

SOCIOLOGY

Adapted from Richard T. Schaefer (2007)

Sociological Research



Sociological Research

- Scientific Method?
- Major Research Designs
- Ethics of Research
- Technology and Sociological Research
- Social Policy and Sociological Research

Scientific Method

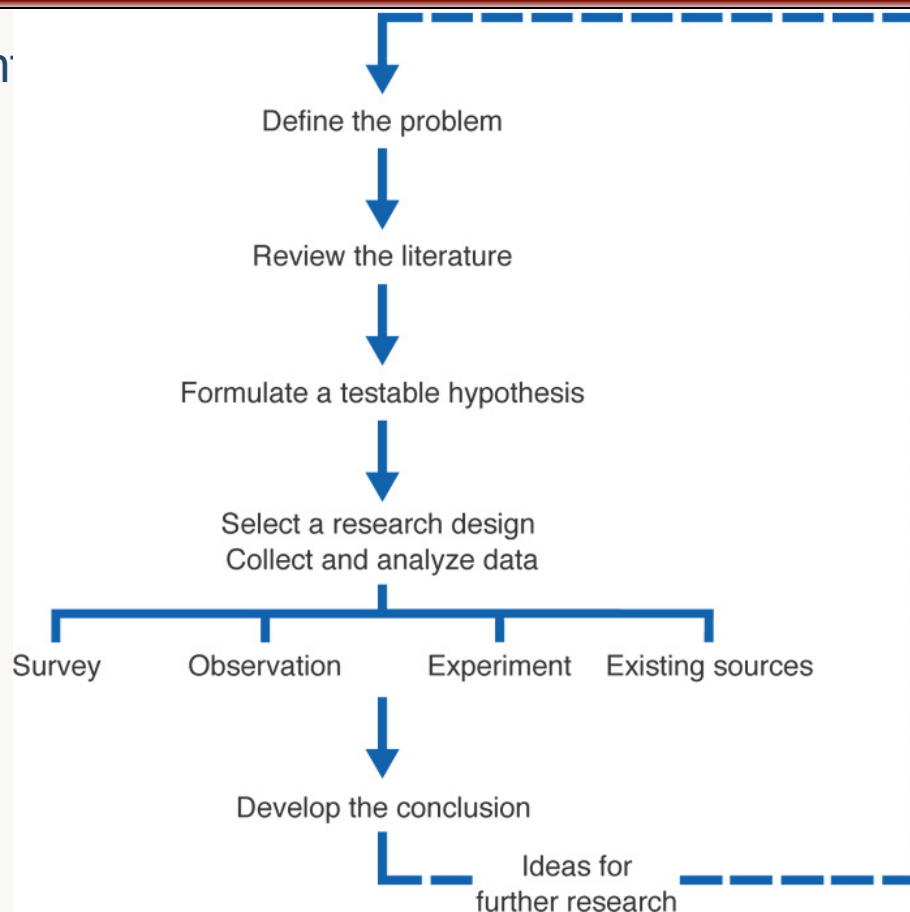
Systematic, organized series of steps that ensures objectivity and consistency in research



What is the Scientific Method?

Look familiar Tech student:

It's not me, it's science.



Defining the problem

- In Abstract AND AGAIN in Introduction
 - State as clearly as possible what you hope to investigate (THESIS)
 - **Operational Definition:** explanation of concept that is specific enough to allow you to look at the concept in a scientific way
- Reviewing the Literature
 - What have other experts said on topic?

Formulate the Hypothesis

- **Hypothesis:** speculative statement about relationship between two or more factors known as *variables*
- **Variable:** what you are measuring (subject to change under different conditions)

Types of variables

- **Independent variable:** variable hypothesized to cause or influence another (example GENDER, IB versus IMM program) It is INDEPENDENT of your control (you can't switch programs for your study)
- **Dependent variable:** action *depends* on the influence of the independent variable to affect its action (ex. feelings of success)

Formulating Hypothesis

Causal Logic: Involves relationships between a condition or variable and a consequence, with one event leading to the other (studying more CAUSES higher grades)

