Chapter 2. Sociological Research

Figure 2.1 Research process. Photo courtesy of Lilia Efimova/Flickr CC 2.0
Chapter 2. Sociological Research by William Little is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

NSCC Edition adapted with new content written by Connie McPherson.
Contents

Introduction to Sociological Research ............................................................................. 3
Approaches to Sociological Research............................................................................... 4
  Science vs. Non-Science................................................................................................. 5
  Science and Research Methods...................................................................................... 6
  The Scientific Method.................................................................................................... 7
  Ask a Question .............................................................................................................. 9
Research Existing Sources.............................................................................................. 10
Formulate a Hypothesis ................................................................................................ 10
Hypothesis Formation in Qualitative Research ............................................................ 13
Next Steps ................................................................................................................... 13
Sociological Research Methods ................................................................................... 14
  Surveys and Interviews ............................................................................................... 15
  Experiments ................................................................................................................ 18
  Field Research ............................................................................................................. 20
  Participant Observation .............................................................................................. 21
  The Case Study ............................................................................................................ 22
  Secondary Data Analysis ............................................................................................. 23
  Summary ..................................................................................................................... 25
Ethical Concerns ............................................................................................................. 26
  Making Connections: The Hawthorne Effect .............................................................. 28
  Making Connections: An Experiment in Action: Mincome ........................................ 29
  Making Connections: When Is Sharing Not Such a Good Idea? ................................. 31
Section Summary ............................................................................................................ 31
  Approaches to Sociological Research ......................................................................... 32
  Research Methods ...................................................................................................... 33
  Ethical Concerns ......................................................................................................... 33
Key terms ........................................................................................................................ 34
Chapter Quiz ................................................................................................................... 37
Further Research ............................................................................................................ 42
References ..................................................................................................................... 43
Image Attributions .......................................................................................................... 44
Solutions to Section Quiz ............................................................................................... 45
Introduction to Sociological Research

After the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, Prime Minister Stephen Harper said, “this is not a time to commit sociology.” He thought we should condemn the violence, not discuss sociological research about causes of political violence. Harper’s statement suggests that talking about social causes of violence can weaken a stand against terrorism.

Behind statements like Harper’s are beliefs about the nature of a “terrorist”. In this view, the terrorist is a person beyond reason and morality. Therefore, sociological analysis is not useful. Sociology would interfere with our determination to prevent terrorism.

However, Robert Pape’s (2005) research shows a different picture of terrorists. Pape studied 462 suicide bombers. They were not mentally imbalanced or blindly motivated by religious zeal or unconcerned by morality. They were ordinary individuals caught up in extraordinary circumstances. Other studies of suicide bombers in confirm this. How would this understanding affect public policy and public responses to terrorism?

Sociological research is important for public policy. For example, what’s the most effective way to respond to terrorism or violent crime? Often, the news talks about terrorism and violence in moral terms. Then the solutions are narrowed to either being “tough” or “soft” on crime. Tough and soft are moral categories. A question framed by moral categories cannot be solved using evidence-based procedures. Narrow moral categories can prevent asking about responses to crime that actually work.

The sociological approach differs. Sociology examines the effectiveness of strategies for preventing violent behaviour. Sociologists ask who commits violent acts and why. Sociologists rely on systematic research rather than opinion.

Sociological researchers use empirical evidence (evidence gathered by direct experience and observation) combined with the scientific method. Scientific sociological study of the social causes of crime or terrorism would involve careful steps:

1. defining a research question that can be answered through empirical observation
2. gathering information through detailed observation
3. forming a hypothesis

4. testing the hypothesis

5. analyzing data and drawing conclusions from the data

6. publishing the results and thinking about future research on the topic.

A starting point might be the question “What are the social conditions of individuals who commit terrorist acts?”

Unwillingness to “commit sociology” and think about the roots of political violence might lead to moral outrage, but not to violence prevention. Events like the Boston Marathon bombing are precisely the moment to commit sociology to find causes.

**Approaches to Sociological Research**

Sociologists study the social world created by humans. They notice patterns of behaviour as people move through the world. Sociological research methods are based on the scientific method rather than casual observation.

There are three basic approaches to sociological knowledge:

- **positivist** interest in quantitative evidence: This evidence can be used to make good social policy decisions.

- **interpretive** interest in understanding the meanings of human behaviour. This can help greater mutual understanding.

