

# Social Research Methods

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## SOC

### - **Research Methodology:**

- system of methods a researcher uses to gather data on a particular

### - Research Q: what we want to understand

- ex.: “what is the relationship between..., how does mass media affect..., does violence in media impact lvls of societal violence?”

### - **Epistemology in social research**

- epistemology = philo debates surrounding “how we know what we know”

### - Comte coined term sociology + his sociology rooted in positivism

### - Comte :

- same methods used to study natural world can be used in social sciences
  - Methods used to study natural world = used in social sciences

### - Positivism assumes researchers = objective

## **Positivism**

### - Joyce Nielsen’s 5 assumptions to positivism:

1. we can know the social world in same way we can know the natural world
2. there’s an objective +knowable reality
3. gather empirical data = only way to understand social world
  1. data that can be observed
4. social + natural world are ordered in a predictable + measurable way
5. all sciences become more alike overtime

## **Positivism VS. Interpretivism**

### - Interpretivism:

- anti-positivism

- reject positivist idea that there's one reality that's knowable
- interpretivists say that it's more important to capture meanings, experiences, + perceptions of participants
  - eg. "how do mass media portrayals of women in ads. shape young women's body image?"

### **Systems of Reasoning:**

#### **Inductive VS. Deductive Logic**

- Inductive logic:
  - move from data → theory
  - gather info about topic before developing theories about how to explain particular aspects
  - mostly used qualitative approach
- Deductive logic:
  - move from theory → data
  - develop theory / set of theories to explain / predict pattern + then test theory
  - mostly use quantitative approach

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#### Case study of Deductive logic: Stanley Cup Playoffs & Suicide (1998)

- Trovato wants to test that idea of suicide is closely linked to social solidarity
  - what are the IV & DV?
- Dvlpd 2 hypotheses based on Durkheim theory
  - H1: will be a reduction in number of suicides when MTL is engaged in playoff activity
  - H2: when MTL is eliminated early from Cup series → temporary increase in suicide
- Findings:

- no decrease in suicide rates during playoffs
- Canadians eliminated early - temporary increase but supported but only for males (15-34 y/o)
- Doesn't disprove theory of social integration but means that sporting events don't have enough impact on social integration to affect suicide rates
- Spurious Correlation: when someone sees correlation + falsely assumes causation

### **Quantitative VS Qualitative Research**

- **Qualitative research** : close examination of characteristics that can't be counted or measured (ethnography)
  - hypothesis: testable statement about relationship between ppl, objects, groups of ppl
  - variable: concept w/ measurable traits / characteristics that can vary / change from 1 person, group, culture, or time to another
  - IV: has effect on another variable (the cause)
  - DV: affected by IV (the effect)
  - Operational def. transform abstract / theoretical concepts like 'poverty' or 'middle class' into concrete, observable, measurable, countable variables.

### **Research Surveys + Interpreting Poll Results**

- data generation methods:
  - poll is quantitative survey designed to measure respondents; attitudes, beliefs, + behaviours
  - closed-ended Q's to capture participants' answers to a set of Q's w/ set answer options
- Questionnaires = administered to a sample selected from larger pop.
  - large pop. = random sampling is most desirable
- Goal = generalize
- Qualitative sociology relies on existing databases (stats can)
  - stats is science that in socio involves use of numbers to map social behaviour + beliefs

- **Quantitative research** : close examination of social elements that can be counted or measured + are therefore used to generate statistics (surveys, polls)
  - often has interpretivist epistemology
  - focus on gathering data rich in detail + allows understanding of workings + culture of social groups &/or social phenomena rather than statistical representations
  - qualitative rsrchrs often use interviews, observations + focus groups to collect data
  - Ex.: Blee (2002) “Women in the hate movement”
    - interviewed women who identify as white supremacists to understand what makes women want to be part of it
    - how might quantitative study approach this topic?
    - Blee’s qual. research design = ‘narrative study’

#### Common Methods of Data Collection

- **Ethnography**: ppl + their culture are studied through fieldwork
  - Participant observation: observing ppl + actively participate in their activities to obtain insider’s POV
  - semi-structured interviews: informal face-to-face
  - informants: insiders helps rsrchrs become accepted by community + assist w/ interpretation of info + behaviour
  - increasingly find online ethnography
- **Case Studies** : research design that takes as its subject a single case or a few selected ex. of social entity
  - often used to identify + describe best practices - strategies w/ proven history of achieving desired results

#### **Ethics + Research**

- research ethics : demonstrate respect for participants
- **Informed consent** : participants indicate understanding + acceptance of research conditions

## Research ethics in Social Sciences

- convos about research ethics started in medical field
- especially following nazi atrocities + the nuremberg trials
  - Nuremberg Code
  - Emphasized voluntary consent of research participants
- Tuskegee Syphilis Study :
  - what happens when you leave syphilis untreated?
  - chose a poor neighbourhood to easily make them participate in research by giving them meals in exchange
  - didn't tell them what the point of their research was or the consequences = no informed consent
  - affected portion of the population (deaths + health prblms)
- social sciences have history of questionable research ethics
- Milgram's obedience to authority
  - read list of words, but if read word wrong, give mild to strong electric shocks to the opponent (pretending to be shocked - actors), uncomfortable but still continued
  - participants in psychological agony (deception that it wasn't real shocks)
- Humphrey's Tearoom Trade (1970's)
  - both highlighted concerns about deception + the need to weight benefits of research against the harms
  - followed ppl in tearooms to their houses and interviewed their family
- Stanford Prison Experiment (Zimbardo):
  - study obedience to authority (WW1&2 soldiers)
  - canceled due to ethical concerns (abuse of prisoners)

Ethical Principles:

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- Respect for human dignity = underlying principle of research involving living humans
- Conduct research in manner that is sensitive to inherent worth of all human beings + respect & consideration that they're due.
- 3 core principles:
  - Respect for persons
  - Concern for welfare
  - Justice
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