CHAPTER 2

SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

CHAPTER OUTLINE

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define the scientific method.
2. Discuss the process of formulating a hypothesis.
3. Describe the processes of collecting and analyzing research data.
4. Define validity and reliability in social research.
5. Describe the various research methods used in performing social research.
6. Discuss the ethics of social research.
7. Describe the impact of technology on research.
8. Discuss sociological efforts to understand sexual behavior.

WHAT'S NEW IN THIS CHAPTER

MODULE 5: WHAT IS THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD?

- Chapter-opening excerpt from The Tender Cut: Inside the
- Hidden World of Self-Injury by Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler
- Discussion of nonrespondents to the Current Population Survey

MODULE 6: MAJOR RESEARCH DESIGNS

- Discussion of the need to adjust survey questions in response to changes in society
- Coverage of ethnography as a major research design, and observation as one component of ethnography, with cartoon
- Research Today box, "Gender Messages in Scouting"
- Coverage of content analysis of gender stereotyping in children's coloring books, and of television coverage of men's versus women's sports

MODULE 8: DEVELOPMENTS OF METHODOLOGY

- Discussion of feminist research on self-injury
- Discussion of epidemiologists' use of Google topic searches in tracking the spread of the H1N1 virus
- Discussion of the vastly increased amount of data now available to sociologists and its ethical implications

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Sociologists are committed to the use of the ***scientific method*** in their research. The basic steps in the scientific method are defining the problem, reviewing the literature, formulating the hypothesis, selecting the research design, and collecting and analyzing the data. Finally, the researcher develops a conclusion based on the findings of the research.

An ***operational definition*** is an explanation of an abstract concept that allows a researcher to assess or measure the concept. Numerical variables, such as income, age, or educational attainment, are simple to operationalize. However, other variables, which are not summarized numerically, are much more difficult to measure. Such variables might include marital happiness or religiosity.

A review of the relevant literature helps to refine the problem, consider previous attempts to investigate it, and reduce avoidable mistakes. A ***hypothesis*** is a speculative statement about the relationship between two or more variables. Sociological studies sometime fail to support the original hypothesis and researchers must reformulate their conclusions.

Variables are measurable traits or characteristics that are subject to change under certain conditions. The variable hypothesized to cause or influence another variable is called the ***independent variable*** (sometimes referred to as the "causal" variable). The variable that is changed or dependent on the independent variable is called the ***dependent variable***. A ***correlation*** exists when a change in one variable coincides with a change in the other. A correlational relationship does not necessarily indicate a causal relationship, however. ***Control variables*** are those factors that are held constant to test the strength of a relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

In most studies, social scientists carefully select a sample. A ***sample*** is a selection from a larger population that is statistically representative of the population. In a ***random sample,*** every member of the population being studied has the same chance of being selected for the study.

The scientific method requires both validity and reliability. ***Validity*** refers to the degree to which a measure or scale truly reflects the phenomenon under study. ***Reliability*** refers to the extent to which a measure produces consistent results.

A ***research design*** is a detailed plan or method for obtaining or collecting data. ***Surveys*** are a common method of ***quantitative research*** used by researchers to collect data. A quantitative method is one in which data are represented as numbers or statistics. Surveys may consist of oral ***interviews*** or written ***questionnaires***. ***Observation*** is a ***qualitative research*** method, which allows researchers to collect data through everyday interaction with a group or community under study. Qualitative research involves smaller samples and different research methodologies. ***Experiments*** are artificially created situations in which researchers can manipulate variables. Typically, an experimental group is exposed to the independent variable (or "stimulus") and the ***control group*** is not. Analyzing existing data that has been previously collected is called ***secondary analysis***. ***Content analysis*** involves the systematic coding and objective recording of data, such as using newspapers, periodicals, and other common documents or venues to interpret and test the significance of data.

All researchers must abide by a ***code of ethics*** to ensure that researchers are not causing harm or violating a person's privacy. The ASA, *American Sociological Association*, is responsible for publishing a code of ethics for researchers in the field of sociology. Most research seeks to remain ***value neutral*** in its judgments when interpreting research results. However, some have suggested neutrality may be

impossible to attain. As the feminist perspective gains influence among sociological researchers, feminist methodology is changing both how issues are defined and how data is collected. Computers and the Internet are exciting technologies that are having an impact on research.

RESOURCE INTEGRATOR

Focus Questions	Resources
1. What is the scientific method?	**IN THE TEXT** **Key Terms**: scientific method, operational definition, hypothesis, variable, independent variable, dependent variable, causal logic, correlation, sample, random sample, validity, reliability, control variable **IN THE INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL** **Additional Lecture Idea**: How Would You Obtain a Representative Sample (2-1) **Video Resources**: *Scientific Method and Values*; *Sociological Thinking and Research* ***REEL SOCIETY* VIDEO** **Topic Index**: Scientific Method
2. What are the major research designs in sociological research?	**IN THE TEXT** **Key Terms**: research design, survey, interview, questionnaire, quantitative research, qualitative research, observation, ethnography, experiment, experimental group, control group, Hawthorne effect, secondary analysis, content analysis **Boxes:** Research Today: Surveying Cell Phone Users **IN THE INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL** **Additional Lecture Ideas**: Asking the Correct Questions (2-2); Framing Survey Questions about Interracial Relationships (2-3); The Personal Implications of Ethnographic Research (2-4); Content Analysis of Coverage of the Rodney King Beating (2-5); Useful Statistics (2-6) **Classroom Discussion Topics**: Defending Surveys (2-3); NORC and the Internet (2-4); Coding (2-5); Ethnographies (2-6); Role Conflict and Observation Research (2-7); Content Analysis of Children's Book (2-8); Content Analysis and Magazines (2-9); Content Analysis and Personal Ads (2-10) **Topics and Sources for Student Research**: Content Analysis—Comic Superheroes; Content Analysis—Newspapers **Video Resources**: *Sociological Inquiry; Research Methods for the Social Sciences* **Internet Connection**: Oral History Society; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