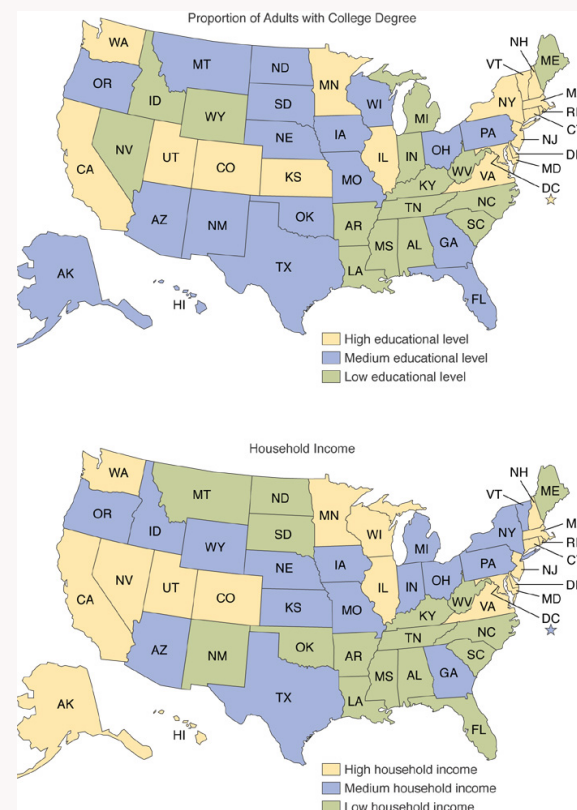
Correlation: Exists when a change in one variable coincides with a change in another (Being in IB and high self esteem seem to happen together but it is impossible to prove which came first)

Important - Correlation does not indicate causation!



Causation

Figure 2-2. Educational Level and Household Income in the United States



Source: Bureau of the Census 2004a:143; DeNabais-Walt et al. 2004:21

Causal Logic

Independent variable

Dependent variable

x



y

Level of educational degree



Level of income

Degree of lack of integration into society



Likelihood of suicide

Parents' church attendance



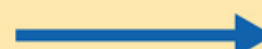
Children's church attendance

Time spent preparing for quiz



Performance on quiz

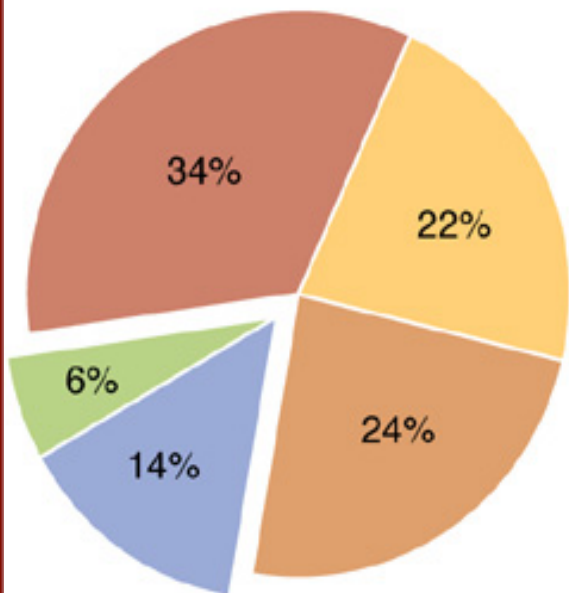
Parents' income



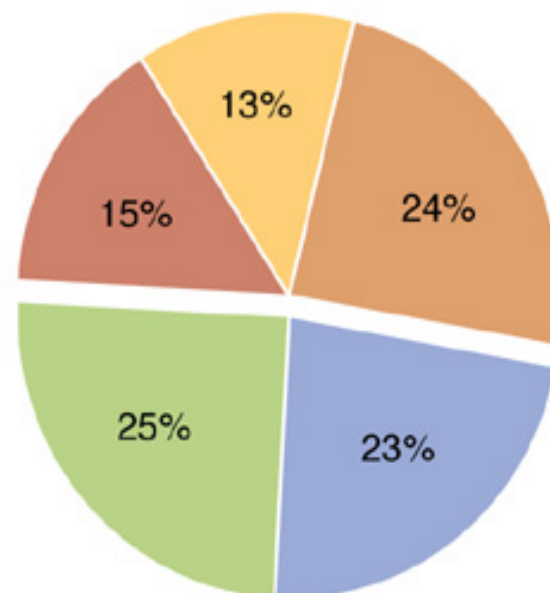
Likelihood of children's enrolling in college

Impact of college education on Income

High school diploma or less



Associate's degree or more



Remember – LAW LIKE rules. There are always exceptions!

