

The sociological investigation

[Science](#)



The Sociological Investigation ~ These notes are taken and adapted from Macionis, John J. (2012). *Sociology* (14th Edition). Boston: Pearson Education Inc. There are two basic requirements for sociological investigation: 1. Know how to apply the sociological perspective or paradigms or what C. Wright Mills termed as the "sociological imagination." 2. Be curious and ready to ask questions about the world around you. There are three ways to do Sociology. These three ways are considered as research orientations: A. Positivist Sociology - Positivist sociology studies society by systematically observing social behaviour. - Also known as scientific sociology. - It includes introducing terms like independent variable, dependent variables, correlation, spurious correlation, control, replication, measurement, cause and effect, as well as operationalizing a variable¹. - Positivist sociology requires that researcher carefully operationalize variables and ensuring that measurement is both reliable and valid. - It observes how variables are related and tries to establish cause-and-effect relationships. - It sees an objective reality "out there." - Favours quantitative data (e. g. data in numbers; data from surveys). - Positivist sociology is well-suited to research in a laboratory. - It demands that researchers be objective² and suspend their personal values and biases as they conduct research. - There are at least FOUR limitations to scientific / positivist sociology. - Positivist sociology is loosely linked to the structural-functional approach / paradigm / perspective. B. Critical Sociology - Critical sociology uses research to bring about social change. - It asks moral and political questions. - It focuses on inequality. 1 Specifying exactly what is to be measured before assigning a value to a variable (Macionis: 2012, p. 50). 2 Personal neutrality in conducting research (Macionis: 2012, p. 50) Page 1 - - It rejects the principle <https://assignbuster.com/the-sociological-investigation/>

of objectivity, claiming that ALL researches are political. Critical sociology corresponds to the social-conflict approach / paradigm / perspective. C. Interpretive Sociology - Interpretive sociology focuses on the meanings that people attach to their behaviour. - It sees reality as constructed by people in the course of their everyday lives. - It favours qualitative data (e. g. data acquired through interviews). - It is well-suited to research in a natural setting. - Interpretive sociology is related to the symbolic-interaction approach / paradigm / perspective. Gender and Research Gender3, involving both researcher and subjects, can affect research in five ways: 1. Androcentricity (literally, " focus on the male") 2. Overgeneralising 3. Gender blindness 4. Double standards 5. Interference Research Ethics Researchers must consider and do the following things when conducting research: - Protect the privacy of subjects / respondents. - Obtain the informed consent of subjects / respondents. - Indicate all sources of funding. - Submit research to an institutional review board to ensure it does NOT violate ethical standards. - There are global dimensions to research ethics. Before beginning research in another country, an investigator must become familiar enough with that society to understand what people there are likely to regard as a violation of privacy or a source of personal danger. Research and the Hawthorne Effect Researchers need to be aware that subjects' or respondents' behaviour may change simply because they are getting special attention, as one classic experiment revealed. Refer to Elton Mayo's investigation into worker productivity in a factory in Hawthorne, near Chicago. 3 The personal traits and social positions that members of a society attach to being female or male (Macionis: 2012, p. 50). Page 2 The term Hawthorne Effect is defined as a change in a subject's behaviour caused <https://assignbuster.com/the-sociological-investigation/>

simply by the awareness that s/he is being studied. Methods: Strategies for Doing Sociological Research There are the basic FOUR methods: A. Experiment - This research method allows researchers to study cause-and-effect relationships between two or more variables in a controlled setting. - Researchers conduct an experiment to test a hypothesis, a statement of a possible relationship between two (or more variables). - This research method collects mostly quantitative data. - Example of an experiment: Philip Zimbardo's "Stanford County Prison." o Advantages Provides the greatest opportunity to specify cause-and-effect relationships. Replication of research is relatively / quite easy. o Limitations Laboratory settings have an artificial quality to it. Unless the lab environment is carefully controlled, results may be biased too. B. Survey and/or Interview - This research method uses questionnaires or interviews to gather subjects' / respondents' responses to a series of questions. - Surveys usually yield or produce descriptive findings, painting a picture of people's views on some issues. - This research method collects mostly qualitative data. - Example of a survey: Lois Benjamin's research on the effects of racism on African American men and women. She chose to interview subjects / respondents rather than distribute a questionnaire. o Advantages Sampling, using questionnaires, allows researchers to conduct surveys of large populations or a large number of people. Interviews provide in-depth responses. o Limitations Questionnaires must be carefully prepared so that the questions and instructions are clear and not confusing. Questionnaires may yield low response / return rate from the target respondents. Interviews are expensive and time-consuming. Page 3 C. Participant observation - Through participant observation, researchers join with people in a social setting for an extended period of time. - <https://assignbuster.com/the-sociological-investigation/>

Researchers also play two roles, as a participant (overt role) and as an observer (covert role). - This method allows researchers an “ inside look” at a social setting. - This research method is also called fieldwork. - Since researchers are not attempting to test a specific hypothesis, their research is exploratory and descriptive. - This participant observation research method collects qualitative data. - Example of participant observation: William Foote Whyte’s “ Street Corner Society. ”

- o Advantages It allows for the study of “ natural” behaviour. Usually inexpensive.
- o Limitations Time-consuming. Replication of research is difficult. Researcher must balance role of participant and observer.

D. Existing or Secondary sources - Researchers analyse existing sources, data which had been collected by others. - This research method is also called library research or archive research. - By using existing or secondary sources, especially the widely available data by government agencies, researchers can save time and money. - Existing sources are the basis of historical research. - Example of using existing sources: E. Digby Baltzell’s award-winning study “ Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia. ” How could it be, Baltzell wondered, during a chance visit to Bowdoin College in Maine, USA, that this small college had graduated more famous people in a single year than his own, much bigger University of Pennsylvania had graduated in its entire history?

- o Advantages Saves time, money and effort of data collection. Makes historical research possible.
- o Limitations Researcher has no control over possible biases in data. Data may only partially fit current research needs.

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