- **critical** interest in knowledge useful for challenging power relations and liberating people.
Sociologists often begin the research process by asking a question about how or why things happen. A sociologist then goes through a scientific process to answer the question. Sociologists can choose from different research methods. Choice of method depends on the topic and goals of the research.

The researcher may use a **positivist methodology** or an **interpretive methodology**. Both methods can be used by **critical research**. The following sections describe these approaches.

**Science vs. Non-Science**

Sometimes we need to be skeptical about science: for example, when technologies based on science destroy the natural environment. But skepticism can be dangerous: for example, when epidemics like measles occur because of low vaccination rates. Skepticism is important to both natural and social sciences, but a skeptical attitude needs to be combined with systematic research. The scientific method allows sociologists to distinguish between everyday opinions and ideas supported by evidence.

Here is one distinction between scientific and non-scientific claims about the world: In science “seeing is believing” but in everyday life “believing is seeing” (Brym, Roberts, Lie, & Rytina, 2013). Science is based on systematic observation. Only by observation (or “seeing”) can a scientist believe that an idea about the world is correct. Research methodologies reduce the chance that conclusions will be made in error. In everyday life, people often “see” what they already expect to see or what they already believe to be true.

Many people know things about the social world without having a background in sociology. Sometimes their knowledge is valid; sometimes it is not. Think about how people know what they know, and compare this to the scientific way of knowing. Four types of non-scientific reasoning are common in everyday life:

- knowledge based on casual observation,
- knowledge based on selective evidence,
- knowledge based on overgeneralization,
- knowledge based on authority or tradition.
Table 2.1. Scientific and Non-Scientific Ways of Knowing (Source: Amy Blackstone, Sociological Inquiry Principles: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods. Creative Commons by-nc-sa 3.0 License)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Way of Knowing</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Casual Observation</td>
<td>Occurs when we make observations without any systematic process for observing or assessing the accuracy of what we observed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selective Observation</td>
<td>Occurs when we see only those patterns that we want to see, or when we assume that only the patterns we have experienced directly exist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overgeneralization</td>
<td>Occurs when we assume that broad patterns exist even when our observations have been limited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority/Tradition</td>
<td>A socially defined source of knowledge that might shape our beliefs about what is true and what is not true.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Research Methods</td>
<td>An organized, logical way of learning and knowing about our social world.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Science and Research Methods

Scientific Research Methods are organized, logical ways of learning and knowing about our social world. Many people know things because they experienced them directly. If you grew up in Manitoba, you may have observed what some kids learn each winter: it is true that tongues will stick to metal when it’s very cold outside. Direct experience may get us accurate information, but only if we are lucky. We are not very careful observers. In this example, the observation process is not really deliberate or formal. Instead, you would come to know what you believe to be true through casual observation. Sometimes casual observation is right, and sometimes it’s wrong. Without a systematic process for observing and judging the accuracy of observations, we can’t be sure if informal observations are accurate.
Many people overlook contrary evidence. Suppose a friend insists that all men are liars shortly after she had learned that her boyfriend cheated. One man’s lies started to represent a quality of all men to her. But do all men really lie all the time? Probably not. If you asked your friend to think about her experiences with men, she would probably admit that she knew many men who had never lied to her. Maybe even her boyfriend did not habitually lie. This friend committed what social scientists refer to as **selective observation**: She notices only the pattern that she wanted to find. She ignored contrary evidence. If, on the other hand, your friend’s experience with her boyfriend had been her only experience with any man, then she would have been committing what social scientists call **overgeneralization**, assuming that patterns exist based on very limited observations.

Another way that people claim to “know” is believing what they hear. An urban legend claims a woman used to cut both ends off a ham before putting it in the oven (Mikkelson, 2005). She baked ham that way for years because that’s the way her mother did it, so clearly that was the way it was supposed to be done. She based her knowledge on a family tradition (**traditional knowledge**). After years of tossing perfectly good ham into the trash, she learned that her mother cut the ends off ham only because she did not have a pan large enough for the ham.

Without questioning what we think we know is true, we can believe false statements. This is more likely when an **authority** tells us that something is true (**authoritative knowledge**). Sometimes we might need to rely on authorities like government, school or churches. This way of knowing differs from the sociological way of knowing, however. Whether quantitative, qualitative, or critical, sociological research is based on the scientific method.

---

The last four paragraphs on the four types of non-scientific reasoning adapted from Amy Blackstone, *Sociological Inquiry Principles: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods (V. 1.0).* Used under Creative Commons by-nc-sa 3.0 License.

