

oversee Association projects supported by external funds.

3.2. The duration, size, and length of members' terms may vary according to the requirements of the project.

3.3. Project committees shall report regularly to the Council on the projects for which they are responsible.

### Chapter VI: Principles and Guidelines for Educational Programs and Activities

The Council has adopted a set of general principles and procedures for oversight and coordination, evaluation and review, and publication and dissemination of information on educational programs and activities. (Council minutes, February 4, 1977) Association committees and staff shall follow these procedures in developing and administering educational programs.

## Sexist Biases in Sociological Research: Problems and Issues

Prepared by the  
**Committee on the Status of Women in Sociology**<sup>1</sup>

*(Editor's Note: This document is reprinted in PS at the request of the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession. While this report was prepared for sociological research, the committee felt the discussion applicable to work of political scientists.)*

Sexist bias in sociological research is a topic of current concern. This document identifies five aspects of the research process where bias frequently occurs: research problem selection and formulation, review of previous

research, selection of population and sample, validity issues, and interpretation of research results. The various problems are closely linked and reinforcing; and studies frequently have major shortcomings in several areas at the same time. Many of the issues discussed here could also be generalized to race and class bias.

The American Sociological Association (ASA) Committee on the Status of Women in Society prepared this document to encourage all members of the profession, whether teacher, researcher, grant officer, research consumer, or publication editor, to recognize and solve the problems described. Several of the most serious types of problems in each area are identified, and, where appropriate, examples of the general problems are provided. The issues are clearly not exhaustive, and readers are invited to identify and share additional problems and to recommend solutions. Any comments and suggestions should be sent to the Committee on the Status of Women in Sociology c/o the Executive Office.

### I. RESEARCH PROBLEM SELECTION AND FORMULATION

#### General Problem

1. *Gender-blind social theory.* Gender may be a significant variable in a social setting, institution, or society, but the gender variable is not explored or incorporated into a theory, interpretation, or analysis of the system.

*Example:* Analysis of social inequality in a society without reference to gender inequality.

2. *Significant topics ignored.* Topics of particular significance for women are ignored.

*Example:* Insufficient research on the organization of housework and sex discrimination in the U.S.

### II. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

#### General Problem

1. *Failure to mention that samples are single-sex or have highly imbalanced sex ratios.* The results of a study are cited but no reference is made to the gender composition of the sample upon which the results are based.

*Example:* Citation of a study demonstrating a positive association between position in the job hierarchy and work satisfaction; failure to mention that the study sampled men only.

<sup>1</sup>This document was developed by Michael Useem with the assistance of: Joan Huber, Council Liaison ('78); Essie Rutledge; Petter Schwartz; Joan Stelling, Chair ('77-'78); Barrie Thorne, Chair ('78-'80); and Gayle Tuchman. Input was also received from Lewis Coser; Helen Hughes, Council Liaison ('79); Joyce Ladner; and Doris Wilkinson, Staff Liaison to the Committee. The document was approved by the ASA Council at its June 1979 meeting.

2. *Failure to note that samples are single-sex or have highly imbalanced sex ratios when reviewing a body of literature.*

*Example:* Summary of results of previous research on occupational mobility without indication that nearly all studies cited are of men only.

3. *Methodological weakness of previous research ignored.* Previous studies are cited which purport to reach conclusions casting women in an inferior light; the studies suffer from serious methodological weaknesses, but the reviewer fails to warn the reader about these problems and how they may invalidate the results.

*Example:* Uncritical citation of studies purporting to find sex differences in fear of success, field dependency and industrial productivity.

3. *Selective treatment of topics.* Aspects of a topic of special salience for men are defined as covering the entire topic while aspects of special salience for women are under-researched.

*Example:* Primarily male-victim crimes receiving far greater attention than primarily female-victim crimes (e.g., sexual assault, sexual harassment, family violence).

4. *Inadequate specification of research problem.*

a. A research problem is formulated for men or women only, but this limitation is not explicitly noted.

