

## CHAPTER 2 HOW SOCIOLOGY IS DONE

### I. DETAILED CHAPTER OUTLINE

- A. Social Theory and Research
  - 1. Cause and Effect
  - 2. Theory and Values
  - 3. Theories versus Values: Why Does It Matter?
    - a. Values and the Social Sciences
  - 4. The Relationship between Theory and Research
    - a. Explanation versus Prediction
    - b. Research and Theory-Testing
    - c. Research and Theory Generation
- B. Using and Measuring Variables
  - 1. Independent Variables
  - 2. Dependent Variables
  - 3. Operational Definitions
  - 4. Validity and Reliability
  - 5. Correlation
    - Box: *Understanding Race, Class, and Gender* – Sorting Out Cause-Effect Relationships: Single-Parent Homes and Teenage Parenthood (see p. 34)
  - 6. Control Variables
- C. Key Research Methods in Sociology
  - 1. Quantitative and Qualitative Methods
- D. Experiments
  - 1. Experimental and Control Groups
    - Box: *Personal Journeys into Sociology* – “Changing Times” by Joan McCord (see p. 36)
  - 2. Field Experiments
    - a. Natural Experiments
    - b. Social Experiments
- E. Survey Research
  - 1. Questionnaires
  - 2. Telephone Interviews
  - 3. Personal Interviews
  - 4. Survey Questions
  - 5. Sampling
    - Box: *Sociological Surprises* – Doing Survey Research: Sex in America
- F. Field Observation
  - 1. Field Observation and Theory Generation
  - 2. Participant Observation
    - Box: *Understanding Race, Class, and Gender* – Doing Participant Observation: Slim’s Table
  - 3. Unobtrusive Observation
- G. Use of Existing Data Sources
  - 1. Data Archives
  - 2. The U.S. Census
  - 3. Content Analysis
- H. Reading Tables

## II. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- A. Explain the meaning of *cause* and *effect* as these terms are used in the social sciences, and understand the significance of cause and effect relationships to the discipline of sociology.
- B. In the context of cause and effect relationships, understand the roles of *prediction* and *explanation* as objectives of social research.
- C. Differentiate between *theories* and *values*, and also between theories and *research*. Understand the roles of theory, research, and values in sociology.
- D. Define *hypothesis* and explain how this concept was used by Emile Durkheim in his study of suicide.
- E. Explain what social scientists mean by *theory generation*, and illustrate this concept with reference to the work of Theodor Adorno and his associates.
- F. Explore the use and measurement of *variables* in the social sciences. Understand what a variable is, and know the meaning of *independent variables* and *dependent variables*, *control variables*, *correlations*, *operational definitions*, and *validity* and *reliability*.
- G. Understand the difference between *correlation* and *causation*, and the usefulness and limitations of correlation as a means of identifying cause-effect relationships.
- H. Understand the differences between *quantitative* and *qualitative research*, the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, and the value of incorporating both types of research in understanding social relations and issues.
- G. Distinguish among, provide examples of, and note the components of each of the four major types of research methods used by sociologists: *experiments*, *surveys*, *field observation*, and the *analysis of existing data*.
- H. Outline the components of a table, and learn how to read one properly.

## III. IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

|                                |                                 |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Cause and effect (p. 27)       | Telephone interview (p. 38)     |
| Values (p. 27)                 | Fixed-response questions (p.39) |
| Hypothesis (p. 29)             | Respondent (p.39)               |
| Case study (p. 31)             | Open-ended questions (p. 39)    |
| Independent variable (p. 31)   | Personal interview (p. 39)      |
| Dependent variable (p. 31)     | Sample (p. 40)                  |
| Variable (p. 31)               | Representative sample (p.40)    |
| Operational definition (p. 31) | Field observation (p. 40)       |
| Validity (p. 32)               | Observation (p. 41)             |
| Face validity (p. 32)          | Interpretation (p. 41)          |
| Reliability (p. 32)            | Participant observation (p.41)  |
| Correlation (p. 32)            | Qualitative interviewing (p.42) |
| Control Variable (p. 33)       | Unobtrusive observation (p.44)  |
| Quantitative research (p. 33)  | Content analysis (p. 45)        |
| Qualitative research (p. 33)   |                                 |
| Experiment (p. 35)             |                                 |
| Experimental group (p. 35)     |                                 |
| Control group (p. 35)          |                                 |
| Field experiments (p. 36)      |                                 |
| Natural experiments (p. 36)    |                                 |
| Social experiments (p. 37)     |                                 |
| Survey research (p.38)         |                                 |
| Questionnaire (p. 38)          |                                 |

#### **IV. IMPORTANT THEORISTS AND RESEARCHERS**

Emile Durkheim (pp. 30)  
Theodor Adorno (p. 31)

Joan McCord (pp. 36-37)  
William Foote Whyte (p. 41)

Herbert Gans (p. 41)

#### **V. SUGGESTED LECTURE TOPICS**

A. Discuss the differences between the type of sampling techniques utilized in a shopping mall survey (quota sample or sample of convenience) and the types of samples selected in major surveys conducted by the major news media and the Nielsen Corporation (representative samples). Explain the reasons for using each type of sample and the problems associated with each of them in respect to cost, time, difficulties, and generalizability.

B. Using the Code of Ethics pamphlet published by the American Sociological Association, discuss the ethical issues involved in research on human subjects. Ask students how they feel about the considerations being made by the association for the well-being of people participating in sociological research as subjects. Ask students if they have participated in any research study and about the effects of the research on them.

C. Review the methods employed by Laud Humphries in his famous study of the “Tearoom Trade.” What are the ethical issues involved in how Humphries carried out his study? Ask them to consider what alternative methods a researcher could have used to replicate his study in a more ethical manner.

D. Lead a discussion over why some people refuse to answer Census takers, participate in telephone surveys or respond to exit poll surveyors after an election. While apathy or impatience may play a role, what other factors are at work in some people's refusal? .

#### **VI. SUGGESTED CLASSROOM EXERCISES**

A. Have students read “Body Ritual among the Nacirema” by Horace Miner for homework. Separate the students into groups of four or five members and have them discuss the strange rituals of the group under study. Some students will realize that the Nacirema are actually Americans (American spelled backwards) but many will not. Lead a discussion on the problems of researchers bringing their own biases into the research setting. Have students complete the exercise by turning in a reaction paper based on the reading.

B. Have students work in small groups to design a questionnaire aimed at discovering why students use electronic devices in class, such as cell phones, blackberries, etc. Have them try to discover if this practice bothers other students as much as professors, why students continue to use them despite constant threats, requests or incentives not to, and what could be done to reduce the use of such devices in classrooms. You can have them each distribute their questionnaire as a group to students on campus or help lead a process where students choose the final form of the survey based on the best of all of the surveys developed in class.

#### **VII. INTERNET RESOURCES**

<http://www.asanet.org> (Check out the Code of Ethics for sociological research at this website)

<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/> (General Social Survey website, provides information on data available through the General Social Survey. Access to actual data may require institutional membership.)

<http://sophia.smith.edu/~jdrisko/qualres.htm> (Qualitative sociology Web links)

<http://gsociology.icaap.org/methods/> (Web resources for social research and program evaluation. Also has numerous links on the ethics of social research)

## **VIII. SUGGESTED FILMS**

*ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN*, 1976

Investigating the crimes of the president.

*FROST/NIXON*, 2009

Two teams try to out-research each other for a prime time high stakes "debate."

*THE INSIDER*, 1999

Investigating the tobacco companies.