---

**The Scientific Method**

Sociologists use research methods such as experiments, surveys, field research, and secondary data analysis.
Social interactions are complicated. They can seem impossible to measure and explain. This is sociology uses scientific methods to study human behaviour. Scientific research establishes rules to help ensure results are as objective and accurate as possible. Scientific methods focus a study and organize results.

- Positivist quantitative methodologies seek to translate observable phenomena into numerical data.

- Interpretive qualitative methodologies seek to translate observable phenomena into units of meaning.

The social scientific method in both cases involves developing and testing theories about the world based on empirical (observable) evidence. The social scientific method commits to systematic observation of the social world. It strives to be objective, skeptical, and logical. It involves a series of established steps known as the research process.

![The Scientific Method Diagram](image)

Figure 2.2. The research cycle passes through a series of steps. The conclusions and reporting typically generate a new set of questions, which renews the cycle.
No matter what research approach is used, researchers want studies to have reliability (how likely research results are to be the same if the study conducted again). Reliability increases the likelihood that what is true of one person will be true of all people in a group.

Researchers also want to maximize the study’s validity (how well the study measures what it was designed to measure).

Sociologists use the scientific method to be as objective and consistent as possible. The scientific method steps provide the means for accuracy, reliability, and validity.

Typically, the scientific method starts with these steps:

1. ask a question
2. research existing sources
3. formulate a hypothesis.

**Ask a Question**

The first step of the scientific method: ask a question, describe a problem, and identify the specific area of interest. The topic should be narrow enough to study within a geography and period. “Are societies capable of sustained happiness?” would be too vague. The question should also be broad enough to have wide interest. “What do personal hygiene habits reveal about the values of students at Scuzi High School?” might be too narrow.

Next, ideas need to be clearly defined or operationalized. In a hygiene study, for instance, hygiene could be defined as “personal habits to maintain physical appearance.” A researcher might ask, “How do differing personal hygiene habits reflect the cultural value placed on appearance?” When forming research questions, sociologists develop an operational definition; they define a concept by the concrete steps needed to measure it. The concept is translated into an observable variable, a measure that has different values. An operational definition identifies an observable condition.
Operationalizing variables allows researchers to collect data systematically. The operational definition must be a meaningful measure. It must also be reliable, meaning that results will be similar when tested on more than one person. For example, good drivers might be defined in many ways: Those who use their turn signals; those who do not speed; or those who allow others to merge. But these driving behaviours could be interpreted differently by different researchers, so they could be difficult to measure. Alternatively, “a driver who has never received a traffic violation” is a specific description that will lead researchers to obtain the same information, so it is a good operational definition. Asking the question, “how many traffic violations a driver has received?” turns the concepts of “good drivers” and “bad drivers” into variables which might be measured by the number of traffic violations.

Sociologists need to be careful how they operationalize variables. In this example we know that Black drivers receive much higher levels of police scrutiny than white drivers, so the number of traffic violations a driver has received might reflect less on their driving ability and more on the crime of “driving while Black.”

**Research Existing Sources**

Next researchers conduct background research through a literature review. The researcher reads similar and related studies. This lets them build on prior knowledge. They focus their research question and avoid duplicating previous research. Researchers—including student researchers—are responsible for correctly citing all existing sources they use.

**Formulate a Hypothesis**

A hypothesis is an assumption about how two or more variables are related; A hypothesis makes a statement about the relationship between those variables. It’s sometimes called an educated guess because it’s based on theory, observations or the existing literature. The hypothesis puts this guess in the form of a testable statement. In positivist sociology, the hypothesis predicts how one form of human behaviour influences another.
Positivist approaches operationalize variables as **quantitative data**: They translate a social phenomenon like health into numerically measurable variable like “number of visits to the hospital.” This permits sociologists to make predictions using math. They can perform statistical techniques to demonstrate the validity of relationships.

Variables are examined to see if there is a **correlation** between them. When a change in one variable coincides with a change in another variable, there is a correlation. This does not necessarily mean that one variable causes another variable, however; just that changes in the variables are associated.

The difference between independent and dependent variables is important. In research, **independent variables** are the cause of the change. The **dependent variable** is the effect or thing that is changed. For example, how does gender (the independent variable) affect income (the dependent variable)? How does religion (the independent variable) affect family size (the dependent variable)? How is social class (the dependent variable) affected by level of education (the independent variable)? (Why is the third example different?)

