



SOC497/L: SOCIOLOGY RESEARCH METHODS

## Unobtrusive Research:

Observations without Interference

Ellis Godard

## Warnings in the Syllabus

### Work Alone

Do not work together when you have been instructed to work alone. Plan ahead as much as possible, and ask frequent questions early, but DO NOT complete assignments (other than group labs) together! Undertake study partners or groups with caution, and terminate them at the appropriate stage of your work. Discuss the contents of any assignment, and plan how to carry it out, with any other member of the class, the instructor, or anyone else. However, once you have actually begun the work on the assignment, only ask the instructor for help, no matter how minor. You may always consult written course materials, your own notes, or SPSS program "help" features, which we will review.

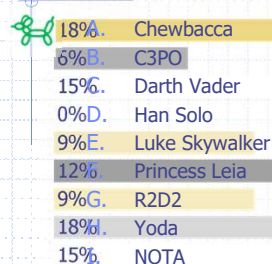
### Careful Being Helpful

Academic dishonesty, as defined by the CSUN Schedule of Classes and Catalog Supplement, includes cheating, fabrication, plagiarism as well as facilitating academic dishonesty. Facilitating academic dishonesty includes allowing another student to see your work, which they then reproduce in whole or in part and submit as their own, whether you know it or not.

SOC424 w/ Dr. Ellis Godard --  
Slide

2

## Favorite Star Wars Character

Sociology of Law w/  
Ellis Godard @ CSUN

5

29

## From the syllabus, cont'd:

### Be Honest

I exercise zero tolerance for academic dishonesty (including cheating and plagiarism), as outlined in the section on Academic Dishonesty in the University Catalog (<https://catalog.csun.edu/policies/academic-dishonesty>), and take any compromise of that policy very seriously. Ignoring this instruction will result in wasted time and investment, will damage your academic record, and will forego the opportunity to actually learn the material and benefit from the course.

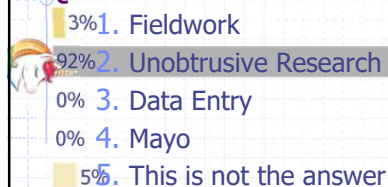
### Penalties

Penalties for academic dishonesty begin with a failing grade on the assignment. Identical (or even nearly identical) submissions from two or more students will earn instant zeroes. And if any part of an assignment is plagiarized, I may at my discretion assign a zero to (that is, give no credit for) that entire assignment. Do not, therefore, steal so much as a sentence fragment without proper attribution. And note that zeroes awarded for academic dishonesty will not be dropped, and will lower your semester grade.

SOC424 w/ Dr. Ellis Godard --  
Slide

3

## Q1. This lecture is on....



SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard

7

0

Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## Outline for Today

- ◆ Admin Issues
- ◆ Unobtrusive Overview
- ◆ 3 Types of U.R.
  - Historical/Comparative
  - Existing Statistics
  - Content Analysis
    - Overview & General Issues
    - Sampling & Coding Issues
    - Lab

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 8

Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## What's "Unobtrusive"?

- ◆ Opposite of Obtrusive (undesirably prominent, forward in conduct, interfering, meddlesome, intrusive, prying)
  - Aka "non-reactive research" (Eugene Webb book, 1966)
- ◆ Observing what people inadvertently leave behind
  - wear/tear on floor in front of exhibits
  - mucus on glass
  - radio settings on cars brought for repair
  - clues all around you – fallen flyers, writing on desks, etc.
- ◆ Addresses key problem of other methods
  - Observing changes observations, esp. in surveys or field research
  - Unobtrusive methods don't impact what's being studied
    - Observations are stable and reliable
    - Replication is easy, though reliability problems in *interpretations*

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 14

Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## Q2. How many modes of observation does the class cover?

Number of Modes	Percentage
1	0%
2	0%
3	55%
4	42%
5	3%

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 12

Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## Three Types

- ◆ Historical/Comparative Research
  - much more difficult, but a strong tradition in sociology
  - Rich history of comparing epochs, societies, & orgs
- ◆ Analysis of Existing Statistics
  - Best way to get through grad school
  - Uses other established methods
  - Already done some
- ◆ Content Analysis
  - Applies to any form of communication
  - Will do in today's lab

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 15

Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## Preamble: Choosing a Modality

- ◆ 7 lectures on modes (or "modalities") of observation
- ◆ 5 modes covered:
  - Fieldwork / Ethnography
  - Experimental Research
  - Survey Research (inc. Interviews)
  - Focus Groups (some overlap)
  - Unobtrusive Research
- ◆ For each, you should know:
  - Main features & choices
  - Major strengths and weaknesses
  - Ultimately, in what circumstances would you use each?

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 13

Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## Q3. Which type of U.R. can use conventional indices as measures?

