



SOC424 w/ Dr. Ellis Godard

SOC497/L: SOCIOLOGY RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design: Methodology of Methodology

Ellis Godard

Some Red Flags Already...

- 3 (Nickname). What would you like me to call you, if something other than your first name on record? (PLEASE leave blank if you just want me to use what's in the CSUN system. Please. Don't write the same name you just wrote, or "I don't have one", or "just use my name", lol... only enter a nickname, if you have one.)
 - But 6 of you gave me your legal first name or wrote "just use my name"
- 4 (Codename). I need a "codename" for you - something under which to post your grades in the PDF grading report, if you want your row shown in the PDF grading report. This cannot be, or include, your name, initials, address, phone number, email address, Social Security number (or even part of it), student ID number (or even part of it), or anything else personally identifying. Think code, something no one but you and I will know. :-)
- 6 (Email). At what email address, if something other than your CSUN address, would you like to receive class notices, updates, and warnings? (PLEASE leave blank if you just want me to use your CSUN address.)
 - But 2 of you gave your CSUN address

I worry when folks are already missing questions w/clear, all-caps cautions

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Where we are...

DEADLINES			LECTURE		LABS				
Date	Things Due	Reading (150)	Category	TOPIC	Lab #	Lab Assignment	Type	T	R
Tue Jan 28	HW1 Article Review	ch. 4	Orientation	Research Design	1	Mini-Design	Solo	1, 2	
Thu Feb 6	HW2 Annotations	pp. 124-137	Measurement	Operationalization	2	Measuring Love	Topical	3, 4	
Tue Feb 11	HW3 Dataset Basics	pp. 415-420, 434-435	Measurement	Quantitative Analysis	3	Coding Heroes	Topical	EC1, 9	
Thu Feb 13	HW4 Welfare Analysis	pp. 249-256	Measurement	Sampling & Errors	4	Draft Survey Questions	Topical	10, 11	
Tue Mar 4	HW5 Indices	pp. 256-263	Measurement	Surveys: Format	5	Draft Survey Format	Topical	14	
Thu Mar 6	HW6 Proposal	pp. 263-280	Measurement	Surveys: Mode	6	Conduct Survey	Solo	17, 18	
Tue Mar 11	HW7 Three Tests	ch. 13 & 430-439	Measurement	Qualitative Analysis	7	Jaywalking Study	Solo	19, 20	
Thu Mar 13	HW8 Survey Analysis	pp. 315-318	Measurement	Qualitative Analysis	8	Evaluation Design	Topical	23, 24	
Tue Mar 18	Final Exam		Measurement	Qualitative Analysis	9	Qual Presentations Eval	Solo	24, 25	

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Which are you doing?

- Definitely doing the paper
14%
- Probably doing the paper
22%
- Not sure
51%
- Probably taking the final
11%
- Definitely taking the final
3%

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Admin Purpose Units Focus Process Assessment Grades Lab

Announcements/Updates

- ◆ Grade PDF update tonight
 - Intake? Photo? Phone #? Codename ok?
- ◆ First Progress Report (email) tonight
 - Still missing intakes (2) & headshots (17!)
- ◆ HW1 due in 7 days (2/4, @ *start* of lect)
- ◆ Early labs spread out – but pace picks up!
 - Deadlines many places: Each assignment, PNG snapshot, & module where introduced, plus in Canvas calendar, Assignments list, “syllabus”

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I. TYPES OF STUDY

- What is the **purpose** of the research?
- What is the **focus** of the research?
- What is the **unit of analysis**?
- What’s the **temporal** nature of the study?

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Q1. For the class survey...

- Any student can write their own.
0%
- Each student will write their own.
16%
- They will all be different.
0%
- This is not the answer.
0%
- 😊 You will all use the *same one* survey.
84%

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IA. Purpose(s) of Research

- ◆ **Three major purposes:**
 - Exploratory (...)
 - Descriptive (...)
 - Explanatory (...)
- ◆ **Two possible additions?** (but not distinct from above)
 - Methodological!
 - Evaluative? (Evaluation/Assessment)
- ◆ Overall: **order facts, account for patterns** of reality
 - order already supplied puts a constraint on what you can add

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Outline


- Types of Study**
 - 4 decisions to make
 - ◆ Purpose, Units, Focus, Time
- Process of Study**
 - 8 Steps to research projects
 - Highlights today; more later
 - Order may vary; yours atypical

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Exploration / Exploratory Research