To claim **causation**, three criteria must be satisfied:

- There must be a correlation between the independent and dependent variables.
- The independent variable must happen before the dependent variable.
- There must be no other **intervening variable** responsible for the causal relationship.

While there needs to a correlation between variables for a causal relationship, correlation does not necessarily mean causation. The relationship between variables can be the result of a third, intervening variable.

For example, there might be a positive relationship between wearing bikinis and eating ice cream. But wearing bikinis does not cause eating ice cream. It is more likely that the heat of summer causes both an increase in bikini wearing and an increase in the consumption of ice cream.
Table 2.2. Examples of Dependent and Independent Variables. Typically, the Independent Variable Causes the Dependent Variable to Change in Some Way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The greater the availability of affordable housing, the lower the homeless rate.</td>
<td>Affordable Housing</td>
<td>Homeless Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The greater the availability of math tutoring, the higher the math grades.</td>
<td>Math Tutoring</td>
<td>Math Grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The greater the police patrol presence, the safer the neighbourhood.</td>
<td>Police Patrol Presence</td>
<td>Safer Neighbourhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The greater the factory lighting, the higher the productivity.</td>
<td>Factory Lighting</td>
<td>Productivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The greater the amount of public auditing, the lower the amount of political dishonesty.</td>
<td>Auditing</td>
<td>Political Dishonesty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The distinction between causation and correlation can have significant consequences. For example, Indigenous Canadians are overrepresented in prisons. In 2013, Indigenous people made up about 4 percent of the Canadian population, but they made up 23.2 percent of the federal penitentiary population (Correctional Investigator Canada, 2013). There is a positive correlation between being an Indigenous person in Canada and being in jail. Is this because Indigenous people are predisposed to crime? No. There are at least four intervening variables that explain the higher imprisonment of Indigenous people (Hartnagel, 2004):

- Indigenous people are more likely to live in poverty, and poverty is associated with higher arrest and incarceration rates
- Indigenous lawbreakers tend to commit more detectable “street” crimes than the less detectable “white collar” crimes
- the criminal justice system profiles and discriminates against Indigenous people
- the legacy of colonization disrupted and weakened traditional Indigenous communities.
Operational definitions help measure variables reliably. In a study asking how tutoring improves grades, for instance, one researcher might define “good” grades as a C or better, while another uses a B+ as a starting point for good. Another operational definition might describe “tutoring” as “one-on-one assistance by an expert in the field, hired by an educational institution.” Those definitions set limits and establish cut-off points, ensuring consistency and replicability in a study.

Simply identifying two topics, or variables, is not enough: Their relationship must be part of the hypothesis.

A sociologist makes a hypothesis, but that doesn’t mean data contradicting the hypothesis are not welcome. Sociologists analyze general patterns, but they are equally interested in exceptions to patterns.

In a study of education, a researcher might predict that high school dropouts have a hard time finding a rewarding career. While many assume the higher the education, the higher the salary and degree of career happiness, there are many exceptions. People with little education have had stunning careers, and people with advanced degrees have had trouble finding work. A sociologist prepares a hypothesis knowing that results will vary.

Hypothesis Formation in Qualitative Research

While many sociologists rely on positivist methods in their research, others operate from an interpretive approach. While still systematic, this interpretive approach does not follow the hypothesis-testing model using quantitative variables. Instead, an interpretive framework wants to understand social worlds from the point of view of participants. This leads to in-depth knowledge. The interpretive approach focuses on qualitative data, or the meanings that guide people. Rather than relying on quantitative instruments, like fixed questionnaires or experiments, the interpretive approach tries to find ways to get closer to the lived experience. Interpretive research is usually more descriptive than positivist research.

Next Steps

Once the hypothesis defined, it is time for the next research steps:
• choosing a research methodology,
• conducting a study,
• and drawing conclusions.

**Sociological Research Methods**

Sociologists examine the world, see a problem or interesting pattern, and study it. They use research methods to design a study. Planning the research design is very important in any sociological study.

When entering a social environment, a researcher must be careful. There are times to remain anonymous and times to be open. There are times to conduct interviews and times to just observe. Some participants need to be thoroughly informed; others should not know that they are being observed. A researcher would not stroll into a high crime neighbourhood at midnight, calling out, “Any gang members around?” And if a researcher walked into a coffee shop and told the employees they would be observed as part of a study on work efficiency, the self-conscious servers might not behave naturally. Human research subjects can react to the researcher and change their behaviour under observation.