*Example:* Research questions posed about the work-place implicitly referring to men only; questions posed about the home-place referring to women only.

b. A research model is improperly assumed to apply to men or to women only.

*Example:* Assumption that the adjustment of women to work depends on the household situation while the adjustment of men is largely unaffected by the family.

c. Inadequate exploration of topics which transcend sex-stereotyped divisions.

*Example:* Insufficient attention to the relationship between employment experience and child-rearing.

5. *Pejorative labeling or conceptualization.* Situations in which men or women act outside of prescribed sex roles are defined as areas for the study of deviant behavior or "problems"; situations in which they conform to prescribed roles are assumed to be non-problematic.

*Example:* Emphasis on the problems of

female-headed households and single-parent families; absence of studies of the problems associated with two-parent families. Unpaid housework and child-rearing are not considered "work" and women involved in such activity are considered to be outside the labor force.<sup>2</sup>

### III. SELECTION OF POPULATION AND SAMPLE

#### General Problem

1. *Women or men are arbitrarily excluded from sample.* A research problem applies to a population with both men and women but only a single-sex is sampled for study.

*Example:* Studies of language acquisition which focus on the interaction of mother and child, neglecting the role of the father.

2. *Inadequate justification for exclusion of men or women from sample.* Men or women are arbitrarily excluded from a study because of financial constraints, convenience, lack of familiarity, or personal preference of the investigator; it is presumed that the topic is only relevant for men or women.

*Example:* Studies of occupational mobility or work roles which include men only on the untested assumption that the male experience is the most important aspect.

### IV. VALIDITY ISSUES

#### General Problem

1. *Biased question wording in surveys.* Numerous problems associated with question wording yield conclusions which are invalid.

*Example:* A respondent is asked to designate a single person as "head of household."

2. *Scales validated on a single sex.* A scale is validated on a sample of men or women only but is then applied to samples of both men and women.

*Example:* An instrument for the measurement of the need for achievement is devel-

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<sup>2</sup>The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, defines the *civilian labor force* as the sum of the unemployed and the civilian employed. The *total labor force* includes those in the armed forces.

## PS Appendix

oped on male samples but is then used for measurement with both men and women.

3. *Cross-sex interviewing.* On highly sensitive gender-related questions, efforts are not made to ensure that interviewers are of the sex that will yield the least bias in eliciting responses.

## V. INTERPRETATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

### General Problem

1. *Over-generalization of single-sex studies.* Discussion of the results of a study based on a single-sex sample fail to qualify conclusions; implicit or explicit assertions are made of the generalizability of the findings to both sexes.

*Example:* Results of a study of the correlates of job satisfaction among men generalized to both men and women.

2. *Improper entitlement of single-sex study reports.* Publication titles of single-sex studies make no reference to this limitation.

*Example:* Female-based study entitled "The American Family System"; male-based study entitled "The American Stratification System."

### 3. *Inferences unwarranted by the data.*

- a. Conclusions with adverse implications for women are improperly drawn from the data.

*Example:* Rape victims held partially responsible for the assault; women in bureaucratically organized professions held partially responsible for the limits on their professional autonomy.

- b. Observed differences between men and women are attributed to individual-level biological and psychological gender differences; no effort is made to investigate whether social factors correlated with gender in the U.S. may account for the observed sex differences.

*Example:* Lower aspirations for bureaucratic promotion and advancement among women attributed to general sex differences, ignoring differences in opportunity structures.

See also:

Wilkinson, Doris, "Women in the Profession: Data Sources for the Eighties," *SWS Network*, 9 (January, 1980): 3.

———, "Women, Racial and Ethnic Minority Sociologists: A Selected Bibliography," *ASA Footnotes*, 8 (August, 1980): 8.

## ANNUAL MEETING PROGRAMS AVAILABLE

If you were unable to attend the 1981 Annual Meeting, there are a few remaining programs available with a complete listing of registered panel participants and papers presented. There is also a courtesy listing of all the unaffiliated panels.

To obtain a program send \$6.50 (APSA members) or \$10.50 (non-members), payable to APSA to:

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