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# METHODS

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# RESEARCH

- In sociology we use the scientific method when we conduct research.

These are the steps we often take:

1. Define a problem/Ask a question.
2. Review existing literature.
3. Design research methodology (qualitative or quantitative).
4. Collect data.
5. Analyze data collected.
6. Report findings.



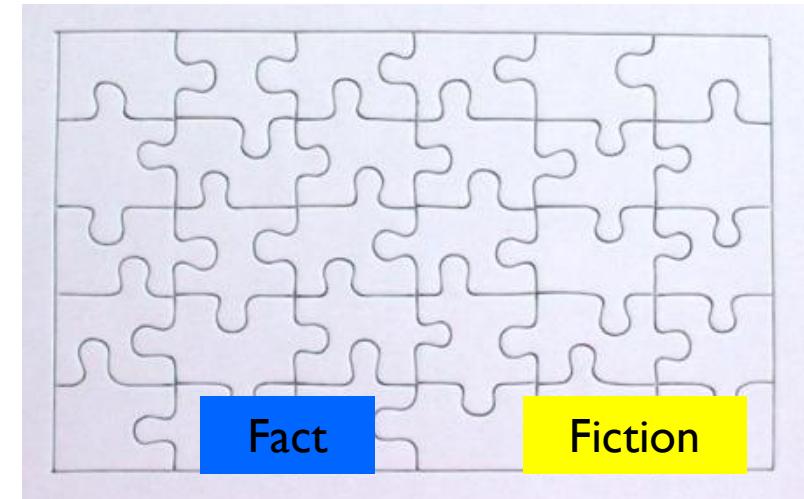
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# ARE OUR FINDINGS ALWAYS OBJECTIVE?

- No. All scientific research will include some level of subjectivity.
- The simple decision to choose a topic and use a particular theoretical perspective is influenced by our values and life experiences.
- The terminology we use, and the way in which we report our findings is never 100% objective. This does not mean that scientific research is useless- quite the contrary. While the values and opinions of the researcher may influence their work to a certain extent- it is still necessary and can contribute to the field.
- When someone says they have “all the facts” we should look a bit further.

# ARE FACTS REALLY FACTS?

- We should ask ourselves the following questions when we are told that something is a fact:
  1. Who produced this fact?
  2. Was it a person or organization that promotes a particular point of view?
  3. What was the purpose of making this fact known?
  4. What do we know about the relationship of this fact to other facts or trends?



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# MANIPULATING FINDINGS

- It is not uncommon for people and organizations to use only information that supports their purpose. An example is the organization FamilyFacts.org. This is a family-centered conservative organization reporting on the benefits of marriage. They are not lying or making up their findings, but they often leave out any findings that go against their values.
  - For example: they report how divorce negatively affect children, and can increase the likelihood of mental health problems. They left out that when children of divorce have mental health problems, it is likely that they would have developed them anyway.

# RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FACTS

- We must always examine the ways in which people make claims about the relationships between facts.
- Folks on the right make sweeping claims about the relationship between divorce or cohabitating parents and negative outcomes in their children. Folks on the left often make claims that it is not the divorce itself that causes negative outcomes, but pre-existing circumstances of conditions.
- Journalists and politicians like to use social science research to promote their agendas, and their own interpretation is not always accurate. Politifact is an organization that checks claims made by politicians.



## PROBLEMS WITH INTERPRETATIONS OF RESEARCH FACTS

- Casual facts imply a direction of effects- the cause.
- It is incorrect to automatically conclude that when two facts correlate, they must have causal relationship (one causing the other).
- Reasoning backward about causality produces backward thinking.
- Correlations can result from a third variable that produces the association between them.

## HOW DO WE SOLVE THIS?

- We need systematic studies that include randomized clinical trials with control groups.
- Several perspectives must be considered in the interpretation of findings.
- If we are reporting that a particular program provides positive results, there must be a control group in order to really determine if the results are correct while giving us a point of comparison.
- Longitudinal studies are effective in determining if results are sustained over time.

# THE TROUBLE WITH AVERAGES WHEN STUDYING SOCIAL PROBLEMS

- We are usually quick to assume that if a report says "the average..." it must reflect the actual average experience in that scenario.
- Averages don't tell the entire story. This is especially true when considering how individuals experience life events. Marriage, divorce, parenting, and trauma are not experienced the same because so many other factors influence our experiences.
- We must consider all possible variables in order to better understand how we cope and live day to day with our own life experiences.

## REFERENCES

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- *Sociology in Modules*, 4th Edition. By Richard Schaefer McGraw Hill: 2017