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Introduction to Sociology Research Project “The Sociology of Everyday Life: Working”

GENERAL OVERVIEW:

1. Conduct a qualitative interview with a family member or close friend about work.
2. Identify themes that stand out in the interview and consider how they relate to C. Wright Mill’s discussion of *troubles* and *issues*.
3. Schedule a conference with the instructor to discuss the theme that will serve as your research focus. Your instructor will help you develop a plan for the next stages of the project.
4. Conduct a literature search on your theme, using the search terms that you and the instructor came up with. Select three scholarly sources that seem to relate well to your research focus. Annotate these sources.
5. Using your *primary research* (the interview) and your *secondary research* (the scholarly sources) write a research proposal.
6. Present your findings to the class.

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW

The topic for your research project is *work*. In this interview, your goal is to discover your subject’s (the person you are interviewing) perceptions about her work, from her perspective. In order to do this, you will ask your subject five, open-ended, general questions (you can ask follow-up questions based upon your subject’s responses). Once you have conducted the interview, you will fully transcribe it and then analyze the responses and look for themes that may be sociological *issues* (e.g., things that seemed to stand out as especially important to your subject and that may transcend her personal experience).

Step 1: Select five interview questions from the approved list we generate in class.

Step 2: Conduct the interview. If your subject agrees, you should tape record the interview. If not, make sure to take detailed notes. Prior to conducting the interview, you must get a signed Informed Consent form from the person you wish to interview (forms will be provided to you).

Step 3: Word-process a transcript of the interview. The transcript should include the questions (including any follow-up questions) you asked and the responses your subject gave.

Step 4: Analyze the interview (e.g., read the transcript, look for and identify themes and/or issues). Write up a description of the themes/issues that emerged in the interview.

MILLS ASSIGNMENT

C Wright Mills (1959) distinguishes between *troubles* and *issues*. What is the distinction? Relate Mills' discussion of *issues* to your research subject's work experience. What aspects of your subject's experiences – either positive or negative – seem like they would apply to other workers in similar circumstances? In other words, discuss how your interviewee's experiences (micro) are related to larger social factors (macro).

Be as thoughtful and detailed with this assignment as possible. Doing well on this component of the research project will help you enormously with the research proposal.

ANNOTATIONS

Locate three academic (scholarly) sources related to your research theme and compile an annotated bibliography. Annotated comments should answer the following questions:

1. Does the author make any **hypotheses**? If so, what **variables** are being looked at and what are the proposed relationships between them? What **variables** does the author not consider that might be important?
2. Does the author use a **theory**? If so, what is it?
3. Does the author use any research **methods**? If so, what are they? Are they **qualitative** or **quantitative**, or both? Do you see these methods as the best choice for gathering the information the researcher needs? Why or why not? How does the author use **inductive** or **deductive** reasoning?
4. How does this work relate to your research, either directly or indirectly? How might this work reveal further insight into your research? What questions still remain unanswered in your mind?

Please use ASA citation format.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The aim of your research proposal is two-fold. First, you will explain to the reader what you have learned from the research you have already done. Second, you will discuss the directions that future research in this area might take. Your proposal should follow this format:

I. Introduction

In this section, briefly introduce your subject and the theme of your research. Who did you interview and what theme or issue came out of the interview?

II. Micro-Macro Connections

In this section, you will use Mills to connect the theme/issue of your interview to the secondary research you annotated. Your aim is to show that your subject's experience with work is not unique to her, but is experienced by other workers in similar circumstances. If your subject is dissatisfied with her work, identify the source(s) of her dissatisfaction. If your subject is satisfied, identify the source(s) of satisfaction. How common are these sources of satisfaction or dissatisfaction? What factors seem to generate them? What obstacles stand in the way of addressing sources of dissatisfaction and what might workers do collectively to solve common issues?

Misc: Use direct quotes from the interview to ground your theme. You may also want to include statistical data that is relevant to your theme. For instance, let's say that you have identified role conflict for women who work and have children as an issue. The *Statistical Abstract of the U.S.* could give you information on the percentages of working mothers today, compared to several years ago. This might help you to decide whether a structural transformation has occurred and whether role conflict is widespread.

III. Directions for Future Research

The aims of this section are three-fold. First, summarize your findings up to this point. Specifically, connect the micro to the macro. In other words, discuss how your interviewee's experiences (micro) are related to larger social factors (macro), and discuss how your findings could be used to inform labor policy to create better conditions for workers. Second, construct a minimum of three research questions and related hypotheses that could serve as the basis for future research in this area. Third, discuss the research method or methods that would be best suited for answering each question.

Reference List (in ASA Format)

Appendices (copies of the interview transcript, theme discussion, Mills assignment, and annotations)

RESEARCH PRESENTATION

Present your findings to the class in the form of an oral presentation.