	Social Policy: How Americans Feel—An Introduction to Survey Research
3. What are the key ethical issues in sociological research?	**IN THE TEXT** **Key Terms**: code of ethics, value neutrality **Boxes:** Research Today: Gender Messages in Scout Badges **IN THE INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL** **Classroom Discussion Topics**: Teaching the Ethics of Sociological Research (2-11)
4. What are the key issues in feminist methodology?	**IN THE INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL** **Classroom Discussion Topics**: Using Content Analysis to Research Gender (2-13) **Student Research and Assignments**: Feminist Methodology; Fieldwork/Observation and Feminist Scholarship

LECTURE OUTLINE

I. What Is the Scientific Method?

- A systematic, organized series of steps that ensures maximum objectivity and consistency in researching a problem. It is important to be able to distinguish between scientific and popular sources, as we are constantly bombarded with information and so-called "facts."

A. Defining the Problem

- An operational definition is necessary to assess or measure a concept. ***Example:*** A sociologist may use membership in exclusive social clubs as an operational definition of "status."

B. Reviewing the Literature

- This process serves to refine the problem under study, clarify data collection techniques, and reduce avoidable mistakes.

C. Formulating the Hypothesis

- Hypothesis: A speculative statement about the relationship between two or more variables (A variable is a measurable trait or characteristic).
- Independent variables cause or influence change in dependent variables.
- Dependent variables are changed by the independent variables or are dependent on them.
- Causal logic refers to the relationship between a condition or variable and a particular consequence, with one event leading to the other. ***Example:*** Time spent studying may result in a higher grade on an exam.
- Correlation is only an indication that causality *may* be present. Other factors are necessary to determine causation.

D. Collecting and Analyzing Data

- Research designs guide researchers in collecting data.

1. Selecting the Sample

- Sample: The sample is a statistically representative selection from a larger population. Researchers collect samples because the population is too large to be studied.
- A random sample occurs when every member of an entire population has the same chance of being selected for the study.

2. Ensuring Validity and Reliability

- Validity refers to the degree to which a measure or scale accurately reflects the phenomenon under study.
- Reliability refers to the extent to which a measure produces consistent results.

E. Developing the Conclusion

- Conclusion represents both an end and a beginning in research.

1. Supporting Hypothesis

- Some studies refute a hypothesis, which leads to reformulations about a conclusion and adjustments in research designs.

2. Controlling for Other Factors

- A control variable is a factor held constant to test the relative impact of the independent variable. ***Example:*** If a researcher were interested in comparing life expectancy among persons of different races or ethnicities, he or she might wish to control for socio-economic status (SES).

II. Major Research Designs

- A detailed plan or method for obtaining data scientifically.

A. Surveys

- Surveys are generally in the form of an interview or questionnaire, providing researchers with information about how people think or act. ***Example:*** Gallup poll.
- The survey is an example of quantitative research, which collects and reports data primarily in numerical form.
- Survey questionnaires have the advantage over most other methods of being cheaper to administer. They also offer the advantage of uniform questions and answers, thereby allowing researchers to make comparisons across the sample. Samples for survey research are often quite large.

B. Observation

- Qualitative research offers more depth and detail than quantitative analysis. This type of research relies on what is seen in field and naturalistic settings, and often focuses on small groups and communities. Observation is the most common form. ***Example:*** A researcher might observe gang life or homeless persons. Observational research relies on small samples.
- The Hawthorne effect refers to the tendency for subjects of research to deviate from typical behavior because they are under observation.
- William F. Whyte's 1930s study, in which he moved into a low-income Italian neighborhood in Boston, is a classic example of a participant observation research.
- Ethnography: The study of an entire social setting through extended systematic observation. The Adlers' study of self-injury, described in the chapter opening, was an ethnographic study.

C. Experiments

- Experiments involve artificially created situations. Pure experiments require the use of an experimental group exposed to an independent variable, and a control group, which is not exposed to the independent variable.
- Sociologists do not rely on classic forms of experiment/control groups, due to the danger they might cause to humans. Sociological topics often do not lend themselves well to experimental designs.
- The Hawthorne effect refers to the tendency for subjects of research to deviate from typical behavior because they are under observation.

D. Use of Existing Sources

- Secondary analysis refers to making use of previously collected or publicly accessible information and data. ***Example:*** Census data.
- Existing data is nonreactive, since it does not influence people's behavior; thus, researchers can avoid the Hawthorne effect by using secondary analysis. ***Example:*** Durkheim's research on suicide.
- Content analysis is the systematic coding and objective recording of data. ***Example:*** Analyzing the content of films to determine if there has been an increase in the depiction of smoking in movies.

III. Ethics of Research

- The American Sociological Association's Code of Ethics for sociologists was first published in 1971.
- Objectivity, integrity, privacy, protection from harm, confidentiality, informed consent, acknowledge collaboration and assistance, and disclose sources of financial support.

A. Confidentiality

- Rik Scarce jailed for refusing to divulge what he knew about a 1991 raid on a university lab by animal rights activists.
- The Supreme Court has failed to clarify the rights of scholars preserving the confidentiality of research subjects.

