



## Sociology in Your Social World

### How to Read a Research Table

A statistical table is a researcher's laborsaving device. Quantitative data presented in tabular form is more clear and concise than the same information presented in several written paragraphs. A good table has clear signposts to help the reader and avoid confusion. For instance, the table below shows many of the main features of a table, and the list that follows explains how to read each feature.\*

TABLE 2.1 **Mean Earnings (in dollars)**

Characteristic	Level of Highest Degree								
	Total Persons	Not a High School Graduate	High School Graduate Only	Some College, No Degree	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Professional Degree	Doctorate Degree
All persons <sup>a</sup>	37,046	18,734	27,915	29,533	35,958	51,206	62,514	115,212	88,471
Age									
25–34 yrs	33,212	18,920	26,073	28,954	32,276	43,794	51,040	74,120	62,109
35–44 yrs	42,475	22,123	31,479	36,038	38,442	57,438	66,264	126,165	101,382
45–54 yrs	45,908	23,185	32,978	40,291	41,511	59,208	68,344	132,180	92,229
55–64 yrs	45,154	23,602	31,742	38,131	39,147	57,423	66,760	138,845	98,433
65 and over	28,918	17,123	20,618	28,017	23,080	41,323	42,194	77,312	56,724
Sex									
Male	55,455	28,345	40,119	48,812	50,012	71,140	85,700	148,611	105,928
Female	31,024	16,075	23,143	26,720	30,639	40,200	48,535	72,594	73,516
White									
Male	57,075	28,603	41,239	50,262	51,094	73,648	86,718	153,469	111,093
Female	32,344	17,598	23,920	27,329	31,576	39,581	48,746	73,075	71,356
Black									
Male	40,779	24,962	34,334	38,133	43,081	50,793	78,354	—	—
Female	28,171	16,509	21,270	25,919	27,658	42,633	49,330	—	—
Hispanic <sup>b</sup>									
Male	35,160	24,628	31,921	44,397	43,279	52,948	70,747	—	—
Female	23,265	14,414	20,352	24,100	28,060	38,473	48,433	—	—

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (2005). Data are extracted from "Table 9: Earnings in 2003 by Educational Attainment of the Population 18 Years and Over, by Age, Sex, Race Alone, and Hispanic Origin: 2004."

Note: The dash means that the base is too small to show the derived measure.

a. Includes other races, not shown separately.

b. Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

**TITLE:** The title provides information on the major topic and variables in the table.

**"Earnings by Highest degree Earned: 1999"**

**SOURCE:** The source note, found under the table, points out the origin of the data. It is usually identified by the label "source."

**"Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (2005)"**

**MARGINAL TABS:** In examining the numbers in the table try working from the outside in. Begin by looking at the marginals, the figures at the margins of the table. The figures often provide summary information.

In this table note that the column marked "Total persons" provides average income in each category for all levels of education.

**CELLS:** To make more detailed comparisons, examine specific cells in the body of the table. These are the boxes that hold the numbers or percentages.

In this table the cells contain data on ethnic (white, black, Hispanic), age, and gender difference.

**HEADNOTE:** Many tables will have a note under the title giving information relevant to understanding the table or units in the table.

For this table, the reader is informed that this includes all persons over the age of 18 who reported an income.

**FOOTNOTES:** Some tables have footnotes, usually indicating something unusual about the data or where to find more complete data.

In this table several footnotes are provided so the reader does not make mistakes in interpretation.

**HEADINGS AND STUBS:** Tables generally have one or two levels of headings under the title and headnotes. These instruct the reader about what is in the columns below.

In this table the headnotes indicate the level of education achieved so the reader can identify the average income for persons with that amount of education.

**UNITS:** Units refer to how the data is reported. It could be in percentages or in number per 100 or 1,000, or in other units.

In this table the data is reported in dollars of income.

**FACTS FROM THE TABLE:** After reviewing all of the above information, the reader is ready to make some interpretations about what the data mean.

In this table the reader might note that women's income distribution is lower than men's and that women with the same amount of education earn much less than men. Likewise, African Americans and Hispanics earn much less than whites with similar amounts of education.

\*Features of the table adapted from Broom and Selznick 1963.