

# **Introduction to Social Research**

## **Week 3: Research Design: Hypothesis and Research Question**

**April 23, 2025**

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# Outline

I. The Sociological Imagination

II. The Research Questions & Hypotheses

III. An Illustration: Obedience to Authority

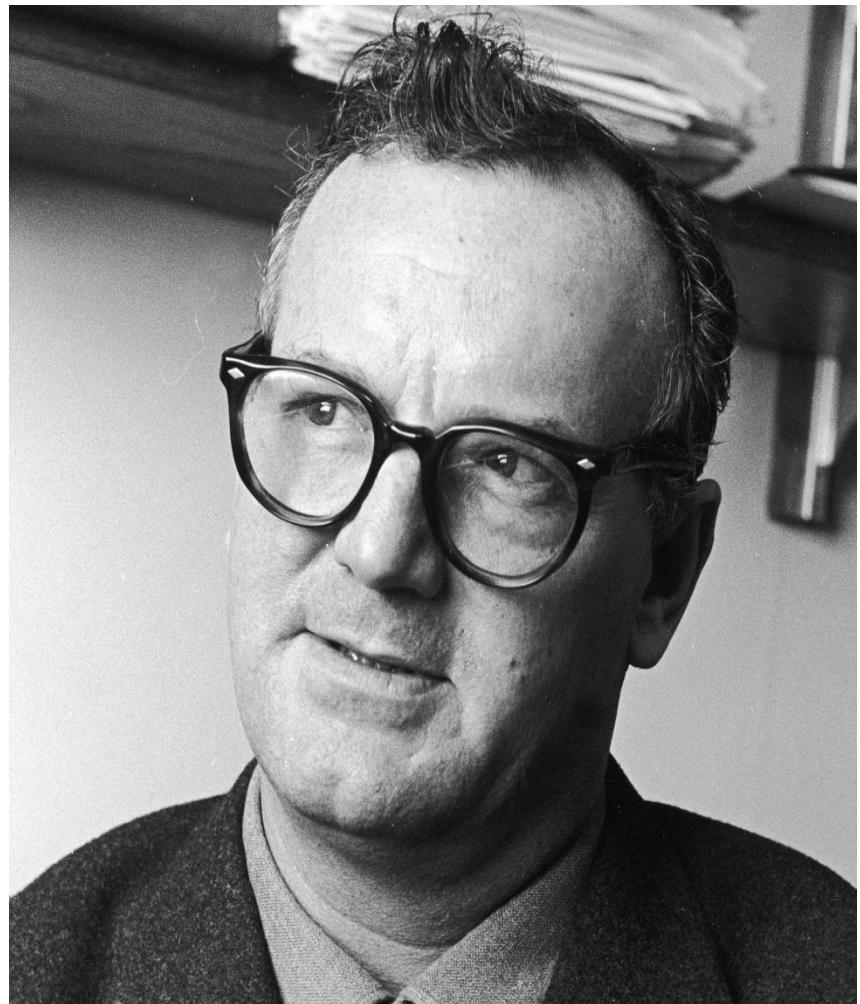
IV. Conclusions

# I. The Sociological Imagination

# **Charles WRIGHT MILLS**

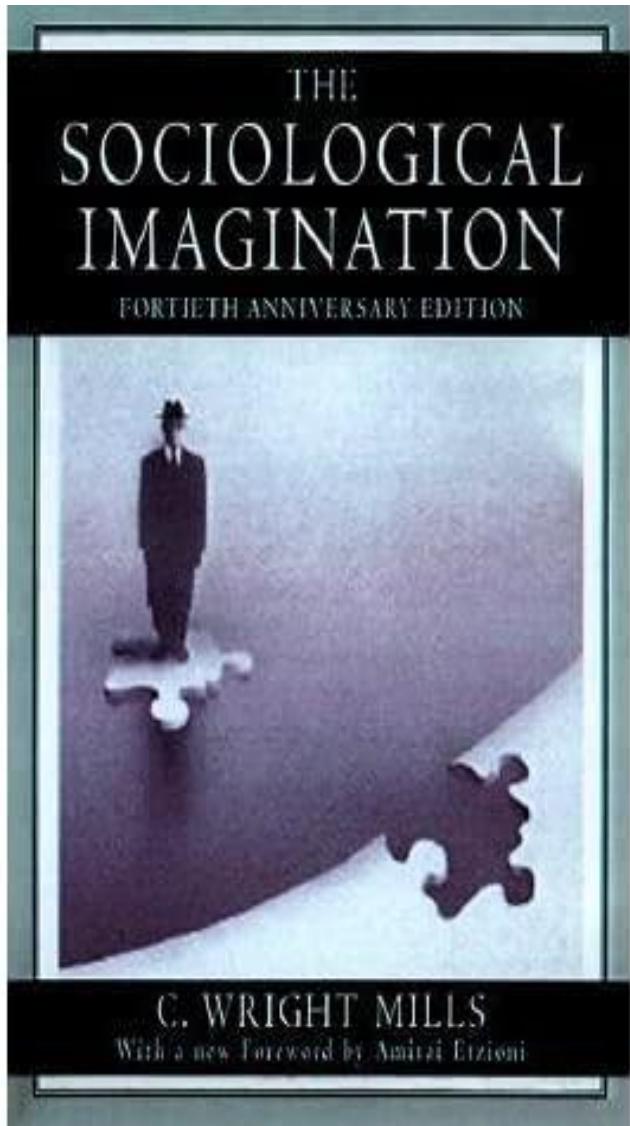
## **(チャールズ・ライト・ミルズ)**

- Famous Research:
  1. **White Collar: The American Middle Classes**  
(ホワイト・カラー中流階級の生活探究), 1951,  
Oxford University Press
  2. **The Power Elite** (パワー・エリート), 1956, Oxford University Press
  3. **The Sociological Imagination** (社会学的想像力), 1959, Oxford University Press



**Charles WRIGHT MILLS (1916-1962)**

# The Sociological Imagination(社会学的想像力)



**Sociological imagination:** “The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society.” (Mills, 1959, p.6)

**Ability to see our private experiences**, personal difficulties, and achievements as, in part, a reflection of the structural arrangements of society and the times in which we live

**Sociological research:** How can we develop the ability to understand the interplay between biography and history, personal troubles and public issues?

# The Sociological Imagination: Personal troubles & Public Issues

- **First Principle:** look beyond the personal troubles of individuals to see the public issues of social structure. “**The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals.**” (p.5)
- **Second Principle:** Look at the functions and the relationships of institutions. “Our chance to understand how smaller milieux and larger structures interact, and our chance to understand the larger causes at work in these limited milieux thus require us **to deal with historical materials.**” (p.149)
- **Third Principle:** Look for these mechanisms of change, the cherished values that are threatened and those that are supported: “But it does mean – and this is the second reference of the principle – that within this historical type **various mechanisms of change** come to some specific kind of intersection.” (p.149)

# **Relations between personal troubles & public issues: Unemployment, Divorce, War, Crime, Poverty, Racism, etc.**

- When one might consider unemployment as a public issue, rather than a personal trouble?
- “In these terms, consider unemployment. When, in a city of 100,000, only one man is unemployed, that is his personal trouble, and for its relief we properly look to the character of the man, his skills, and his immediate opportunities. But when in a nation of 50 million employees, 15 million men are unemployed, that is an issue, and we may not hope to find its solution within the range of opportunities open to any one individual. The very structure of opportunities has collapsed. Both the correct statement of the problem and the range of possible solutions require us to consider the economic and political institutions of the society, and not merely the personal situation and character of a scatter of individuals” (p.9)