B. Research Funding

- When accepting funding for their research, sociologists must be careful that the funding source does not taint the objectivity of the research. ***Example***: Exxon funded research on jury deliberations after the *Valdez* disaster.

C. Value Neutrality

- Weber and value neutrality in research. Neutrality may be impossible.

IV. Feminist Methodology

- The feminist perspective has had an impact on sociological research, both in terms of methodology and in terms of substantive content. ***Example***: Research is now being conducted on the integration of work and family, rather than viewing the two topics as unrelated. Feminist scholars were among the first to identify unpaid, domestic labor as a form of work.
- Historically, sociologists researched men's work, associations, communities, and generalized this research to all people, resulting in a biased picture of social life.
- Feminist scholarship often employs a multidisciplinary approach to the research itself and its application.

V. Technology and Sociological Research

- Impact of computers and Internet on research. ***Example***: Software programs.
- Web-based surveys are promising, but may not be random samples.

VI. Social Policy and Sociological Research: Studying Human Sexuality

A. The Issue

- Human sexuality is a difficult topic to research, yet a scientific understanding of human sexuality is important, especially in an age of devastating sexually transmitted diseases, relatively high teenage pregnancy rates, and concerns over early onset of sexual activity.

B. The Setting

- There have been few reliable studies of patterns of sexual behavior in the U.S. The sensitive nature of the subject makes it difficult to obtain accurate information, and until the AIDS crisis, there was little scientific demand for data on sexual behavior.
- Government funding for studies of sexual behavior is controversial.

C. Sociological Insights

- Sociologists may fear studying and objectively reporting findings for fear of losing government funds, in the event the research criticizes government policies.

D. Policy Initiatives

- In 1987, the federal government's National Institute of Child Health and Human Development sought research proposals for a national survey of sexual behavior.
- In 1991, the U.S. Senate voted to forbid funding any survey on adult sexual practices.
- Researchers secured private funding for the research to go forth: National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLS). Careful procedures helped establish validity of the NHSLS findings.
- Authors of the study contend their data will allow sociologists and policymakers to better address such issues as AIDS, sexual harassment, welfare reform, sex discrimination, abortion, teenage pregnancy, and family planning.
- The research findings countered conventional notions about abortion and birth control. ***Example:*** Researchers found that women do not regularly use abortion for birth control and that affluent women are more likely to have abortions than poor teens. Both of these findings challenge conventional wisdom and common sense about abortion.

KEY TERMS

Causal logic The relationship between a condition or variable and a particular consequence, with one event leading to the other.

Code of ethics The standards of acceptable behavior developed by and for members of a profession.

Content analysis The systematic coding and objective recording of data, guided by some rationale.

Control group The subjects in an experiment who are not introduced to the independent variable by the researcher.

Control variable A factor that is held constant to test the relative impact of an independent variable.

Correlation A relationship between two variables in which a change in one coincides with a change in the other.

Cross-tabulation A table that shows the relationship between two or more variables.

Dependent variable The variable in a causal relationship that is subject to the influence of another variable.

Ethnography The study of an entire social setting through extended systematic observation.

Experiment An artificially created situation that allows a researcher to manipulate variables.

Experimental group The subjects in an experiment who are exposed to an independent variable introduced by a researcher.

Hawthorne effect The unintended influence that observers or experiments can have on their subjects.

Hypothesis A speculative statement about the relationship between two or more variables.

Independent variable The variable in a causal relationship that causes or influences a change in a second variable.

Interview A face-to-face or telephone questioning of a respondent to obtain desired information.

Mean A number calculated by adding a series of values and then dividing by the number of values.

Median The midpoint or number that divides a series of values into two groups of equal numbers of values.

Mode The single most common value in a series of scores.

Observation A research technique in which an investigator collects information through direct participation and/or closely watching a group or community.

Operational definition An explanation of an abstract concept that is specific enough to allow a researcher to measure the concept.

Percentage A portion of 100.

Qualitative research Research that relies on what is seen in field or naturalistic settings more than on statistical data.

Quantitative research Research that collects and reports data primarily in numerical form.

Questionnaire A printed or written form used to obtain information from a respondent.

Random sample A sample for which every member of an entire population has the same chance of being selected.

Reliability The extent to which a measure produces consistent results.

Research design A detailed plan or method for obtaining data scientifically.

Sample A selection from a larger population that is statistically representative of that population.

Scientific method A systematic, organized series of steps that ensures maximum objectivity and consistency in researching a problem.

Secondary analysis A variety of research techniques that make use of previously collected and publicly accessible information and data.

Survey A study, generally in the form of an interview or questionnaire, that provides researchers with information about how people think and act.

Validity The degree to which a measure or scale truly reflects the phenomenon under study.

Value neutrality Max Weber's term for objectivity of sociologists in the interpretation of data.

Variable A measurable trait or characteristic that is subject to change under different conditions.

ADDITIONAL LECTURE IDEAS

2-1: How Would You Obtain a Representative Sample?

Students and their instructors have typically been saturated with telephone and shopping mall surveys. But do students know why they have been selected, and whether their selection is part of a representative sample? Suggest to the class that they have been given the responsibility of developing a representative sample in their school's county that will be asking questions about a controversial subject (e.g., abortion rights, capital punishment, or gun control). How would they go about selecting a representative sample of county residents for this study? Student responses will tend to gravitate toward the following: shopping malls, telephone interviews, birth certificates, tax reports, grocery stores, bus depots, their college, and other suggestions that will not generate a representative sample. Each response should be met with an explanation of why the suggestion is not representative.

