## Sociological Research

**imagination**  
**method**  
**pen & paper**  
**theory**  
**problem**

### Sociologists are interested in patterns

- Sociologists look for **patterns** across individuals, groups or societies.

- Sociologists ask what is the **probability** or the **likelihood** that certain social factors are related to each other?
Stages in the research process

- Define a topic
- Articulate a research question
- Review existing studies on this issue
- Develop a hypothesis/hypotheses
- Select a research method
- Collect data
- Analyze data
- Report conclusions

Research question

- Specifies the factor(s) you want to research
  - How does X happen?
  - Why does X happen?
  - What influences/determines X?

Example: What influences differences in earnings?
Hypothesis

A prediction of the relationship between two factors X and Y

- (Y) = the factor you are trying to explain
- (X) = the factor you think explains Y

Earnings example: Y = individuals’ income

X = ? ? ?

Research Methods in Sociology

- Surveys
- Interviews
- Participant Observation
- Content Analysis
### Surveys

A method of gathering information by having subjects fill out a questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths:</th>
<th>Weaknesses:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Can study large populations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- With closed ended questions, answers are easily comparable and categorized which simplifies analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Questionnaires must be carefully prepared (unambiguous, wording or order of questions should not influence the answers)</td>
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<td>- May have a low response rate</td>
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For the research paper: you need to get 30 responses.

### Interviews

A method of gathering information by asking respondents questions either face-to-face or over the phone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Can obtain in-depth information</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Can ask for clarification or elaboration of answers</td>
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<td>- Can be very time consuming</td>
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<td>- Interviewer may influence the respondent</td>
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<td>- Respondents may provide what they consider socially desirable answers (also true for survey methods)</td>
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For the research paper: you need to do 8 interviews, lasting at least a half hour each.
### Participant Observation

Studying social groups or interaction in their natural environment whereby the researchers participates in the group being studied (also called field research).

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>- Can study people in their usual setting</td>
<td>- Can be very time consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Rather inexpensive</td>
<td>- Often hard to get access to settings</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Allows a researcher to observe behavior</td>
<td>- The presence of researcher may alter the usual behavior of the group studied</td>
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For the research paper: you need to spend at least 4 hours observing with the group.

### Content Analysis

A method of gathering information by systematically analyzing the content of artifacts such as advertisements, op-ed articles, and other written documents.

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<td>- Can take advantage of already existing sources of data</td>
<td>- Coding must be transparent so that other researchers can interpret data in the similar way</td>
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<tr>
<td>- This research method is unobtrusive, so it avoids challenges and ethical issues related to involving people as research subjects</td>
<td>- Limited to the information that is available</td>
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For the research paper: you need to analyze 30 artifacts.
Sociologists look for **patterns** across individuals, groups or societies

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### Making comparisons

- To establish any patterns, sociologists draw comparisons

- **Think about your research question in a way that will allow you to make a comparison!**

  Examples of comparisons:
  - men and women
  - two different student organizations
  - two different ethnic groups
  - two magazines targeted to different audiences
| Variability vs. comparability |

- To establish patterns, factors that you analyze should *vary* from one situation or person or group to another (e.g. age, ethnicity, occupation, beliefs, earnings, job search strategy)

- However, in selecting what to study, you should also try to keep many factors as *similar* as possible across the comparison, so as to isolate the effect of your explanatory factor (X) on the outcome (Y)