Collecting and Analyzing Data

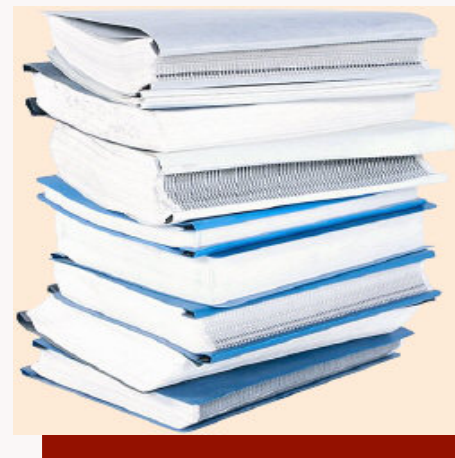
– Selecting the Sample

- **Sample:** selection from a larger population that is LIKE that population
- **Random Sample:** when every member of an entire population has the same chance of being selected
- **Skewed Sample:** the sample does NOT represent the population (just choosing your friends)

Analyzing Data

– Ensuring Validity and Reliability

- **Validity:** degree to which a measure reflects the phenomenon (does it measure what you said?)
- **Reliability:** extent to which a measure provides consistent results (will this happen again?)

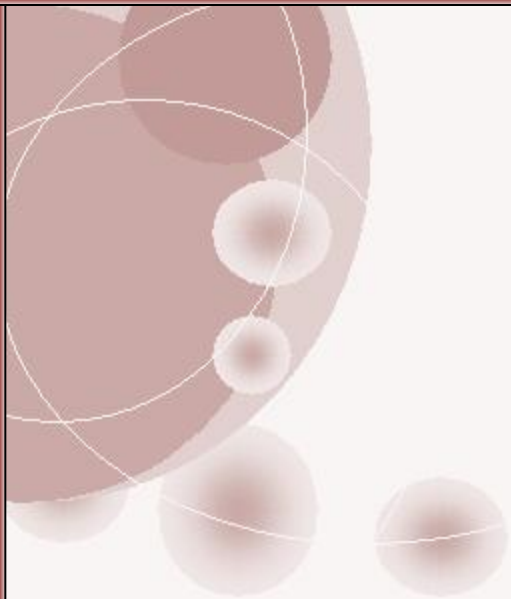


What is the Scientific Method?

- **Developing the Conclusion**
 - **Supporting the Hypothesis**
 - Sociological studies do not always generate data that support the original hypothesis
 - **Controlling for Other Factors**

Control Variable: factor that is held constant to test the impact of the independent variable

Research Design



Detailed plan or method for obtaining data scientifically (Explain what you are doing)

Research Design tools

- **Surveys**

- Study, generally in form of an interview or questionnaire, that provide sociologists with information about how people act or think

Quantitative research: collects and reports data primarily in numerical form

Major Research Designs

- Surveys

Qualitative research: relies on what is seen in field and naturalistic settings; often focuses on small groups and communities rather than large groups or large nations

Major Research Designs

- **Observation**

- Collecting information through direct participation and/or by closely watching a group or community

Participant observation:
when sociologist joins a group for a period to get an accurate sense of how it operates

Ethnography: efforts to describe entire social setting through extended systematic objective observation

Major Research Designs

- **Experiments**

- Artificially created situation that allows researcher to manipulate variables
 - **Experimental Group:** exposed to independent variable
 - **Control Group:** not exposed to independent variable
 - **Hawthorne Effect:** unintended influence of observers or experiments on subjects

Major Research Designs

- **Use of Existing Sources**

- **Secondary Analysis:** research techniques that make use of previously collected and publicly accessible information and data
- **Content Analysis:** systematic coding and objective recording of data, guided by some rationale

Term II

Major Research Designs

Table 2-1. Existing Sources Used in Sociological Research

Table 2-1 Existing Sources Used in Sociological Research

summingUP

Census data

Crime statistics

Birth, death, marriage, divorce, and health statistics

Other Sources

Newspapers and periodicals

Personal journals, diaries, e-mail, and letters

Records and archival material of religious organizations, corporations, and other organizations

Transcripts of radio programs

Videotapes of motion pictures and television programs

Web pages, Weblogs, and chatrooms

Song lyrics

Scientific records (such as patent applications)

Speeches of public figures (such as politicians)

Votes cast in elections or by elected officials on specific legislative proposals

Attendance records for public events

Videotapes of social protests and rallies

Literature, including folklore

Major Research Designs

Table 2-2. Major Research Designs

Table 2-2 Major Research Designs

Method	Examples	Advantages	Limitations
Survey	Questionnaires Interviews	Yields information about specific issues	Can be expensive and time-consuming
Observation	Ethnography	Yields detailed information about specific groups or organizations	Involves months if not years of labor-intensive data
Experiment	Deliberate manipulation of people's social behavior	Yields direct measures of people's behavior	Ethical limitations on the degree to which subjects' behavior can be manipulated
Existing sources/ Secondary analysis	Analysis of census or health data Analysis of films or TV commercials	Cost-efficiency	Limited to data collected for some other purpose