Students will generally suggest that members of the sample population should be selected based on their characteristics, which is a good place to introduce a discussion of variables and quota samples and the weaknesses of this type of sample. Finally, the students should be asked, "If I were trying to select a random sample of this class, a sample in which every member of the class has the same chance of being selected, how could I do this?" Almost immediately, students will suggest placing names into a hat and pulling out one or more names at random. At that point, students can be led through a discussion of how the "hat selection" process can be used for a large population in order that everyone in the county has a chance to have their names "pulled out of a hat."

See Earl Babbie. *The Practice of Social Research* (10th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2003. See also Peter Rossi et al. *Handbook of Survey Research*. New York: Basic Books, 1983; and Morton M. Hunt. *Profiles of Social Research: The Scientific Study of Human Interactions*. New York: Russell Sage, 1986.

2-2: Asking the Correct Questions

Sociologists try to phrase questions carefully so that there will be no misunderstanding on the part of the respondents. If a question is improperly worded (or biased), the results are useless for the researchers.

POOR QUESTION	PROBLEM	BETTER QUESTION
Do you favor urban homesteading?	People may not understand the question.	Do you favor a government program that encourages families to improve inner city housing?
Did your mother ever work?	Misleading; Sexist.	Did your mother ever work for pay outside the home?
Should it be possible for a woman to obtain a legal abortion?	Too general.	Should it be possible for a woman to obtain a legal abortion if there is a strong chance of serious defect in her baby? If she became pregnant as a result of rape?

Do you favor making it legal for 18-year-olds to drink liquor and smoke marijuana?	Double-barreled (two questions in one).	Do you favor making it legal for 18-year-olds to drink liquor? Do you favor making it legal for 18-year-olds to smoke marijuana?
Don't you think that the press is slanted and that we should distrust whatever it says?	Biased question; leads people toward a particular response.	Would you say that you have a great deal of confidence, some, or very little confidence in the press?

After reading through and discussing these examples, have students get into small groups and prepare three or four well-written, unbiased survey research questions about topics of their choosing.

2-3: Framing Survey Questions about Interracial Relationships

Do White people really have close Black friends, and vice versa? Many surveys have attempted to gauge the amount of White–Black interaction. But unless the questions are phrased carefully, it is possible to overestimate just how much "racial togetherness" is taking place.

Sociologist Tom Smith, who directs the respected General Social Survey, noticed that a high proportion of Whites and African Americans indicate they have close friends of the other race. But is this, in fact, true? When Smith and his fellow researchers analyzed data from the 1998 General Social Survey they found that response rates varied according to how the question was phrased.

For example, when asked whether any of their friends that they feel close to was Black, 42.1 percent of Whites said "yes." Yet when asked to give the names of friends they feel close to, only 6 percent of Whites listed a close friend of a different race or ethnicity.

Talk about this with the students and use it as a learning opportunity in two areas. First, discuss the validity of the original question cited above (i.e., what were the researchers *actually* measuring here? Did this question simply generate the normative or politically correct response?). Secondly, use this as a platform for a larger discussion about the issue of race relations in the United States. Perhaps have students conduct an informal survey of their own or do some observations of race relations on campus. Do they find that racial segregation is prevalent, for example, in the cafeteria, library, or at social events?

2-4: The Personal Implications of Ethnographic Research

Ethnography is one of the most fascinating methods of data collection open to social scientists—so much so that it is worthy of sociological analysis itself. For one, ethnography requires an unusually long and intense period of observation, interviewing, and participation. It is also a method of study that involves an inherent dialogue between researcher and subject. In contrast to a survey or an experiment, those under observation in an ethnographic study can always "talk back" in ways that are unexpected for the researcher, thereby changing the scope and content of the research project as it moves along. For most practitioners, an ethnographic study also requires a long period in which the ethnographer is removed from familiar social settings, and is immersed in a very different culture or subculture. Often, one unintended consequence is that the ethnographer finds himself or herself personally changed by the research process. In contemporary ethnographies, it is now common for one or more chapters to reflect upon these personal implications of ethnographic work.

Crafting Selves is Dorinne K. Kondo's ethnography of a Tokyo confectionary. Kondo, a Japanese American with native fluency in Japanese, was often able to "pass" as Japanese. Because of her ethnicity

and language abilities, she also found that her research subjects increasingly held her to the behavioral expectations of a young Japanese woman, rather than an American ethnographer. As a result, Kondo gradually found herself possessing two distinct "selves": the "American self" and the "Japanese self," with the Japanese self becoming increasingly dominant. This process came to a head one day when Kondo unexpectedly saw her reflection in a mirrored surface, but failed for a moment to realize that she was seeing herself rather than an unknown Japanese woman. In this moment, Kondo felt that her American identity had collapsed completely, and that her Japanese identity had taken over in its absence. Shaken, she realized that it would be necessary in the coming months to extricate herself somewhat from the environment into which she had so fully immersed herself (Kondo 1990).

In many cases, the ethnographer not only reports on the personal impact of ethnographic fieldwork, but also uses the experience to better analyze the social context under study. One of the most well known examples is in the work of Renato Rosaldo. While Rosaldo and his wife were studying the Ilongot people of the Philippines, Rosaldo's wife, Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, accidentally fell from a cliff to her death. In his essay "Death and a Headhunter's Grief," Rosaldo describes how the immense grief he experienced gave him new insight into the emotional motivations for headhunting among the Ilongot (Rosaldo 1989).

