Religion in Sociological Perspective 6th edition Roberts Test Bank

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Chapter 2
A Social Scientific Approach to Studying Religion

Essay Questions

When it comes to essay questions, students sometimes write poorly because they are guessing about what the instructor wants, even if the question seems to be perfectly clear. For that reason we strongly recommend provision of an **audience** (so students know how much to assume in use of sociological vocabulary as well as how much must be made explicit) and **criteria for evaluation** (which is information that any writer needs to know.) Below are two sample statements that might be used as part of an essay question.

A. *This essay calls for presentation and defense of an informed opinion. You should write for a well-educated reader, but one unfamiliar with sociological approaches to the study of religion. You will be graded on a) provision of a clearly stated thesis, b) the clarity and sophistication of your rationale, and c) the ability to support your argument with strong evidence. Sophistication of rationale refers to awareness of the complexity of the issues. The side of the argument that you support is irrelevant to the grading criteria.*

B. *Your audience for this essay should be senior sociology majors who know sociological vocabulary, but have never specifically studied the sociology of religion. The criteria for evaluation will be 1) accuracy of explanation, 2) clarity of illustrations or examples, and 3) thoroughness in exploring all dimensions of the issue.*

Since some of these questions call for careful reflection, you might consider giving students a list of these and other essay questions in advance.

1. What is the unique contribution of sociology to the understanding of religion? How does the sociological perspective differ from the approach offered by other disciplines that study religion?

2. What are the key strengths and limitations of the sociological perspective, especially in the study of religion?

3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each of the following research designs as they apply to sociological research on religion?
   a. Survey research and statistical analysis.
   b. Content analysis.
   c. Observational studies.
   d. Experiment.

4. Why is the experiment such an important method of testing hypotheses in the social sciences? Why is this research method so difficult to use in the study of religious behavior?

5. Sociologists of religion are concerned with the same subject matter as journalists writing about religion, religious novelists, and ministers. Using appropriate concepts and examples from class and the course textbook, argue for the unique perspective that sociologists use in attempting to understand religion.

6. Why do many sociologists maintain that the natural sciences are "easy" sciences and sociology is the truly "hard" science? How do sociologists attempt to overcome the difficulty of studying human social reality from a scientific perspective?

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7. Some estimate that 85% of all published research in sociology is based on statistical analysis of survey data. With specific reference to the sociology of religion, what is gained by sociologists through this heavy reliance on survey research and statistical analysis, and what is lost?

8. Explain the difference between "quantitative" and "qualitative" research, and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each approach to the sociological study of religion.

9. What is considered "evidence" in sociology—that is, what is considered sound enough to reach a conclusion? Support your position with as many specifics as possible.

10. Following Nancy Ammerman's guidelines on "Participant Observation of Local Congregations," create a (fictional) series of diary entries that chronicle your (imaginary) visit to a religious congregation. You should include entries for the various steps Ammerman outlines: before you go, getting there, going inside, observing the service, after the service, and going home. The entries must make clear that you understand the *purpose* for Ammerman's various instructions. *(FOR INSTRUCTORS: This question is best suited to a take-home exam, and may require a page/word limit and clear instructions from you as to the point of the essay and the criteria for evaluation.)*

Multiple Choice Test Questions

1. Which of the following is NOT a focus of sociologists investigating religion?
   a. The organizational patterns of religious groups and institutions.
   b. The social behavior of individuals within a religious group.
   c. Clarification of the moral responsibility of religious persons.
   d. Conflicts between religious groups.
   e. The conflict between beliefs and institutional norms—such that beliefs and institutional structures influence behavior in contradictory ways.

2. The sociological approach to beliefs stresses the question of
   a. how beliefs influence behavior.
   b. whether the beliefs are logically consistent and present a coherent theological perspective.
   c. whether the beliefs are eternally true or are false and idolatrous.
   d. whether the beliefs lead to valid ethical conclusions and moral decisions.
   e. all of the above.

3. The sociological perspective is characterized by two fundamental principles:
   a. opposition to empiricism and objectivity.
   b. reliance on empirical data and firm commitment to a particular ideological perspective in interpreting all data.
   c. commitment to an ideology and a firm belief in individualism.
   d. rejection of any religious beliefs for one's self and opposition to empiricism.
   e. efforts to be objective and reliance on empirical data.

4. Objectivity in sociology means
   a. the sociologist must give up any private commitment as a citizen.
   b. the sociologist must try to guard against bias and must try to understand other religious groups on their own terms.
   c. the sociologist must reject any religious belief or commitment to any religious group.
   d. the sociologist must avoid all error and present only the whole truth.
   e. all of the above.

