Experience Sociology 4th edition Croteau Solutions Manual

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Chapter 2—Understanding the Research Process

Brief Outline

Social Science as a Way of Knowing
Doing Research
Types of Research
Thinking Critically: How to Assess Research
A Changing World: Technology and Social Research

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate social science research from everyday reasoning.
2. Describe the four key elements of sociological research.
3. Describe the role of theory in social science research.
4. Describe the features, strengths, and weaknesses of the major data collection methods.
5. Apply ethical standards to the challenges researchers encounter in conducting research.
6. Compare and contrast the three approaches to social science research.
7. Describe tactics for evaluating a scientific study.
8. Describe the impact of new technologies on social science research.

Lecture Outline

A. Social Science as a Way of Knowing
   - Much of the work that sociologists do is basic research, where the primary goal is to describe some aspects of society and advance our understanding of it.
   - Some sociological work is applied research, where the primary goal to directly address some problem or need.
   - Public sociology refers to the efforts to reach beyond an academic audience to make the results of sociological research, both basic and applied, known to the broader public.

1. The Limits of Everyday Thinking
   - Unquestioned trust in authorities
   - Unquestioned acceptance of "common sense"
   - Unquestioned acceptance of traditional beliefs
   - Generalizations based on personal experience
   - Reliance on selective observation
   - Biased observation and interpretation
2. The Elements of Social Science Research

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a. Patterns in Social Life
   - Social science focuses on identifiable, repeating patterns in human thought and action.
   - Social life is not merely a chaotic series of random events.
   - Social science research largely consists of identifying and understanding these patterns in social life.
   - Social scientists use a variety of techniques to describe and measure these patterns.

b. Empirical Evidence
   - Empirical evidence is evidence that can be observed or documented using the human senses.
   - It can be categorized as
     - Quantitative data
       - This is evidence that can be summarized numerically.
       - They are presented in the form of variables, which are measures that can change (or vary) and thus have different values.
       - To assign values, researchers much operationalize, which refers to defining the variables clearly so that they can be measured.
       - Variables are categorized as either independent or dependent.
       - A correlation is a relationship in which change in one variable is connected to change in another.
       - Researchers often pose a hypothesis, which is a statement about the relationship between variables that is to be investigated.
     - Qualitative data
       - Qualitative data refer to any kind of evidence that is not numerical.
       - It can be gathered from interviews, direct observation, and written or visual documents.
       - Researchers focus on describing social processes, and they organize their evidence around central themes that have emerged in their study.

c. Transparency of Methods
   - Social science depends on transparency.
   - Transparency refers to the requirement that researchers explain how they collected and analyzed their evidence and how they reached their conclusions.
   - It allows others to see how the research was done by reading a description of the process that was used in the study.

d. Provisional Knowledge
   - Social science is based on provisional knowledge.
   - It is the idea that all truth claims are tentative and open to revision given new evidence.
   - You can never be 100 percent certain about your understandings of social phenomena.

3. The Special Challenges of Social Science
   - Social researchers are unlikely to be able to control conditions.

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- Social life cannot be predicted with the certainty of natural laws.
- Human beings are conscious of being studied, which may change their behavior.
    - The tendency of humans to react differently than they otherwise would is known as the Hawthorne effect.

B. Doing Research
- Theory and data act together in social science research.
- Theory helps us identify key research questions and interpret data that are collected.
- Data provide the evidence that can support existing theory.

1. The Theory–Research Dynamic
- Theory plays several vital roles in social science research.
- Researchers reason *deductively* from a general theory when they use it to inform the gathering of specific data.
- They reason *inductively* when they develop a theory based on data they already have.
- Arnold van Gennep's theory that the function of some rituals was to mark a change of social status (rites of passage) illustrates the roles theory plays.

a. Highlighting Key Questions
- van Gennep's theory suggests that rites of passage help encourage or reinforce certain behavior, affirm common ties through their use of cultural symbols, serve as a communal acknowledgment of the change of status, and provide an outlet for emotions related to the status change.
- A researcher can draw from van Gennep's theory about rites of passed to ask questions about the contemporary social world.

b. Explaining Collected Data
- van Gennep's theory can help explain data collected by research.
- Understanding the theory associated with rites of passage helps make sense of risky behavior, such as tagging.

c. Seeing Connections
- By moving beyond description and analysis of specific phenomena to a general or abstract level, theory can help us see patterns and connections between phenomena that are not immediately apparent.

d. A Hypothetical Example
- Emile Durkheim's theory of social solidarity could help provide an investigation into the question of the causes of a sports team success.
- Theory, then, suggests areas of possible research by highlighting key questions, and it helps explain the data collected.

