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Department of Sociology

Sociology 205
Fall 2011
Monday 1:00 to 4:00, William James Hall 601

Sociological Research Design

Synopsis

This course covers the fundamentals of social science research design. Emphasis is placed on principles that are applicable in all kinds of research, from surveys to participant observation, from comparative historical study to demographic analysis. We begin with a bit of philosophy of science, and the course focuses on such practical matters as how to distinguish a theory from a political program or a philosophical assertion, how to derive a falsifiable hypothesis from a theory, how to design a research project to test an hypothesis, how to carry out research, and how to write up results. The course also delves into current methodological controversies in several arenas. I strive to avoid redundancy with other courses in the department, hence the course gives relatively little attention to specific qualitative and quantitative techniques of analysis.

Course Requirements

Students should come to class prepared to discuss the week's readings. Each week there will be a short assignment (1-3 pages) that will serve as the basis for an in-class exercise. While brief, most assignments will require a fair amount of thought and preparation. Please bring a copy of your work for each member of the class, unless instructed otherwise. By the end of the semester, students will complete a 10-15 page research proposal in the form of a grant application.

READINGS

Articles and chapters are available on the course website. In addition, four books are required. You can find them at used bookstores online.

Required Books

Becker, Howard. 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Stinchcombe, Arthur L. 1968. *Constructing Social Theories*. New York: Harcourt.

Alford, Robert R. 1998. *The Craft of Inquiry: Theories, Methods, Evidence*. New York: Oxford University Press.

King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Recommended Book:

Strunk, William, Jr., and E.B. White. Any Edition. *The Elements of Style*. New York: Macmillan.

WEEK 1, August 31 (Wednesday this week, following Monday schedule)

Metatheory, Theory, and Hypotheses

Stinchcombe, Arthur L. 1968. *Constructing Social Theories*. New York: Harcourt. Pages 1-56.

Popper, Karl R. 1959. "Predictions and Prophecy in the Social Sciences." Pp. 275-285 in *Theories of History*. Edited by Patrick Gardiner. London: Macmillan.

Hempel, Carl G. 1974. "Reason and Covering Laws in Historical Explanation." Pp. 90-105 in *The Philosophy of History*. Edited by Patrick Gardiner. London: Oxford University Press.

Gorski, Philip S. 2004. "The Poverty of Deductivism: A Constructive Realist Model of Sociological Explanation." *Sociological Methodology*, 34:1-33

Ridgeway, Cecilia L. 1997. "Interaction and the Conservation of Gender Inequality: Considering Employment." *American Sociological Review* 62 (2): 218-235.

Assignment:

Drawing on Stinchcombe's discussion of hypotheses, derive formal hypotheses from the Ridgeway article.

WEEK 2, September 12

How to Prove Things

Durkheim, Émile. 1966 [1938]. "Rules Relative to Establishing Sociological Proofs", Chapter 6. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press.

Weber, Max. 1978. "Basic Sociological Terms." Pp. 3-62 in *Economy and Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994 "Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research." Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapters 1 and 2.

Wimmer, Andreas and Brian Min. 2006. "From Empire to Nation-State: Explaining Wars in the Modern World, 1816-2001." American Sociological Review, 71 (6):867-897.

Sharkey, Patrick and Felix Elwert. 2011. The Legacy of Disadvantage: Multigenerational Neighborhood Effects on Cognitive Ability." American Journal of Sociology 116 (6): 1934-81.

Assignment:

For the article by Wimmer and Min or the article by Sharkey and Elwert, derive formal hypotheses as you did in the first week. Then using Durkheim's principles for establishing sociological proofs, provide a brief outline of the evidence the authors present to test their hypotheses. Assess the paper in Durkheim's terms.

WEEK 3 September 19

Causality

Stinchcombe, Arthur L. 1968. *Constructing Social Theories*. New York: Harcourt. Pages 57-129.

King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. "Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research," Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapter 3.

Hedstrom, Peter and Richard Swedberg. 1998. "Social Mechanisms: An Introductory Essay." pp 1-31 in *Social Mechanisms*, edited by Peter Hedstrom and Richard Swedberg. Cambridge: Oxford University Press.

Assignment:

Assignment: Find an existing survey dataset appropriate to the question you would like to address. Based on the codebook, write a two-page memo outlining the characteristics of the dataset, including sample size, population sampled, and response rate. List the variables you would foresee using in the analysis, and all information about those variables that is shown in the codebook, such as univariate statistics. Detail several, preferably competing, hypotheses; review how you will operationalize causal factors and outcomes; propose analytic techniques.

WEEK 4 September 26

Research Design

Alford, Robert R. 1998. *The Craft of Inquiry: Theories, Methods, Evidence*. New York: Oxford University Press. Introduction and Chapters 1-5.

Mayo, Elton. 1984 [1949]. "Hawthorne and the Western Electric Company." Pp. 279-292 in *Organization Theory: Selected Readings*. Edited by D.S. Pugh. New York: Penguin.

Castilla, Emilio J. and Stephen Benard. 2010. "The Paradox of Meritocracy in Organizations." Administrative Science Quarterly 55:543–576

MacKenzie, Donald. 2011. "The Credit Crisis as a Problem in the Sociology of Knowledge." American Journal of Sociology 116 (6):1778-1841.

Assignment:

For either the Castilla and Benard paper or the MacKenzie paper, outline the theory and hypotheses presented and propose a research design to test the same hypotheses using altogether different methods.