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5. Which of the following social roles might cause a researcher to be biased in his or her observations?
   a. The role of being a white, middle class, American male studying the role of women in Christianity
   b. An atheist researcher studying the effects of Christianity on American society
   c. An active church member studying symbols of the Christian church.
   d. A female researcher studying male Muslims.
   e. Any social role can create bias on the part of the researcher; it is the responsibility of all researchers to remain as unbiased as possible when conducting research.

6. Understanding the *subjective* religious meanings of individuals can be best accomplished through which of the following research strategy?
   a. Historical
   b. Survey
   c. Content Analysis
   d. Participant Observation
   e. Experiment

7. A major concern regarding experimental research in the field of sociology of religion, and the reason why so little experimental research has been conducted in this field is:
   a. Religious groups have been very closed systems and have not let researchers do experiments on them.
   b. The ethical issues involved with experimenting in this area are enormous.
   c. Experimental research in the area of religion is so expensive to conduct that few researchers have the funds to conduct their experiments.
   d. Researchers have had little success finding subjects to allow them to experiment with their religion.

8. Which of the following is NOT an advantage of participant observation that was mentioned in the text?
   a. It allows for observation of symbolic interactions between members of which the actors may be only partially aware.
   b. Researchers are better able to find discrepancies between what the people say and what they do.
   c. Researchers are able to conduct studies of nonconformist groups that are very private and that maintain a front with the public.
   d. Participant observation allows the researcher to go under cover and secretly observe and obtain information for their research.

9. Participant observation has been used widely in research on a range of religious groups, but it suffers from the following limitation(s):
   a. it is such a quick way to gather information that it tends to be overused.
   b. observations may be biased by the observer's opinions and beliefs.
   c. it provides quantitative data and that is a problem when studying religion.
   d. it manipulates some variables and controls others; therefore is unethical when studying people's religion.

10. A major concern or possible limitation of survey research is that
   a. the stated intentions or verbal responses of respondents often do not match with their actual behavior.
   b. it does not provide quantitative data for analysis.
   c. it is only applicable to the study of historical cases and does not lend itself to analysis of contemporary society.
   d. the study cannot be replicated by another sociologist.
   e. all of the above are problems with survey research.

11. A major advantage of survey research is that it
   a. is far better at specifying causal sequence than historical or participant observation methods.
   b. allows more insight into the emotional context of the social setting—more feel for the subjective elements that are present.
   c. allows no possibility of bias in interpretation of data; the data are always very "hard."
   d. involves no interpretation; the data always speak for themselves.
   e. is most effective at establishing, with certainty, a correlation between two or more variables.

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12. A research method that provides quantitative analysis of existing material and that is especially useful in comparison of historical attitudes and beliefs to contemporary ones is
    a. sample surveys.
    b. participant observation.
    c. experimentation.
    d. content analysis.
    e. none of the above.

13. When a researcher uses an interview schedule with a series of prompts to get more information, but does not specify a set of pre-established answers from which the respondent must choose, the approach is called
    a. forced-choice schedule.
    b. semi-structured.
    c. closed-ended survey.
    d. content analysis.
    e. quasi-experiment.

14. Triangulation refers to:
    a. Use of three theories to analyze the data from a study.
    b. Using a research technique, such as interviewing, to reach several different conclusions about a study, which will later be further analyzed.
    c. Use of several methods to be sure data all point toward the same conclusions.
    d. A diagram displaying data results from a survey.

15. Which of the following cultural "texts" would be appropriate objects for content analysis by a sociologist of religion?
    a. Sermons
    b. The World Wide Web
    c. Cartoons
    d. Hymns
    e. All of the above

16. Consider the following two statements in relation to the course material: (A) Values can influence the topics sociologists choose to study and the questions they ask; and (B) Values should influence data collection, analysis, and conclusions that are drawn by sociologists. Which of the following is correct:
    a. Only A is an accurate statement
    b. Only B is an accurate statement
    c. Both A and B are accurate statements
    d. Neither A nor B are accurate statements

17. _____ means that the sociologist tries to prevent personal beliefs, values, or other biases from affecting the study, and _____ emphasizes the need to make claims about the social world based on systematically gathered data.
    a. Scientism; methodology
    b. Archemedism; empiricism
    c. Objectivity; empiricism
    d. Empiricism; objectivity

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