Such "vulnerable writing"—in which the ethnographer explicitly incorporates personal experiences into his or her work—can also lead to a new level of understanding for the reader of that ethnography, according to Ruth Behar (1996). When Behar wrote a book in which she compared the life of a Mexican peddler to her own experience in the academic tenure process, several readers wrote to tell her that they found the comparison to be a vital element of the book. It had allowed them to identify better with the peddler's experiences.

Not surprisingly, there is growing interest among ethnographers—especially among those who are anthropologists—in a type of ethnography called autoethnography. While this term has been defined in a number of different ways, autoethnography can refer to a type of ethnographic text in which the writer explicitly addresses his or her own personal identity and history, and how it is linked to his or her work as an ethnographer (Reed-Danahay 1997).

Of course, there are those within the social sciences who question the credibility of research methodologies which are considered "soft" or subjective. Sociology continues to be dominated by quantitative methodologies. Consequently, until recently, qualitative studies (and scholars) have been somewhat "ghettoized" and placed outside the mainstream of the sociological canon.

Sources used for this essay and additional reading ideas include: Ruth Behar. *The Vulnerable Observer*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996; Dorinne K. Kondo *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990; Annette Lareau and Jeffrey Schultz, *Journeys through Ethnography*. Boulder: Westview, 1996; Deborah E. Reed-Danahay (ed.), *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*. New York: Berg, 1997; Renato Rosaldo. "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage." Pp. 1–21 in *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

2-5: Content Analysis of Coverage of the Rodney King Beating

Sociologist Ronald N. Jacobs examined media coverage following the severe beating of an African-American motorist, Rodney King, by members of the California Highway Patrol and the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) on March 3, 1991. Unknown to the police officers, the event was videotaped by an amateur cameraman who subsequently sold the tape to a local television station. Interest in the incident diminished about a month after the release of the Christopher Commission report on July 9, 1991, but exploded again in April 1992 with the return of not-guilty verdicts for the four police officers who were indicted for the beating. By the end of the crisis, Police Chief Daryl Gates had resigned, Mayor

Tom Bradley had decided not to run for reelection (for the first time in 23 years), and the city of Los Angeles had experienced the most costly civil disturbance, or riot, in the nation's history.

In order to analyze the discourse concerning the Rodney King case, Jacobs examined all articles appearing between March and September 1991 in the daily *Los Angeles Times* (357 articles) and the weekly *Los Angeles Sentinel* (137 articles). The *Sentinel* is the largest African-American newspaper in terms of circulation in Los Angeles, while the *Times* has by far the largest circulation of any newspaper in the region. Both papers presented a similar narrative or construction of the events. They showed a "drama of redemption," pitting the heroic acts of local government (the mayor and the city council) against the antiheroic ones (Gates and the LAPD). The *Sentinel*, however, typically posited members of the Black community as heroic actors, while championing democratic ideals. Employing a style common to the African-American press, the newspaper invoked the ideals of American society while criticizing that society as it actually exists.

The Christopher Commission was very critical of the LAPD and particularly critical of Police Chief Gates. Both newspapers spoke in positive terms of the Commission's work and its conclusions. The *Los Angeles Times* saw the commission as giving the community and various government units an opportunity to come together and learn from the tragic events. The *Sentinel* expressed similar sentiments, but did not construct its version as a bridge toward legitimization of local government leaders. The *Sentinel* saw the concerns over police brutality as a justification for the long-standing criticisms of law enforcement made by the African-American community.

Émile Durkheim has spoken of the "collective conscious" of a society. However, analysis of the discourse concerning the 1991 King beating reveals that the incident was socially constructed as several different problems in several different public spheres. On the basis of content analysis of the *Los Angeles Times* coverage, the *Times* constructed the issue as a problem of police brutality, of factionalism, and of political divisiveness. In the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, the incident was constructed as a problem of police brutality, of insincerity on the part of Whites, and of the need for African-American empowerment. The *Times* saw the beating as the beginning of a crisis, while the *Sentinel* saw it as part of an ongoing narrative about civil rights and police brutality. This content analysis of the two newspapers' perspectives appears to support Stephen Hilgartner and Charles Bosk's "public arenas" model of social problems, which argues that problems can be viewed differently, and recognizes multiple public spheres for debating such issues.

See Stephen Hilgartner and Charles Bosk, "The Rise and Fall of Social Problems: A Public Arenas Model," *American Journal of Sociology* 94 (July 1988): 53–78; Ronald N. Jacobs, "Civil Society and Crisis: Culture, Discourse, and the Rodney King Beating," *American Journal of Sociology* 101 (March 1996): 1238–1272.

2-6: Useful Statistics

In their effort to understand social behavior better, sociologists rely heavily on numbers and statistics. How large is the typical household today compared with the typical household of 1970? If a community were to introduce drug education into its elementary schools, what would be the cost per pupil? What proportion of Baptists, compared to that of Roman Catholics, contributes to their local churches? Such questions, and many others, are most easily answered in numerical terms that summarize the actions or attitudes of many persons.

The most common summary measures used by sociologists are percentages, means, modes, and medians. A *percentage* shows the portion of 100. Use of percentages allows us to compare groups of different sizes. For example, if we were comparing contributors to a town's Baptist and Roman Catholic churches, the absolute numbers of contributors from each group could be misleading if there were many

more Baptists than Catholics living in the town. However, percentages would give us a more meaningful comparison, showing the proportion of persons in each group who contribute to churches.

The *mean*, or *average*, is a number calculated by adding a series of values and then dividing by the number of values. For example, to find the mean of the numbers 5, 19, and 27, we add them together for a total of 51. We then divide by the number of values (3), and discover that the mean is 17.