2. Research Methods
- Sociologists use a variety of research methods, which are procedures for collecting and analyzing data.
- Researchers choose the method that allows them to collect the most appropriate type of data needed to address the questions they are asking.

a. Survey Research

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- A versatile data collection technique that involves asking someone a series of questions.
- Problems that can arise in writing survey questions:
  - Lack of clarity
  - Validity
  - Lack of reliability
  - Loaded language
  - Double-barreled questions
- A sample is a part of the population that represented the whole.
- There are many different types of samples: random, convenience, and quota.
- Generalizations describe patterns of behavior of a larger population based on findings from a sample.

b. Intensive Interviews and Focus Groups
- An intensive interview is a data gathering that uses open-ended questions in somewhat lengthy face-to-face sessions.
- The interviews are semistructured.
- They produce more in-depth responses than a survey but include a smaller number of respondents than a survey.
- Focus groups, using a moderator, enable researchers to expand the number of people interviewed.

c. Field Research
- Field research is a data collection technique in which the research systematically observes some aspects of social life in its natural setting.
- Researchers can try to remain separate from the activities he or she is studying, or they can engage in participant observation.

d. Existing Sources
- Secondary data analysis is a type of research using data previously collected by other researchers.
- Content analysis is a variety of techniques that enable researchers to systematically summarize and analyze the content of various forms of communication—written, spoken, or pictorial.

e. Experiments
- An experiment is data gathering in which the researcher manipulates an independent variable under controlled conditions to determine whether change in an independent variable produces change in a dependent variable, thereby establishing a cause and effect relationship.

3. Research Ethics
- Sociologists are expected to adhere to ethical standards in their research activities.
- All researchers are expected to take active steps to help ensure the integrity of their work.
- American Sociological Association (ASA) “Code of Ethics”: Primary goal of ethical guidelines is “the welfare and protection of the individuals and groups with whom sociologists work.”
- In studies using anonymity, subjects remain nameless even to the researcher.

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- In studies using confidentiality, the researcher knows who the subject is, but they keep their subject's identity private.
- The most important ethical standard in research is the principle of informed consent: Subjects in any study must know about the nature of the research project, any potential benefits or risks they may face, and that they have the right to stop participating at any time, for any reason.

4. The Research Process: A Student Example
    - The basic research process is
        - Choose and explore a general topic.
        - Identify a specific research question.
        - Design the research study and specify the data to be collected.
        - Consider ethical dimensions and obtain necessary permissions/approval.
        - Collect, analyze, and interpret the data.
        - Report the results.

C. Types of Research
- Sociology is a discipline that includes a diverse array of approaches to studying the social world.
- The approaches are categorized into three major types, which include positivist, interpretive, and critical social science.
- Researchers tend to emphasize one approach over the other two.

1. Positivist Social Science
    - Positivists assume the social world, like the natural world, is characterized by laws that can be identified through research and used to predict and control human affairs.
    - Positivist social sciences strive for value-neutrality, the removal of any personal views from the research process.
2. Interpretive Social Science
    - This type of research focuses on an understanding of the *meaning* people ascribe to their social world and tends to deal directly with people's values, beliefs, and opinions.
    - Interpretive researchers usually use qualitative data.
3. Critical Social Science
    - Critical social science aims explicitly to create knowledge that can be used to bring about social change, especially to better understand and reveal the dynamics of power in society.
    - Critical researchers do not focus solely on understanding society. They are interested in understanding society to improve it in some way.

D. Thinking Critically: How to Assess Research
- In the peer-review process, scholars evaluate research manuscripts before they are published in order to ensure their quality.
- Ask at least these questions:
    - What is the research question?
    - What is the theory informing the research?
    - How are variables operationalized?

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    - What is the sample?
    - What are the data?
    - Are the conclusions justifiable?

E. A Changing World: Technology and Social Research
    - Technology has transformed social research by enabling researchers to expand the scale of their work, keep costs down, and manage time efficiently.
    - Personal computers and software programs have revolutionized how qualitative and quantitative data are recorded, stored, retrieved, and analyzed.
    - The Internet has also enabled researchers to expand the scale of their work, keep costs down, and manage time efficiently.
    - As new tools continue to develop, researchers will find ingenious and practical ways to put them to use as they investigate the social world.

F. Box: Through a Sociological Lens: Correlation, Causation, and Spuriousness

G. Box: Sociology Works: Sydney Hessel and User Experience Research

H. Box: Sociology in Action: The U.S. Census Bureau

Lecture Summary

1. Social science takes an empirical approach to the collection and dissemination of information about society. Social research relies on evidence that can be documented, transparency of data collection methods, and an openness to revising conclusions as new evidence becomes available. As such, social research can be contrasted with everyday thinking, which too often relies on unquestioned "common sense" and uncritical acceptance of claims made by authorities.