- ◆ **Break new ground**
 - Satisfy researcher’s curiosity, beginning familiarity
 - Knowledge constraint on doing more than that
 - ◆ Empirical: don’t know pop or subject well enough (AIDS ’83)
 - ◆ Practical: don’t know *what* you want to know (surfshops)
- ◆ **Prepare for future study**
 - Test feasibility of more extensive study
 - Develop methods for subsequent study
- ◆ **Seldom provides satisfactory answers**
 - What student projects attempt to do
 - ◆ But may be more ambitious than seems @ 1st
 - Can’t expect much rigor or precision
 - ◆ Problems w/ representativeness, operations, reliability
 - ◆ Aim = approximation?



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Description / Descriptive Research

- ◆ Purpose: typically “who”, “what”, “how much”
 - Seeks accuracy & precision, but rarely = only goal
- ◆ Process: **comparisons, typically on single variable**
 - Univariate – but could have subgroup descriptions
 - Inference – to pop, not just descriptive stats
- ◆ Practice: Used to describe situations or events
 - The U.S. Census is an example
 - Crime rates in different cities
 - Drug use among specific age groups



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Q2. Which purpose fits research on a topic no one's studied before?

1. Description 4%
2. Explanation 8%
3. Exploration 68%
4. Evaluation 4%
5. Methodological 16%

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Explanation / Explanatory Research

- ◆ Purpose: **Bivariate comparisons**
 - Descriptions for predictions
 - Describes, but w/ 2 vars simultaneously
 - When/where - Under what conditions?
 - **Causal claim** about a distribution/relationship
 - Involves ideas about causes & causation
 - Inferential (mechanistic?)
- ◆ Procedures: **Criteria, Elaboration**
- ◆ Practice:
 - = most difficult purpose?
 - Highest levels require much experience

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IC. Units of Analyses

- ◆ **The things you study**
 - Measure, observe, generalize about, etc.
 - 5 choices – or none at all
- ◆ **Individuals**
 - B says requires knowing pop
 - But every level has a theoretical pop
- ◆ **Groups**
 - eg gangs instead of gang members
 - but may derive descriptions from members
 - race, gender, age diffs
- ◆ **Organizations**
 - formal (& usually larger)
 - e.g .churches, frats, college classes

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Extra Credit HW Option:

- ◆ **Methodological** research question
 - *Not* an empirical question (as HW1) or theoretical (see HW2)
 - Examples might include articles testing whether...
 - response rates vary between phone and mail surveys
 - changing a questions' wording changes the distribution of answers
 - Changing the question order affects item response rates.
- ◆ Will be due last day of class
- ◆ Will mean you have 10 assignments (9 after the lowest is dropped) rather than 9 (8 after the lowest is dropped)
 - Does *not* replace another HW; does *not* mean 3 grades dropped.
 - Just means that your pool of assignments is larger, so that any one low (or high) grade makes a proportionately smaller difference in your overall homework grade.

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Units of Analyses, cont'd

- ◆ **Social Artifacts**
 - any product of social life, social beings, or their behaviors
 - E.g. editorials, songs, syllabi
- ◆ **Interactions**
 - not a product of social life, but social life itself
 - gossip, gifts, studying, weddings, court cases, traffic accidents, weddings, fist fights, riots
 - The only true sociological unit?
 - e.g dance – not what people do, but what a social structure does
 - perhaps short structures dance w less restraint (vs line dancing, ballroom, tango)
- ◆ **Possible to have *no* unit of analysis**
 - Pure sociology: pp. 31-32 & 38-39
 - but not at hypothetical level

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Units of Analysis vs. of Observation

- ◆ **Units of *analysis***
 - those things we examine in order to create summary descriptions of all such units and to explain differences among them.
- ◆ **Usually also the units of observation**
 - But may observe units of analysis indirectly
 - Units of *observation* may be examples or subsets
 - Gangs via members
- ◆ **Know what are you studying**
 - Marriages or marriage partners? crimes or criminals? corporations or executives? gangs or gang members?

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IC. Focus

- ◆ **Characteristics**
 - states of being, inc knowledge and demographics
- ◆ **Orientations**
 - a bit more vague
 - may be internal or cultural attitudes, beliefs in the head or at individual level
 - group purposes, policies
- ◆ **Actions behavior**
 - Individuals but also groups, etc.

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Q3. The cases you measure are...