The *mode* is the single most common value in a series of scores. Suppose we are looking at the following scores on a 10-point quiz:

10 10 9 9 8 8 7 7 7 6 6

The *mode*—the most frequent score on the quiz—is 7. While the mode is easier to identify than other summary measures, it tells sociologists little about all the other values. Therefore, we use it much less frequently in this book than we do the mean and median.

The *median* is the midpoint or number that divides a series of values into two groups of equal numbers of values. For the quiz discussed above, the median, or central value, is 8. The mean would be 86 (the sum of all scores) divided by 11 (the total number of scores), or 7.8.

According to the Census Bureau, the U.S. median family income for the year 2002 was $42,409; this indicates that half of all families had incomes above $42,409, while the other half had lower incomes. In many respects, the median is the most characteristic value. Although it may not reflect the full range of scores, it does approximate the value in a set of scores. Also, it is not affected by extreme scores.

Some of these statistics may seem confusing at first. But think about how difficult it is to study an endless list of numbers in order to identify a pattern or central tendency. Percentages, means, modes, and medians are essential time savers in sociological research and analysis.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION TOPICS

2-1. **Demedicalization of Self Injury**: Questions for stimulating a classroom discussion about Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler's study of the phenomenon of self-injury include: As a sociologist, why might you be interested in the age, social class, racial and ethnic statuses of members of these groups? Would this type of group be difficult for a social researcher to penetrate openly? Why or why not? What difficulties might the Adlers have encountered in trying to gain acceptance in friendship groups, both online and in person, while disclosing that they were researchers rather than fellow self-injurers? Would the desire for acceptance into the groups in order to gain more information for their research justify refraining from disclosing that they were researchers? What research methodologies did the Adlers use? If they had used a different research approach, would the findings have been different in some way? How do the Adlers use the three main sociological perspectives in their study?

Instructors may wish to introduce and/or compare the design of this study to *The Tearoom Trade*, done by Laud Humphreys in the 1970s. Discuss whether or not covert observation was justified by the information Humphreys gathered and the knowledge base to which he ultimately contributed (i.e., expanding our awareness and understanding of the complexities of sexual orientation and identity).

2-2. **Theory and Research**: The important tie between theory and research is reinforced by this classroom exercise. See Technique No. 73 in Edward L. Kain and Robin Neas (eds.). *Innovative*

Techniques for Teaching Sociological Concepts. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association, 1993.

2-3. **Defending Surveys**: Surveys, despite often being criticized, are very useful to both the general public and policymakers. See Andrew Greeley, "In Defense of Surveys," *Society* 33 (May/June 1996): 26–29.

2-4. **NORC and the Internet**: Students can access the data from the General Social Survey, or GSS, which is an annual, omnibus personal interview survey of U.S. households conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). The first survey took place in 1972, and since then more than 35,000 respondents have answered over 2,500 different questions. Through the NORC website at www.norc.uchicago.edu, students can visit the GSS Data and Information Retrieval System, which allows access to the code book and the actual results of any variable from all the GSS surveys, including the most recent study.

2-5. **Coding**: Have members of the class ask people on campus a question of contemporary interest, for example, "What do you like or dislike about the current president?" or "What causes crime?" Then have the students (individually or as a class) classify the responses and assign codes to them. The emphasis in this project is on data manipulation rather than on the accuracy of the sampling techniques.

2-6. **Ethnographies**: The author explains the use of motion pictures as the basis for teaching ethnographic research methods. See Lauraine LeBlanc, "Observing Reel Life: Using Feature Films to Teach Ethnographic Methods," *Teaching Sociology* 25 (January 1997): 62–68.

2-7. **Role Conflict and Observation Research**: Two sociologists describe their dilemma of role definition: the pressure to go "native," and the public pressure to take a stand while doing participant observation in the Unification Church. See Arson D. Shupe, Jr., and David G. Bromley, "Walking a Tightrope," *Qualitative Sociology* 2 (1980).

2-8. **Content Analysis of Children's Book—A Class Activity**: Bring enough children's books to class for each student (or for every two students if the class is large). Have the class set up a very simple code sheet and conduct a content analysis of the books. For example, they could simply count the number of time boys appear in the books as compared with the number of times girls appear in the book; they could look for presentation of traditional gender roles (e.g., girls playing with dolls, boys with trucks); or they could count the number of times children from various racial and ethnic groups appear in the book. This activity will be most effective if the books you bring were published over the last 20 years.

2-9. **Content Analysis and Magazines**: See Techniques Nos. 4 and 5 in Edward L. Kain and Robin Neas (eds.). *Innovative Techniques for Teaching Sociological Concepts*. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association, 1993.

2-10. **Content Analysis and Personal Ads**: This exercise guides students through a research project that teaches them about content analysis through the analysis of personal ads. Beth Rushing and Idee Winfield, "Learning about Sampling and Measurement by Doing Content Analysis of Personal Advertisements," *Teaching Sociology* 27 (April 1999): 159–166.

2-11. **Teaching the Ethics of Sociological Research**: This exercise, developed by Stephen Sweet, is an interesting way to draw students into a discussion of research ethics. See Stephen Sweet, "Using a Mock Institutional Review Board to Teach Ethics in Sociological Research," *Teaching Sociology* 27 (January 1999): 55–59.

2-12. **Using Humor**: Joseph E. Faulkner has produced a monograph that includes funny examples that could be incorporated into lectures associated with Chapter 2. See Chapter 1 of Faulkner,

Sociology Through Humor. New York: West, 1987. This book is out of print, but used copies are readily available.

