

Sociological Methods

Ryan Cragun – Summer, 2005

Before the Methods

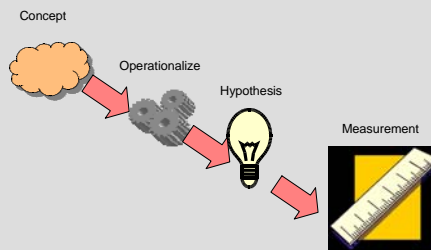
- Phenomena have to be sociological
- Truth ('Truth' or 'truth')
 - Religious/faith
 - Common sense
 - Science
- Caveat:
 - I'm not going to explain statistics or even go into a lot of depth on methods. If you're interested, take a class on it.

Methodological Terms

- Concept – mental construct that represents some part of the world in a simplified form
- Operationalization – specifying exactly what one is to measure before assigning a value to a variable
- Variable – concept whose value changes from case to case
- Measurement – procedure for determining value of a variable in a specific case
- Theory – understanding that draws connection between the concepts
- Independent variable – variable that causes the change
- Dependent variable – variable that changes

Research Process

(in pretty pictures)



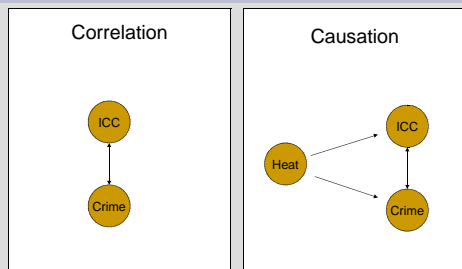
Research Example

- Self-rated Attractiveness (Rand and Hall 1983)
- IV – gender
- DV – ability to rate attractiveness
- Concept – one's ability to rate attractiveness
- Operationalization
 - Gender
 - Scale of attractiveness
- Hypothesis – women will do better than men
- Test – have them do it
- Iterate – revise theory based on findings

Methodological Terms (cont'd)

- Correlation – relationship by which two or more variables change together
- Cause and effect:
 - Demonstrated correlation
 - An independent (or causal) variable that precedes the dependent variable in time
 - No evidence that a third variable could be causing a spurious correlation

Correlation is not Causation



Quantitative vs. Qualitative

- Quantitative measures or 'quantifies' phenomena
 - Experimental designs, surveys, statistics, secondary data analysis
- Qualitative goes for depth/quality over quantity
 - Participant observation, interviews, focus groups, content analysis, historical comparison

Methods

- Experiment
 - Pro: cause and effect
 - Con: artificiality; lack of applicability
- Survey
 - Pro: large populations; in-depth responses
 - Con: no causality; just opinions
- Participant Observation
 - Pro: natural behavior
 - Con: subjective; time-consuming
- Secondary Analysis
 - Pro: large data sets; generally reliable; inexpensive
 - Con: may not get at what you want to ask

Objective vs. Critical

- For both:
 - Topic choice is value-relevant
 - Investigation should be value-free
- Objective – No implications of suggestions made
- Critical – Implications and suggestions made

Ethics

- Why would Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) be necessary in sociological research?
- Confidentiality
- Anonymity
- Informed Consent
- Conflicts of Interest

What can Sociology tell us?

- Human behavior is too complex for sociologists to predict precisely any individual's actions
- Because humans respond to their surroundings, the mere presence of a researcher may affect the behavior being studied (Hawthorne Effect)
- Social patterns change; what is true in one time or place may not hold true in another
- Because sociologists are part of the social world they study, being value-free when conducting social research is difficult