1. Analysis of Units
5%
2. Observations of Analysis
5%
3. Observations of Units
0%
4. Units of Analysis
71%
- ✓ 5. Units of Observation
18%

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Focus/Units Grid

- ◆ Focus and Units are not dependent on each other
 - Nor on topic area – you can study any topic in multiple ways
- ◆ It is possible to “map” one setting (e.g. music store) or topic area (who likes what music) across a grid:

	Characteristics	Orientations	Actions
Individuals	Age of purchasers	Aggressive? Deliberate? Slow?	Buy in bulk? Listen 1 st ?
Groups	Families, couples, friends		Shop together or regroup at end?
Organizations	Labels (major or indie)	Pop vs rap (something about cultural expression)	Sales or distribution practices
Artifacts	Records, checks		Receipts/wrappers
Interactions	Discussion loud, purchase speed	Meandering or direct shopping	Listen first?

Beware Faulty Reasoning

- ◆ **Ecological Fallacy**
 - Ecological refers to groups or sets or systems
 - Applying something learned about group to the individuals in it
 - The army is strong, John is in the army, therefore, John is strong.
 - Assuming knowledge of a unit implies knowledge about its parts
 - May do so tentatively, but can be big problems
 - Dems win in college towns – but PROFS vote, not young people
 - Unions esp stronger in cities – but the strongest opponents of unions are also in cities
 - = one reason the unions have to be strong there
- ◆ **Reductionism**
 - See lecture notes on Inquiry & Explanation

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ID. Time Options

- ◆ **Time**
 - Not a given, nor limited – could study for many years
- ◆ **Cross-sectional - “Snapshot” at one time**
 - Problem: can’t establish temporal precedence as easily; all data gathered at once
 - explanation difficult (eg time order? Alt explanations due to sampling / temporal bias?)
- ◆ **Longitudinal: same phenomena, mult pts in time**
 - trend studies (changes w/i same general population)
 - cohort (diff individuals but typically same age groups)
 - panel study (same precise individuals each time)

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II. PROCESS OF STUDY

- ◆ Something of an ideal, but...
 1. Select Topic Area...
 2. Conceptualization... *
 3. Choice of method... *
 4. Operationalization ...*
 - specific measurement techniques and operations; replication?
 5. Population & Sampling... *
 6. Make Observations / Collect Data
 7. Data Processing...
 8. Analysis... *
 9. Applications...

* At least one later lecture is devoted to each starred topic

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Choice of Method

- ◆ will revisit later – you'll do five (5) this term
 - part 3 in book, Observations items in schedule
- ◆ **Experiments**
 - Classical
 - not done much but easier argument about causality
- ◆ **Surveys**
 - predominant mode of data gathering in sociology
 - closer to RW but still problems with accuracy:
 - can be "too numerical", perhaps artificial – also, responses themselves are a DV
 - easy to do once know what doing - jobs, skills, scldy career
 - allows quantitative analysis, although others can, too

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Selecting your Topic Area

- ◆ What's required?
 - Assignment or Funding parameters
 - Topical or Analytical expectations
 - Audience needs and knowledge
- ◆ What interests you?
 - Connect w/ previous work/experience?
 - Explore something new?
 - Achieve something particular (e.g. publish)?
- ◆ What's available (data, theory, cases)?

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Choice of Method, cont'd

- ◆ **Field research**
 - may be observations, may be participant observation
 - Takes years to do
 - Whyte 3.5 yrs for Street Corner Society, Elijah Anderson's 7yrs for *Streetwise*
- ◆ **Unobtrusive Research**
 - content, trace, or archival analysis
 - no contact with other humans
 - avoids interaction problems (rsrch/rsrchrs) - no social context (?)
 - e.g. trace analysis = what ppl leave behind - trash, fingerprints
 - museum - dirty carpet & floor tiles to measure exhibit popularity
 - store chain - fingerprints on glass - top for adult interest, side for kids
- ◆ **Triangulation** - best to use more than one method
 - each has certain weaknesses & drawbacks
 - some affect obs, interp, analysis, or concs

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Conceptualization / Operationalization

- ◆ **Concepts**
 - Abstract, mental, vague/overarching
 - Refers to a class of facts or variables
- ◆ **Operations**
 - Specific (instructional)
 - Measurable (useful guidelines)
 - Variables (not constants)