2. Theory and data are key components of social research. Theory is used to develop key questions for research, to explain existing data, and to establish connections among phenomena that may not be readily apparent. Sociologists rely on several techniques to obtain data for developing and testing theory, including survey research, in-depth interviews, field research, experiments, and examining existing information. In conducting social research, it is important for investigators to adhere to ethical standards for the protection of human subjects.

3. Sociological approaches to research can be categorized into three major types: positivist research, interpretive investigations, and critical scholarship. Positivist social science attempts to disconnect personal views or agendas from the research process and seeks to identify general principles to explain and predict behavior. An interpretive approach strives to understand the meanings that people ascribe to their social world and assumes that researchers must try to empathize with their subjects in order to interpret the world from their perspective. Critical scholars reject the notion that social research can (or should) be value-neutral, and they conduct research with an explicit goal of generating knowledge that can precipitate social change.

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4. The sociological research process generally follows a series of steps that includes exploring a general topic, identifying a specific research question, designing a study, considering the ethical dimensions of the study, collecting and analyzing data, and reporting results. Social science employs a process of peer review to ensure the quality of research. The peer-review process enlists scholars to anonymously review research studies prior to publication. During peer review, scholars review how an investigation was performed and whether the study's conclusions are justifiable. Understanding the social research process can also allow readers to carry out their own assessments of the quality of research they encounter in scholarly or popular publications.

5. Rapidly changing technology in the past few decades has enabled researchers to collect and analyze ever-increasing amounts of data. As new research tools continue to develop, researchers will find ingenious and practical ways to put them to use as they investigate the social world.

Additional Lecture Ideas

1. Have students review the website of your college's institutional review board (IRB). Discuss why these protocols are necessary and what issues need to be considered when doing research. Discuss your own IRB process for a research project on which you worked. What issues did you have to overcome?

2. Use the documentary, *The Stanford Prison Experiment*, which shows audio clips and pictures from Philip Zimbardo's famous experiment. What questions were Zimbardo trying to answer? How did he go about answering them? Today, what issues would the IRB have with this experiment? Would he be able to run this experiment today? Why or why not? This film can also be reintroduced with Chapter 7 when discussing groupthink and with Chapter 8 when talking about deviance.

3. Use the documentary, *The Milgram Experiment*, which is footage from Stanley Milgram's experiment about power and control. What questions were Milgram trying to answer? How did he go about answering them? How did Milgram avoid the Hawthorne effect? Why would an experiment be the best way to gather this data? Could you create another type of research that could gather the same information? This film can also be reintroduced with Chapter 5 when discussing the use of power and with Chapter 7 when talking about conforming behavior.

4. Have students read about the Tuskegee syphilis experiment. How did this experiment influence our modern IRB? How did the Tuskegee experiment make research in the social sciences more difficult?

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Classroom Discussion Topics

Designing a Research Project

1. Break students into groups of no more than four and have them choose a research question. Then have them decide how they would go about answering that question. Who would they talk to? What questions would they ask? Have the students then share their proposed research project with the class. What other suggestions can the class come up with in order to answer the research question? Having students do this project in class can be a good practice if you want them to conduct an actual research project amongst their peers later.

Survey Research Questions

2. Create a list of survey research questions that break all of the rules. Have the students rewrite the questions and discuss why it is necessary to use these rules.

Statistics

3. Break students into groups of no more than four and give them a newspaper article that includes a graph or a chart. Have the students label the different parts of the statistics (dependent and independent variables, etc.). Have the students discuss the use of the graph or chart. Does the statistical data correspond and accurately address the issues presented in the article (or is it mainly used to draw the audience in)? Discuss the qualitative versus quantitative aspects of the research presented. If the article relies only on quantitative data, have the students discuss how they could address the issues with qualitative research.

Popular Versus Academic Presentation of Research

4. Find a piece of research that was reported in both the popular press and in an academic journal. Have the students compare the articles and find the research question in both articles. How is the presentation of the research changed from the academic article to the popular press article? How does knowing the larger research project (from the academic journal) influence students' perspective of the information presented in the popular press?

Observation

5. Have students sit in a coffee shop for 20 minutes and take notes on what they see. Who patronizes this coffee shop? What can you tell by their clothing? What can you tell by the way they speak? What kind of interactions do the customers have with the employees? Do they seem to know each other? How do the students' notes compare? Did students notice different things? Do some people seem to be better at taking notes than others?

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