## **II. The Research Questions & Hypotheses**

# Research Topic & Research Question

- **Their formulations:**  
From a problem (theme, issue, concern) to a research question
- **Concept:** phenomena that share common characteristics
- **Some examples:**
  1. The economic welfare of immigrants in Japan
  2. The causes of radical Islam terrorism in Middle East
  3. The global environmental crisis
  4. The effects of natural disasters on suicide
  5. The Evolution of health care systems and family structures in developed countries
  6. The differences in income between men and women

# Defining Research Questions

- **3 main criteria:**
  1. Researchable (how is it possible to lead this research?)
  2. Interesting (what am I really interested in explaining?)
  3. General enough to permit exploration & at the same time focused enough to delimit the study (how should be the question formulated?)
- **Some examples:**
  1. Is capital punishment morally wrong?
  2. How fear affects the desire to be with others?
  3. How sports participation enhances educational achievement?
  4. How can wage differences between men and women be reduced?
  5. Do unemployed men do more housework than employed men?

# Hypotheses

- **Definition:** a tentative answer to a research question
- **What should they explain?** The nature and form of a relationship between two or more variables (change in one variable can affect change in another: dependent and independent variables)
- **Be cautious:** tendencies and not absolute certainties

# Hypotheses: some examples

1. An increase in education will result in a decrease in prejudice
2. If a person has a high level of education, then he or she will have a low level of prejudice
3. “People who have performed volunteer roles before retirement will be much more likely to perform such roles after retirement than people who have not performed such roles”

# Research questions & hypotheses: an example

Problem/issue	Determinants of work motivation
Research Question	How do human relations affect workers motivation?
Hypothesis	The manager's attention given to workers has a positive impact on their motivation, contrary to the reliance over bureaucratic rules to control workers.

### **III. An Illustration: Obedience to Authority**

# The Social Issue: Obedience to Authority

- **The context:** trials of the high-ranking Nazi German officials
- **The research question:** “Could it be that Eichmann and his million accomplices in the Holocaust were just following orders? Could we call them all accomplices?”
- **One hypothesis:** The Germans-are-different Hypothesis: “the course of German history... made blind obedience to temporal rulers the highest virtue of Germanic man, and put a premium on servility.”, Shirer, 1960, p.1080.