WEEK 5 October 3

The Unit of Analysis: Sampling

King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapter 4.

Rossi, Peter. 1988. "On Sociological Data." Pp. 131-154 in *Handbook of Sociology*. Edited by Neil Smelser. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Lukes, Steven. 1968. "Methodological Individualism Reconsidered." *British Journal of Sociology* 19:119-29.

Meyer, John. 1988. "Society Without Culture." Pp. 193-201 in *Rethinking the Nineteenth Century*. Edited by Francisco Ramirez. New York: Greenwood.

Assignment:

Draw a stratified random sample (N=40) using sources available in the library or online. You may sample hospitals, schools, architects, nation-states, or whatever you please. Please stratify the sample on two dimensions (e.g., size and location).

WEEK 6 October 17

Survey Design

Taylor-Powell, Ellen. 1998. "Asking Questions With a Purpose."

Fumento, Tobey. "Issues in Questionnaire Design."
<http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/SPED/TRI/questionnaire.htm>

Assignment:

Outline several hypotheses about the opinions of Harvard undergraduates. Draft a questionnaire that could be used to test these hypotheses. Bring copies of the questionnaire to class for discussion by the group.

WEEK 7 October 24

Qualitative Designs

Geertz, Clifford. 1983. "From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding." Pp. 55-72 in *Local Knowledge*. New York: Basic.

Miles, Matthew B and A Michael Huberman. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. Second Edition. Sage: London. Chapters 7 and 8, 172-239.

Kunda, Gideon. 1992. *Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Pages 1-25, 217-240.

Suddaby, Roy. 2006. "What Grounded Theory is Not." *Academy of Management Journal* 49 (4): 633-642.

Assignment:

You have been asked to review a paper by the *American Sociological Review*. I will distribute copies. Write a review of the paper (1-3 pages, single-spaced) and fill out the reviewer's evaluation form.

WEEK 8 October 31

Comparative Designs and the Problem of Small Numbers

Alford, Robert. *The Craft of Inquiry*, Chapters 6 and 7.

King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapter 6.

Skocpol, Theda and Margaret Somers. 1980. "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22:174-197.

Ragin, Charles. 1987. *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pages 85-163.

Fourcade-Gourinchas, Marion and Babb, Sarah L. 2002. "The Rebirth of the Liberal Creed: Paths to Neoliberalism in Four Countries." *American Journal of Sociology* 108(3):533-79.

Assignment:

Assess Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb's methods from the perspective of one of the other readings for this week.

WEEK 9 November 7

Historical Designs

Isaac, Larry W. and Larry J. Griffin. 1989. "Ahistoricism in Time-Series Analyses of Historical Process: Critique, Redirection, and Illustrations from U.S. Labor History." *American Sociological Review* 54: 873-890.

Hobsbawm, Eric. 1983. "Introduction: Inventing Traditions." Pp. 1-14 in *The Invention of Tradition*. Edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. London: Cambridge University Press.

Engels, Friedrich. 1959 [1892]. "On Historical Materialism." Pp. 47-67 in *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Lustick, Ian S. 1996. "History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias." *American Political Science Review* 90: 605-618.

Assignment:

Prepare a short (1-2 page) outline of the research question, and the methods you will use, for the research proposal you are planning. Bring copies of the outline to class to distribute to the other students for feedback.

WEEK 10 November 14

Finding a Model

Stinchcombe, Arthur L., and Richard Ofshe. May 1969. Journal editing as a statistical process. *American Sociologist*, 4(2):116-117.

Bem, Daryl J. 2003. "Writing the Empirical Journal Article" In J.M. Darley, M.P Zanna, and H.L. Roediger III, eds., *The Compleat Academic: A Practical Guide for the Beginning Social Scientist*, 2nd Ed. Washington, DC: Am. Psychological Assn.

Assignment:

Choose an article from the *American Journal of Sociology* or the *American Sociological Review* that could serve as a model for your research project. Prepare a two-page précis of the paper that covers the question addressed, the theories covered, the data used, the methods employed, and the findings. What do you like about the paper? What are its weaknesses? Come to class prepared to discuss the paper you've chosen.

WEEK 11 November 21

Critiques of Normal Science

King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapter 5.

Freedman, David A. 1991. "Statistical Methods and Shoe Leather." Pp. 291-314 in *Sociological Methodology*, Volume 21. Edited By Peter V. Marsden. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Lieberson, Stanley. 1991. "Small Ns and Big Conclusions – An Examination of the Reasoning in Comparative Studies Based on a Small Number of Cases." *Social Forces* 70: 307-320.

Assignment:

You have been asked to review a paper by the *American Sociological Review*. I will distribute copies of the paper. Write a review of the paper (1-3 pages, single-spaced) and fill out the reviewer's evaluation form.

WEEK 12 November 28

Writing Up Results

Strunk, William, Jr., and E.B. White. 1979. *The Elements of Style*. Third Edition. New York: Macmillan,. Chapter 2.

Strauss, Anselm. 1987. *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Pages 249-264, Chapter 12.

Becker, Howard. 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1, 5, 7, 8.

Assignment:

The first draft of your 10-15 page research proposal is due by 5 p.m. on Wednesday the 25th. Each student will give her draft to two other class members for feedback and discussion in class.

Final Paper Due at 5 p.m., December 16.