

THE CURRICULUM VITAE AS A DATA SOURCE

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INTRODUCTION Archival data represent on major form of unobtrusive measure which are compiled independently of the influence of the sociological observer. Webb (1966) classified archival data in two types. The first type includes public records, such as actuarial records, political and court records, government documents, and mass media records and publications. The second type includes private records, such as institutional records, correspondence files, reports, and personal documents. Public records are generally prepared for some audience, while private records are restricted, and normally, are not prepared for an audience. For the most part, archival data have been under-utilized by sociologists (Smith 1975). According to Webb, about 90 percent of all behavioral science research has been based on interviews and questionnaires. Here, we examine one type of archival data, the curriculum vitae, also called a professional resume, biographical sketch, or personal or professional history. To our knowledge, the curriculum vitae has not been used as a data source. The curriculum vitae represents a combination of private and public archival data. It is a personal document, developed for a particular audience. Other treatises on the use of personal documents do not mention the vita as a potential data source (Allport, 1942; Gottschalk et al., 1945; Webb et al. 1966). However, curricula vitae are viable as a data source for sociologists interested in occupations and careers, and generally, for the sociology of science.

Webster defines a curriculum

vitae as a short account of one's career and qualifications prepared typically by an applicant for a position. Obviously, the content of the vita will influence the research area that can be explored, and the topical content is likely to vary, since a standard format is not followed. Nevertheless, the scope of the subject matter tends to be broad. The topics usually described, as applicable are: date of birth, marital status, number of children, educational background, employment history, awards, honors, grants, and fellowships; membership in honorary societies, and professional associations, and publication of articles, books, chapters, and research reports. **THE USE OF VITAE** The authors used vitae as a data source in designing a study of the career patterns and contingencies of sociologists chairing or heading graduate departments of sociology. A major concern of the sociology chairperson study was to determine if certain patterns characterize the careers of departmental chairpersons as a group, and as subgroups, when controls are applied for a number of variables, pertaining to personal characteristics and institutional affiliation. The vita's potential to provide data bearing on a variety of research problems becomes apparent in the following research questions:

1. What is the relation between the prestige of the chairperson's doctorate, as measured by the prestige of the university where the degree was obtained, and:
 - 1.1) the number of years required to achieve the chairperson position;
 - 1.2) whether or not the chairperson serves at a major or minor university.
2. What areas of specialization are most represented by chairpersons?
3. Is there a tendency for chairpersons to be recruited internally or externally?
4. Is it the professional

orientation or the administrative orientation which seems more important in explaining the ascendance into chairperson positions.

5. What relation exists between such career contingencies as sex and age, and the point in one's career a person assumes the chair responsibilities?

6. Is the post-chair productivity pattern characterized by a continuity of the pattern existing prior to the service as chairperson?

7. What is the relation between geographical and career mobility?

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Ideally the researcher should combine the curriculum vitae with other unobtrusive measures and the more traditional interview and questionnaire data gathering methods. Like most archival data, the curriculum vitae provides observational information on "who", "what", "when", and "how", but used alone, would not answer questions of "why" (Smith, 1975).

Our chairperson study used two other data sources: the "Guide to Graduate Departments of Sociology, 1974 (ASA), and the Directory of Members of the American Sociological Association, 1975/1976. The use of multiple methodologies for triangulation, as a cardinal research principle, has considerable merit in its own right (Denzin, 1970). An added advantage is that the vita usually contains the home and office telephone number of the subject, which facilitates telephone contact if other data are required.

Upper level white collar personnel, belonging to the professional, semi-professional, managerial and officer categories are more likely to maintain resumes, but workers lower in the prestige structure probably do not. A preliminary canvass of those representing the proposed study group should be made to insure that vitae are common to the members. There is also a valuable source book, titled: Volume 1, Encyclopedia of Associations (Fish 1977),

which will assist in identifying possible occupational study groups. This guide to the national and world organizations contains detailed descriptions of many organizations in areas such as: trade, business, commercial, agricultural; legal, government, public administration and military; health and medical; public affairs, scientific, engineering and technical; educational, cultural; and social welfare.

Many of these organizations are concerned with occupations. For our purpose, pertinent information on each association included membership, size, key word for the association's field of interest, a brief description of the types of membership, publications, whether a directory is published, the chief official, with the address and telephone number. Information on membership size and directory establish the size of the population universe and the names and addresses of prospective sample members. Having the membership list permits orderly sampling procedures. Information about the key administrative person is useful if the researcher follows the wise practice of securing a letter of endorsement for the planned research operation.

If the occupational group is well chosen, each member probably keeps current copies of the vita which can readily be mailed. The very simplicity of this procedure encouraged compliance with our request for a copy of the current vita in our sociology chairperson study. The final response rate, after a second request letter, was 74 percent, which compares well with other mailed questionnaire studies of academicians. For example, a recent national study of college and university faculty had a 49 percent response rate (Dutton et al 1975)

Almost all of the vitae submitted in the sociology chairperson study were current. In several cases, entries were penciled in the margin to update the vita. Members

of other occupational groups may not be as diligent as these heads and chairpersons, but generally, the curriculum vitae contributes an informative and favorable presentation of self. There is reason to believe the information contained in curricula vitae is very accurate. The vita is a succinct summary of one's professional background, experience, and qualifications. It is the credential for employment. If it became known that a candidate misrepresented himself, the results could be very damaging. In addition, professional ethics mandates honesty in the preparation of curricula vitae. Comparatively, there is little doubt that a person is less likely to give false data on a vita, than in an interview, or on a questionnaire.

The final advantage of the vita, as a data source, is that it does not have the reactive measurement effect that is typical of many personal documents. It is also free of other problems of the more traditional methods of research, such as interview response set, where conventional, rather than factual answers are given, and the problem of fatigue of the respondent and the observer.

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