The Nuremberg War Criminals trial, 1945-46



The Eichmann Trial, 1961, Jerusalem, Israel

# The research protocol: Testing people's response to authority



- **The Stanley Milgram's behavioural experiment on obedience, 1961**
- **The Experimenter, 2015:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1VOZhwRvWo>



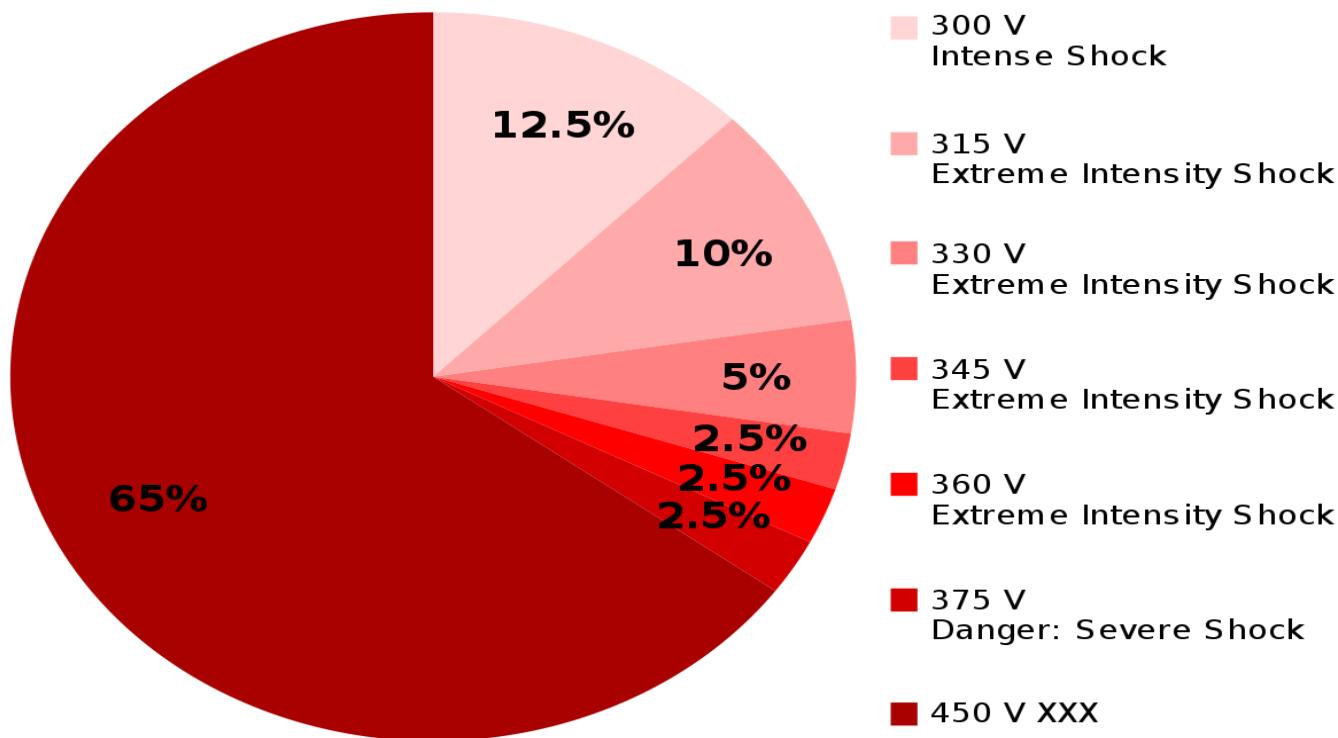
- **The experiment:** a script, an educational experiment with 40 men as volunteers (\$4.50) for Yale University
- **One dependent variable:** the behaviour of subjects (maximum electric shock administered)

The Milgram Experiment

# The Unexpected Results

- **Results:**

1. 65% of subjects pushed the levers up to 450 volts
2. Conflict between own conscience and authority
3. Hypothesis is contradicted. American people do obey



# Theoretical & Ethical Implications

## Situational factors explaining obedience to authority

- The physical presence of an authority
- The prestige of the authority (here, Yale University)
- The competence of the authority
- The physical presence of the victims

## Conflict between obedience to authority and personal conscience

- Legitimate authority: people tend to obey orders if they recognize their authority as morally right and legally based
- Two types of behaviours: autonomous state vs. agentic state

# **IV. Conclusions**

# Conclusions

- Research questions and hypotheses are produced on a dynamic basis
- Sociological imagination helps build research questions, making link between personal troubles and social issues
- Behavioural study of obedience as one example of the dynamic character of research questions and hypotheses

# References

- Stanley MILGRAM. 1963. “Behavioural Study of Obedience”. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*. Vol. 67, No. 4, pp.371-378.
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- William L. SHIRER. 1960. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. Simon & Schuster.
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