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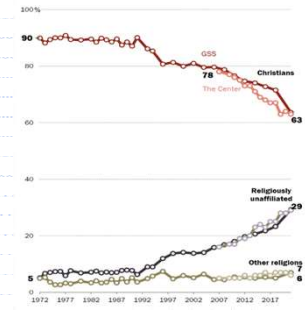
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Replication as Triangulation

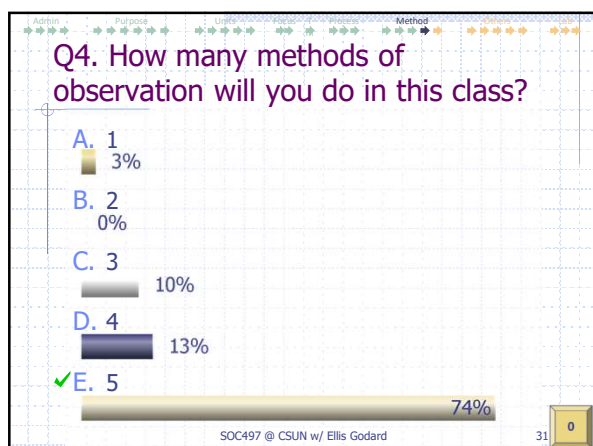
- ◆ Could be 2 variables, samples, or studies, e.g.:

The rise of religious 'nones' looks similar in data from Pew Research Center and the General Social Survey

General Social Survey (darker) and Pew Research Center (lighter) estimates of U.S. religious composition, among U.S. adults



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Data Processing

- usually means putting the info into a computer for quantitative analysis
 - Data entry
 - Error checks (5-10% for entry errors)
 - Data cleaning (missings, indices, etc.)
 - Data validation (validity checks, etc.)
- may also mean other things
 - e.g. organizing field notes (more later)

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How do you select a method?

- Ideas throughout term – pros/cons for each
- Generally, choose based on needs/limits:
 - If exploratory, may need probes
 - If difficult population, may need repeated calls (lawyers)
 - If hard-to-find population, may need snowball (S. AA. preachers)
 - If limited time, telephone quickest (esp. w/ facility)
 - mail the longest (2-3 weeks between 2 or 3 contacts)
 - If limited money, can't afford person-to-person IVS
 - mail may be cheaper IF long-distance, & no hurry, & bulk rate (etc)
 - May be dictated by project
 - E.g. funded for a survey, or assigned to conduct an experiment
- But like many choices, wide latitude
 - Rarely a *single* right answer
 - Learn to explain your choices
 - Gain respect for triangulation

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Analysis

- dealing with that in some coming labs & HWs
- Two lectures devoted to analysis, one each on quantitative and qualitative
- will also discuss analysis when address each method of observation
 - diff kinds of methods require or empower diff types of analysis
 - results may feed back and start another cycle of inquiry –
 - eg article 19 was phase 2 bc phase 1 not get at public

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Population / Sampling

- must decide *whom* or *what* to study
- to what group do you want to infer conclusions
 - almost never able to study all of the members of our pop of interest, or all possible observations of them
 - more on sampling later
 - be careful to be explicit about:
 - pop of interest
 - how sampled
 - limits of sample (keep in mind kinds of conclusions you want)

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Applications

- Where do you put the findings?
- Written Reports
 - Executive summaries
- Oral Presentations
 - Classroom, courtroom, congress/committees, conferences, "job talks"
- Publicity
 - Press release to media, letters to stakeholders
- Discuss with others
 - students or colleagues

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In practice...

- ◆ Sometimes a different order (as in this class)
- ◆ Some items (e.g. method and population) may be prescribed for you (e.g. take a survey of customers; go call some clients)
- ◆ We'll collectively do these five steps, in labs:
 - Conceptualization – *will start soon*
 - Operationalization – *will have 2 labs for this*
 - Data processing – *will have lab time to do*
 - Analysis – *HW9*
 - Applications – *presentations & papers*

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Team Scores

Points	Team	Point s	Tea m
3.67	Not sure		
3.33	Probably taking the ...		
3.01	Probably doing the paper		
2.6	Definitely doing the...		

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Lab Exercise

- ◆ Mini-research design
 - Topic
 - Temporal (time) issues
 - Ethical issues
- ◆ **Individual/solo** assignment
 - Due 1 week from your next lab
 - No group or lab meeting needed for it
 - Some is choosing from lists (read instructions!)

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Q5. Which of these comes last?

1. Analyze data 92%
2. Choose a topic 0%
3. Collect data 3%
4. Identify a purpose 3%
5. Pick a method of observation 3%

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