2-13. **Using Content Analysis to Research Gender**: Introduce students to Jean Kilbourne's research on women and advertising. (See, for example, *Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel* by Jean Kilbourne and Mary Pipher, Touchstone, 2000). Discuss her research approach as well as her findings. Have students critique her approach—do they believe her conclusions are valid? Did she see what she wanted or expected to see? Does she assign too much responsibility to advertisers and not enough to women? Does she perpetuate the notion that women are weak, passive, vulnerable, and unable to think for themselves? Then, have students conduct a similar content analysis of gendered advertisements from more contemporary media. To re-emphasize the importance of research design (rather than content), have students work in groups and attempt to collect a representative sample of images from popular media. Have them defend their choices. Be sure to point out places where they've selected images from outlets which cater to a narrow economic, age, or ethnic population (i.e., *Cosmopolitan* magazine).

TOPICS FOR STUDENT RESEARCH AND CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

1. Ask students to provide an operational definition of an abstract notion, such as the influence of poverty on crime. Students can also provide a hypothesis statement concerning the nature of any relationship.
2. Ask students to bring a mail-back survey (from a product recently purchased) into class, and have students discuss what the researchers may be trying to measure or ascertain from the survey.
3. Ask students to bring in an article addressing the results of a study of some social phenomenon or behavior. Stress that the article must be published by a reputable local or national newspaper or magazine, rather than from a sociological research publication. Examine the extent to which the information published allows the reader to assess reliability and validity. Attempt to identify method, variables, controls, limits to generalizability, and funding sources. Discuss misinformation, critical reading, and the importance of healthy skepticism. This activity can also be used when covering Chapter 6 (Mass Media).
4. Ask students to examine a mail-back survey form for any indications of misleading, double-barreled, or biased questions, and discuss how the questions could be revised to avoid these problems.
5. Ask students to replicate a small-scale study similar to that of Erving Goffman in which students explore newspapers and magazines for evidence of women being portrayed as subservient to men. Ask students to note the relative frequency of uses of members of various racial and ethnic groups and their apparent socioeconomic status as well as their apparent status as dominant or subservient. Discuss the impact of such research on social policy.
6. Ask students to discuss why policymakers and corporations may intentionally refute some research findings revealed by sociologists, or attempt to cover up research findings.

SERVICE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Although some scholars find it difficult to call sociology a "science," it certainly qualifies as such because of its methods and purpose. Prediction of human behavior can be a difficult task. But a disciplined

researcher can provide meaningful insight to social phenomena. Causal relationships can be established as a result of a thorough examination of collected data.

This chapter explains to students the "science "of social science and why sociology qualifies as a legitimate and important vehicle for assessing social change. Of particular worth in this chapter is the section that deals with "major research designs." Below is a relevant service learning activity:

> ***Have students contact a local organization such as Planned Parenthood, AIDS Outreach Program, or a Drug Awareness Program and have the students assist in the administration of a survey. They should volunteer to staple, collect, or to make any contribution that will allow them to get an insider's view as to how these instruments are created and how the information gathered is used. Allow students to choose an organization that they are interested in knowing more about, or an organization that they feel is providing a worthwhile service to the community.***

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Identify and briefly explain the five basic steps in the scientific method.
2. Discuss how the research process/method is somewhat different for qualitative researchers than for quantitative researchers.
3. Provide the students with a research question and ask them to identify which research method would be best suited to studying it and to discuss why.
4. How is a sociological analysis of whether it pays to go to college different from a study conducted by a television station or magazine?
5. Use functionalism, conflict theory, and interactionism to define the issues related to whether or not it pays to go to college.
6. Distinguish among independent variables, dependent variables, causal logic, and correlations.
7. Explain why the surveys conducted by radio and television stations, in which viewers and listeners are encouraged to place "800" and "900" calls to give their views, do not use a representative sample.
8. Explain the difference between validity and reliability.
9. Why are control variables useful in testing hypotheses?
10. Explain how sociological research methods would be useful in conducting a poll in Baghdad.
11. Identify and briefly describe the four different types of research designs for collecting data presented in the text.
12. Why is the framing of survey questions an important issue?
13. What are the advantages of interviews and questionnaires as forms of survey research?
14. What are the strengths and difficulties of the observation method of research?
15. Which type of sociological research is considered to be better, qualitative or quantitative?
16. Discuss the reasons why sociologists and anthropologists often use different research methods than do psychologists.

17. What conclusions can be drawn from William F. Whyte's participant observation research in a low-income neighborhood?
18. Explain the origin of the Hawthorne effect and its significance for researchers.
19. In what types of situations do researchers find secondary analysis useful?
20. What are the principles put forth by the American Sociological Association in its *Code of Ethics*?
21. How does the research by Rik Scarce show the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of sources in observation research?
22. Describe the ideal of *value neutrality* as developed by Max Weber.
23. Summarize the views of Joyce Ladner and Shulamit Reinharz with respect to value neutrality.
24. What are the ethical concerns of receiving funding from corporate sources?
25. What has been the impact of technology on sociological research?
26. Why is it important for sociologists to do studies of human sexuality?

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Discuss how social research may affect the quality of human life. Include an explanation of how dispelling social myths could be considered by some critics as a threat to social order.
2. Consider various ways in which you might try to disguise your identity in performing a participant observation study of street gangs, and whether or not it would be ethical to do so. Discuss the value of obtaining qualitative data compared to obtaining quantitative data.
3. Provide examples of any societal dangers that might occur when the results of poor research are publicized. Can you recall any recent instances of this?
4. Discuss how social research could provide assistance in fighting the war on terrorism. What type of research design would one employ to research terrorism?
5. Describe how social research could aid in the passage of laws and potentially prevent the enactment of poor laws.

