SOC 60

The Process and Problems of Social Research
Social Research Questions

- *Identifying Topics of interest*
  - A. Personal experiences
  - B. Other research (yours or someone else's)
  - C. Social Theory
  - D. Funding and Fashion
Refining Social Research Questions

• A. Find a WHY question. HOW questions can also be good but WHY questions are better, now you have dependent variable.
  – a) Try to phrase your question as a comparison or contrast

• B. Build an explanation. Now you have an independent variable.

• C. Try to reverse the causal order

• D. Try to reverse relationship implied
Evaluating Social Research Questions

• A. Feasibility
• B. Social Importance
• C. Scientific Relevance
The Types of Social Theory

1. Grand Theories
   - Theories about the way societies work. They provide an orientation.
   - A. Rational Choice
     - Everything in society happens because of decisions people make on the basis of their self interest
   - B. Symbolic Interactionism
     - People's communication and the meaning they attach to various symbols that guide social action.
   - C. Functionalism,
     - Society is a functional whole where each part functions to protect the status quo.
The Types of Social Theory (cont.)

• **1. Grand Theories**
  • Theories about the way societies work. They provide an orientation.

• **2. Theories of the Middle Range**
  • Theories about specific social phenomena

• **3. Hypotheses**
  • Empirical, testable predictions
Research Strategies

• 1. Deductive Research
• 2. Inductive Research
• 3. Descriptive Research

Research Cycle
Scientific and Ethical Guidelines

• A. Research on People
• No harm to subjects
• Voluntary participation
• Researcher must fully disclose his/her identity
• Anonymity or confidentiality must be maintained unless explicitly and voluntarily waived
• Benefits should outweigh potential risks
Milgram’s experiment

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QheqURDWNnD4

- A cross section of people (students, businessmen, white collar, blue collar, professionals etc.) selected to “complete a scientific study of memory and learning.” Volunteers were paid $4 plus 50c carfare.

- Subjects had to administer shocks from 15 to 450 Volts for errors in learning to a victim who they could not see only hear
  - Subject manipulated a set of switches labeled by voltage and “Slight Shock” to “Extreme Intensity Shock”, “Danger: Severe Shock” and two switches simply marked as “XXX.”

- Debriefing afterwards
Fig. 3

Shock generator.

Victim is strapped into chair.

Subject receives sample shock.

Subject breaks off experiment.
Outcome

• 65% (26 of 40) of Yale subjects went all the way
• only 48% of the Bridgeport warehouse replication did
• Other variations:
  • If victim is seen not just heard: 40%
  • If victim is touched physically it is 30%
  • When subjects could avoid direct monitoring and supervision many cheated and gave a lesser shock
• And when subject was part of a (carefully orchestrated) group where the others (assistants) refused 90% refused
Ethical guidelines

• B. The Uses of Science
• The Prison Privatization debate
  – How careful are we when interpreting our results?
    • Conflicts of interest
• What if your research on the homeless is used by the police to find all, round and lock them up?
Scientific and Ethical Guidelines

• 1. **Scientific Guidelines**
  • Test ideas without personal investment in outcome
  • Plan and carry out investigation systematically
  • Document all procedures and disclose them publicly
  • Clarify assumptions
  • Specify the meanings of terms
  • Maintain skeptical stance to current knowledge
  • Replicate research and accumulate knowledge
  • Maintain interest in theory
  • Search for regularities and patterns
  • Disclose potential sources of bias (sponsors, personal relationships etc.)
2. Ethical Guidelines

A. Honesty and Openness
   • Cyril Burt, British psychologist
     • (1883-1971)