientation scores by an average of 6.34 points and reducing the odds of extreme individualistic attribution by 42%, even after controlling for demographic characteristics, general educational attainment, and various forms of experiential exposure. These findings confirmed that sociology's distinctive analytical frameworks—particularly its emphasis on institutional scaffolding, relational dynamics, and collective practices—fundamentally reshaped how individuals understood the cultivation of discipline, making visible the usually invisible social mechanisms that the myth of the asocial ascetic systematically obscured. However, the study also revealed troubling patterns regarding the appropriation and distortion of potentially sociological insights within popular discourse, particularly through self-help literature, which showed consistent negative associations with social orientation ($\beta=-0.72$ per book annually) and positive associations with individualistic understandings ($\beta=0.94$), suggesting that these texts actively reinforced precisely the myths that empirical sociology sought to challenge. The ethnographic evidence from religious communities, educational institutions, and professional organizations documented rich arrays of social practices—mentorship relationships, peer accountability structures, institutional rituals, and collective meaning-making—through which discipline was actually transmitted and sustained, yet these fundamentally relational processes were systematically misrecognized in popular consciousness, even among relatively educated populations. The significant interactions between sociological training and self-help consumption indicated that sociological consciousness provided partial but incomplete protection against individualizing narratives, enabling more critical engagement with popular discourse but not fully immunizing individuals against its influence. The study's findings therefore suggested that sociology's role in challenging the myth of the asocial ascetic must be understood as an ongoing political and pedagogical project rather than an accomplished fact, requiring sustained attention to how sociological knowledge circulates beyond academic contexts, how it competes with or is absorbed into other interpretive frameworks, and how the discipline might develop more effective strategies for translating its insights about discipline's social character into forms that could reshape public understanding while resisting appropriation and distortion. The convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings reinforced the theoretical proposition that discipline represents a fundamentally social accomplishment, irreducible to individual willpower or psychological traits, and that recognizing this social character was not merely an academic concern but had profound implications for how societies design institutions, distribute responsibility for self-regulation, and understand the structural conditions that enable or constrain human flourishing.

Recommendations

Institutional Integration of Sociological Perspectives in Professional and Educational Training Programs

Based on the finding that formal sociological training significantly predicted socially-oriented understandings of discipline ($\beta=6.34$, $p<0.001$) while institutional program participation alone showed smaller effects ($\beta=4.28$, $p<0.01$), educational institutions, professional training programs, and organizational development initiatives should systematically incorporate sociological frameworks that emphasize the relational and institutional dimensions of

discipline rather than relying exclusively on psychological or individualistic models. This integration should move beyond superficial references to "community" or "culture" to explicitly teach how peer accountability structures, mentorship relationships, institutional rituals, and collective meaning-making systems function as the primary mechanisms through which disciplinary capacities are cultivated.

Development of Public Sociology Initiatives to Counter Individualistic Self-Help Discourse

Given that self-help book consumption showed strong negative associations with social orientation ($\beta=-0.72$ per book, $p<0.001$) and that heavy consumers demonstrated significantly diminished recognition of institutional scaffolding compared to non-consumers (4.6 vs. 6.3, $d=0.74$), sociologists should develop targeted public engagement initiatives that directly address popular audiences currently served by self-help literature and wellness industries. These initiatives might include accessible public scholarship such as podcasts, popular books, and digital media content that translate sociological insights about discipline into engaging narratives while explicitly critiquing individualistic myths, collaborative partnerships with educators, coaches, and organizational consultants to develop evidence-based alternatives to existing self-help frameworks, and advocacy for institutional policies that recognize structural barriers to self-regulation rather than placing exclusive responsibility on individual willpower.

Research and Practice Development on Synergistic Social Mechanisms of Disciplinary Cultivation

The significant interaction between institutional program participation and peer accountability structures ($\beta=3.21$, $p<0.05$) indicated that combinations of social mechanisms produced synergistic effects exceeding their individual contributions, suggesting that future research and institutional design should focus on identifying and optimizing configurations of relational practices, institutional arrangements, and collective rituals that most effectively cultivate discipline while making its social character experientially evident. Organizations and communities seeking to support members' disciplinary development should move beyond isolated interventions (such as individual coaching or solitary goal-setting) toward integrated systems that combine formal mentorship, peer-based accountability groups, collective reflection practices, and institutional recognition of social interdependence, with particular attention to how these elements reinforce one another.

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