STUDENT RESEARCH AND ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Social Theory**: See Robert K. Merton, "The Bearing of Empirical Research upon the Development of Social Theory," *American Sociological Review* 12 (October 1969): 505–515.
2. **Content Analysis—Comic Superheroes**: See Thomas Young, "Are Comic Book Superheroes Sexist?" *Sociology and Social Research* 75 (July 1991): 218.
3. **Content Analysis—Newspapers**: See Ben M. Crouch and Kelly R. Damphouse, "Newspapers and the Antisatanism Movement: A Content Analysis," *Sociological Spectrum* 12 (January–March 1992): 1–20.

4. **Feminist Methodology**: See Marjorie L. DeVault, "Talking Back to Sociology: Distinctive Contributions of Feminist Methodology." In John Hagan (ed.). *Annual Review of Sociology 1996*. Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews, 1996, pp. 29–50.

5. **Institute for Social Research**: *Focus Newsletter* and *Insight* are two publications issued at regular intervals that are available from the Institute for Social Research. To be placed on the mailing list, write to the Institute at 1180 Observation Drive, 3412 Social Science Building, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706.

6. **Research Methods, Studying Sexuality, and the Nature of Knowledge**: See Julia O'Connell Davidson and Derek Layder, *Methods, Sex, and Madness.* New York: Routledge, 1998.

7. **Fieldwork/Observation and Feminist Scholarship**: See Frida Kerner Furman, *Facing the Mirror: Older Women and Beauty Shop Culture.* New York, Routledge, 1997.

VIDEO RESOURCES

Margaret Mead: An Observer Observed (Filmakers Library, 2002, 85m). This film offers a broad examination of the life and work of Margaret Mead. It deals with the entire span of her long research career, including her initial ethnographic work in Samoa and New Guinea.

Research Methods for the Social Sciences (Horizon Film and Video, 1995, 30m). An introduction to research methods that covers gathering data, types of experimental designs, and use of control groups.

Scientific Method and Values (1993, 34m). This film examines the development of scientific methods, looking at the contributions of Newton, Darwin, and Curie.

Sociological Inquiry (Insight Media, 2002, 30m). This video gives a basic overview of various types of sociological research methods, applying them to the study of groups.

Sociological Thinking and Research (Dallas Community College, 1991, 31m). The program describes how to structure a research study by defining the problem to be studied, reviewing the relevant literature, formulating a hypothesis, and selecting a research design. Sociologist William Kornblum explains his methods for studying the effects of planned renewal on the neighborhood around Times Square. The importance of going beyond common sense in developing sociological theory is emphasized.

Statistics (1988, 20m). This film discusses average, mean, median, and mode. It also questions the statement that statistics can be misleading.

Statistics: For All Practical Purposes (Insight Media, 1988, 5 x 30m). This series of five short videos introduces students to the statistical techniques used by sociologists. It deals with the entire research process, from data collection to analysis.

Writing for the Social Sciences (Insight Media, 1991, 30m). This video prepares students for the process of writing social science papers. It includes interviews with authors in the social sciences.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

American Sociological Association. 1997. *Style Guide*, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: ASA. This concise handbook (39 pages) provides guidance in writing clearly, as well as citation format, including referencing electronic sources such as the Internet.

Best, Joel. 2001. *Damned Lies and Statistics: Untangling Numbers from the Media, Politicians, and Activists*. Berkeley: University of California Press. A sociologist demonstrates the value of careful interpretation of data, but also shows how statistics can be used to mislead people about social issues.

Denzin, Norman K., and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds. 2000. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. The 40 articles in this anthology cover newer techniques used in conducting observation and biographical research, as well as ethical issues facing researchers.

Erickson, Julia A. 1999. *Kiss and Tell: Surveying Sex in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. This text evaluates the methodology of the hundreds of surveys of human sexuality conducted by sociologists and other social scientists.

Gladwell, Malcolm. 2000. *The Tipping Point*. Boston: Little, Brown. A journalist examines how certain benchmarks or milestones are portrayed in news-breaking stories, such as drops in crime, the impact of smoking, and the influence of children's television programming.

Gubrium, Jaber F., and James A. Holstein, eds. 2001. *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Drawing on a variety of disciplines, the editors examine all facets of appropriate interview techniques.

Huff, Darrell. 1954. *How to Lie with Statistics*. New York: Norton. "Figures don't lie, but liars do figure" is an adage that points to the way that statistics can be abused. In this classic book, Huff offers guidance to the reader in how to better understand numbers, graphs, and tables.

Paulos, John Allen. 1988. *Innumeracy*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin. This brief book considers how important basic mathematics is in everyday life.

van den Hoonaard, Will C., ed. 2002. *Walking the Tightrope: Ethical Issues for Qualitative Researchers*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. This is multi-disciplinary assessment of the special ethical considerations in qualitative research. Contributors to the volume draw on their own research encounters with ethical issues.

JOURNALS

Among the journals that focus on methods of sociological and other social scientific research are the following: *IRB: A Review of Human Subjects Research* (founded in 1979), *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (1971), *Qualitative Sociology* (1977), *Social Science Research* (1972), and *Sociological Methods and Research* (1972).

Many sociological journals are now available on the Internet, but one specific journal on research is available only online. You can locate *Sociological Research Online* at www.socresonline.org.uk.