Type of U.R.	Percentage
1. Analysis of Existing Statistics	32%
2. Content Analysis	0%
3. Field Research	0%
4. Historical/Comparative Research	3%
5. Survey Research	65%

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 16

Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## Historical/Comparative: Overview

- ◆ Examination of societies or other social units over time & in comparison with one another\*
  - Qualitative
    - Often overlaps with other methods of research
      - Content analysis and existing statistics
  - Sometimes considered more difficult than other research methods
  - Can be used to compare epochs \*, societies\*, organizations, etc. and look for patterns across times and places
  - Observation based (may also involve immersion into culture)

Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## Existing Statistics: Overview

- ◆ Existing Statistics: Secondary data sources collected by other researchers.
  - Quantitative
  - May overlap with other methods of research
  - Extremely beneficial and makes your research more legitimate if you do this type of research at least supplementally with other methods

Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## Examples... and Problem

- ◆ Weber *Protestant Ethic & the Spirit of Capitalism*
  - John Calvin on Predestination
  - How it ties to the US
  - Compare to Judaism, China, India
- ◆ Problem: This isn't a *method*
  - All research is comparative, & most of it is historical (even if only a small slice of a limited history and/or with merely implied claims about change and/or newnesses)
  - Usually means non-statistical (qualitative) work using document (content) analysis and/or thematic/theoretical work

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 18

Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## Example: Durkheim's *Suicide*

- ◆ Studied environmental conditions in which occurs
- ◆ Found patterns in official (existing) statistics:
  - General stability
  - Temperature as explanation?
  - Age and gender as key variables
  - Political turmoil increased the rate
  - Religion as one explanatory factor
  - Result: concept of anomie

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 21

Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## Historical/Comparative: Pros/Cons

- ◆ Pros
  - Easily accessible type of research: data everywhere
  - Cheap
  - May be able to address topics for which statistical data is not readily available
  - Lends itself to creativity and thinking outside the box
- ◆ Cons
  - All research is comparative and most of it is historical
  - Not statistical, based on individual interpretations and perspectives so reliability is questionable\*
  - Usually means non-statistical (qualitative) work using document (content) analysis and/or thematic/theoretical work. This could be a pro or a con, depending on your personal inclinations.

Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## Existing Statistics: Pros

- ◆ Lots of data everywhere, waiting to be analyzed
  - Michael Barret presentation
  - Esp. Stat Abstracts, fed agencies, WWW, UN Demographic Yrbk, chambers commerce, Nader, orgs
- ◆ Easy to manipulate
  - Recode, compute, etc.
  - "Slice and dice" (select cases, crosstabs, missings)
- ◆ Should always be done, at least supplementally
  - often provides historical or conceptual context

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 22



Existing Statistics: Cons

- ◆ Often aggregated
  - Beware ecological fallacy; make inferences carefully
- ◆ Quality of analysis depends on quality of data
  - What vars, how measured, by whom, when, etc
  - Crime stats routinely misused
    - Local/microsocial problem in all data
      - arrest not measure crime, but police behavior (notes black on p 322)
    - National data has other problems
      - probs of diff defs in diff jurisdictions; voluntary
      - oft altered & incomplete
    - Record-keeping problems
      - E.g. rates increase when records become computerized
- ◆ Subject to misunderstanding/misinterpretation
  - If U didn't design it, U might not understand choices behind it

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 23

Layoff Notices

In the past few months 500 tech companies have laid off a collective 148,000 workers amid slowing growth and fears of a recession. While the circumstances of each layoff decision may differ, there is one constant during these gloomy moments in Silicon Valley: the awkward all-staff memo.

We took a look at 48 such missives issued by companies ranging from massive Microsoft to small-scale start-ups, searching for insights into how tech leaders spin their stories and justify their decisions. Whether they use 200 words or 2,000, their memos bear remarkable similarities.

They point blame inward but also outward, for instance, alluding to the pressure of larger economic forces. They urge a positive outlook despite momentary clouds. And they rarely actually use the word "layoff."

Here's what they had to say:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/interactive/2023/tech-layoffs-company-memos/>

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 26

Q4. Which is not true about the use of previously existing data?

1. The data is more easily manipulated  
14%
2. There is a risk of ecological fallacy  
0%
3. There's lots of data *available* to analyze  
0%
4. You can have latent or manifest codes  
86%
5. You have no control over what's measured  
0%