Ethics of Research

- Code of Ethics

1. Maintain objectivity and integrity in research
2. Respect the subject's right to privacy and dignity
3. Protect subjects from personal harm
4. Preserve confidentiality
5. Seek informed consent
6. Acknowledge research collaboration and assistance
7. Disclose all sources of financial support

(ASA 1997)

Ethics of Research

- **Confidentiality**
- **Research Funding**
- **Value Neutrality**

Technology and Sociological Research

- Extend range and capability to conduct research
- Allow researchers to store and analyze large amounts of information
- Internet facilitates communication between researchers



Social Policy and Sociological Research

- Studying Human Sexuality
 - The Issue
 - Kaiser Family Foundation found two-thirds of TV shows include some sexual content
 - How does one carry out scientific research on such a controversial and personal topic?

Social Policy and Sociological Research

- Studying Human Sexuality
 - The Setting
 - Little reliable national data on patterns of sexual behavior in U.S.
 - Government funding for studies of sexual behavior is controversial

Social Policy and Sociological Research

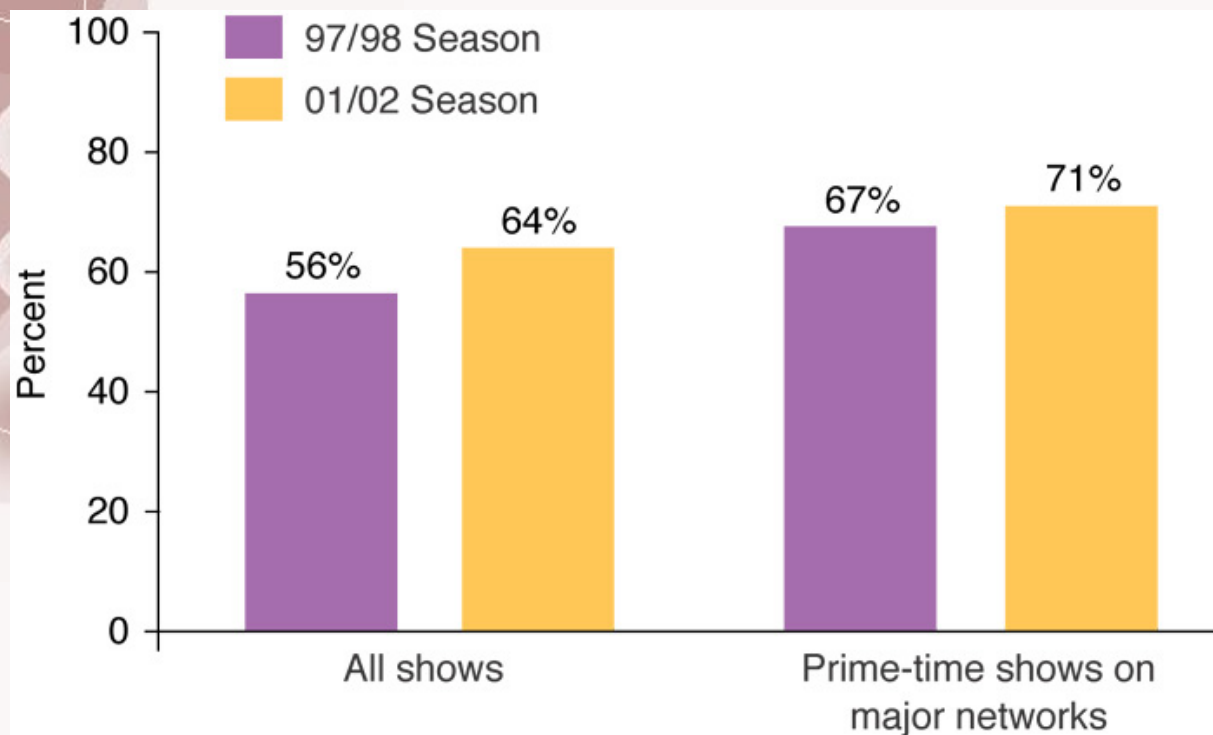
- Studying Human Sexuality
 - Sociological Insights
 - Federal government is major source of funding for sociological research
 - Research on human sexuality has run into barriers constructed by government funding agencies

Social Policy and Sociological Research

- Studying Human Sexuality
 - Policy Initiatives
 - In 1991, U.S. Senate voted to forbid funding any survey on adult sexual practices
 - Gagnon, Michaels, and Michael developed NHSLS to better understand sexual practices of adults in U.S.
 - Used \$1.6 million of private funding to fund research

Social Policy and Sociological Research

Figure 2-5. Percent of Television Shows that Contain Sexual Content



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation 2001:2, 2003:38, 40