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 24

Computerized Content Analysis

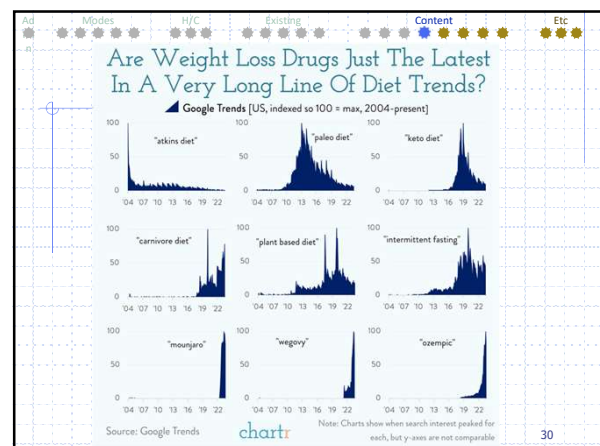
- ◆ Word processing (search and replace tricks)
- ◆ Common software
  - InVivo, Dedoose, Ethnograph, NUDIST
  - Coding using computers
  - But those are tools
    - Still need strategy for how and what to analyze
  - Those are limited to text – can't use for longitudinal ethnography
- ◆ Online tools
  - Google trends - <https://trends.google.com/trends/> \*
  - Mentions in books - <https://books.google.com/ngrams/> \*
  - Real-time Twitter trending - <https://www.trendsmap.com/>

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 27

Content Analysis: Overview

- ◆ Applies to virtually any form of communications
  - focusing on social artifacts
  - newspaper, magazines, books, websites, poems, songs, art, speeches, letters, laws, constitutions, paintings, photos...
- ◆ Goal= range of key journalistic questions: Who says what, to whom, why, how, and with what effect?
  - Naisbitt & Aburdene (1990) Megatrends 2000 - monitored 1000s of local papers nationwide
    - looks for major trends in what gets attention
  - Feminists: fairy tales, billboards, advertisements, fashion, handbooks, art, soc textbooks
  - Babbie gives one early example
    - Ida B Wells, in 1891, looked at newspaper reports of lynchings
    - only accused of rape in 1/3 of the cases, much less proven guilty

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 25



Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## Content Sampling Concerns

- ◆ **Biggest Q: how to identify what to observe**
  - Without hypotheses guiding measurement, the entire endeavor can be aimless, even fruitless
    - See Lofland & Lofland list, p. 298
  - Large risk of only recording that which supports/confirms of your ideas, so...
    - Be aware of that risk, and take steps to reduce it
    - Use quantitative measures when you can
    - Enlist the assistance of others for advice & review

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 31

Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## Pros/Cons of Content Analysis

- ◆ **Strengths:**
  - time and money, no large staff, no special equipment, personal safety,
  - easy to redo (vs field rsrch) or replicate (vs indepth IVing), long periods of time
  - Can be done qualitatively or quantitatively
  - most sig adv = unobtrusive - no effect on what's being studied
- ◆ **Weaknesses**
  - limited to *recorded* communication, probs of validity, even of reliability

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 34

Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## Content Sampling Guidelines

- ◆ **You can't look at all instances of concern**
  - Some exceptions - SotU addresses
- ◆ **Need to know units of analysis**
  - words, themes, charactrs, parags, concepts, semantics, combo
- ◆ **Need to be esp clear if different from units of obs**
  - eg look at laws, but discuss states
- ◆ **May often subsample**
  - eg sample authors, then sample books, then portions within each
  - Some things cant be directly sampled (e.g. TV ads); can sample times
- ◆ **Need a sampling frame**
  - e.g. list of all times to which you want findings to infer
    - form from cnsdrtn of what stations, days, & hours, & how many commercials
  - could employ any of the methods in chapter 8
    - random, systematic, stratified, cluster

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 32

Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## Lab Exercise

- ◆ **Coding Personal Ads**
  - IV: Ad category (4), Sex, or Orientation
  - DV: *anything*, any level of measurement
  - Similar to heroes lab, but also bivariate –
    - Create measures, categorize cases, find patterns
  - Follow instructions (all of them) in order (!!)
  - You'll end w/ data from a random sample
  - Univariate statistics & bivariate conclusion
- ◆ **Assignment & Sample are on Canvas**

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 35

Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## Coding Content to Analyze

- ◆ **Need clear concepts & operational defs**
  - Field research usually looks for depth
    - Broad observations, even if might interpret differently from others
  - Surveys typically reliable but limited measures
    - only what's in questionnaire/instrument
- ◆ **Content analysis inc.'s 2 kinds of codes**
  - Manifest content - Visible, overt, anticipatable
  - Latent content - Underlying meaning, subtle, hidden?
  - Traingulate!
    - eg Auster looked Girl Scout handbook –
    - both % badges centered on home life 1913/1963/1980;
    - also skirts>pants, and new badges

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 33

Ad Modes H/C Existing Content Etc

## Q5. What's the appropriate measure of dispersion for a nominal variable?

- Mode 3% ☐
- Range 0% ☐
- Standard deviation 3% ☐
- Variation Ratio 95% ☒
- None of the above 0% ☐

SOC497 @ CSUN w/ Ellis Godard 36

Ad	Modes	H/C	Existing		Content		Etc
R							
Team Scores							
Points	Team	Points	Team				
4.33	Luke Skywalker						
4.1	Yoda						
3.95	Darth Vader						
3.33	R2D2						
3.17	Chewbacca						