In planning a study’s design, sociologists generally choose from four widely used methods of social investigation:

• survey
• experiment
• field research
• secondary data analysis (or use of existing sources).

The topic of study influences which method is used. Every research method comes with advantages and disadvantages.
Surveys and Interviews

A survey collects data from subjects who answer questions about opinions or behaviour. Surveys are often written questionnaires. Surveys are one of the most widely used sociological research methods. The standard survey format allows individuals to express personal ideas anonymously.

The Statistics Canada census is an excellent example of a large-scale survey. Customers also fill out questionnaires at stores and events, responding to questions such as “How did you hear about the event?” and “Were the staff helpful?” Telephone surveys ask for participation in a political poll or a survey: “Do you eat hot dogs? If yes, how many per month?”

Not all surveys are sociological research. Marketing polls help companies with marketing goals and strategies; they are generally not conducted as part of a scientific study, meaning they are not designed to test a hypothesis or to contribute knowledge to the field of sociology. The results are not published in a scholarly journal where design, methodology, results, and analyses are examined.
TV polls do not represent the general population, but are merely answers from a specific show’s audience. Polls conducted by programs such as Canadian Idol represent the opinions of fans but are not scientific. A good contrast to these are Numeris ratings, which determine the popularity of television programming in Canada through scientific market research. Researchers ask a large random sample of Canadians to fill out a television diary for one week, noting the times and the broadcasters they listened to or viewed. Based on this methodology they are able to generate an accurate description of consumer preferences.

While surveys are not great at capturing the ways people really behave in social situations, they are a good method for discovering how people feel and think—or at least how they say they feel and think. Surveys can track attitudes and opinions, political preferences, individual behaviours such as sleeping, driving, dietary, or texting habits, or factual information such as employment status, income, and education levels. A survey targets a specific population, people who are the focus of a study, such as university athletes, international students, or teenagers living with type 1 (juvenile-onset) diabetes.

Most researchers choose to survey a small sector of the population, or a sample: A sample is a smaller number of subjects who represent a larger population. The success of a study depends on how well a sample represents a population. In a random sample, every person in a population has an equal chance of being chosen for the study.

According to the laws of probability, random samples represent the population as a whole. The larger the sample size, the more accurate the results will be in characterizing the population being studied. For practical purposes, however, a sample size of 1,500 people will give acceptably accurate results even if the population being researched was the entire adult population of Canada. For instance, an Ipsos Reid poll, if conducted as a nationwide random sampling, should be able to provide an accurate estimate of public opinion whether it contacts 1,500 or 10,000 people.
Typically, surveys include a figure that gives the margin of error of the survey results. Based on probabilities, this gives a range of values within which the true value of the population characteristic can be. This figure also depends on the size of a sample. A political poll based on a sample of 1,500 respondents might state that if an election were called tomorrow the Conservative Party would get 30% of the vote, plus or minus 2.5%, based on a confidence interval of 95%. That is, there is a 5% chance that the true vote would fall outside of the range of 27.5% to 32.5%, or. If the poll was based on a sample of 1,000 respondents, the margin of error would be higher.

Problems with accuracy or validity can result if sample sizes are too small because there is a stronger chance the sample size will not represent the whole population. In small samples, the characteristics of unusual individuals have a greater chance of influencing the results. The validity of surveys is damaged when part of the population is inadvertently excluded from the sample (e.g., telephone surveys that rely on landlines exclude people that use only cell phones) or when there is a low response rate.

After selecting subjects, the researcher develops a plan to ask a list of standardized questions and record responses. Researchers must inform subjects of the nature and purpose of a study in advance. Researchers thank the subjects and offer them a chance to see the results of the study if they are interested. The researchers present the subjects with an instrument for gathering the information. A common instrument is a structured written questionnaire in which subjects answer a series of questions. For some topics, the researcher might ask yes-or-no or multiple-choice questions, allowing subjects to choose possible responses to each question.

This kind of quantitative data—research collected in numerical form that can be counted—is easy to tabulate. Just count the number of “yes” and “no” answers or count the “strongly agree,” “agree,” “disagree,” etc. responses and chart them into percentages. This is also the chief drawback of questionnaires, however: they are artificial. In real life, there are rarely any unambiguous yes or no answers.
Some topics are impossible to observe directly. Sometimes they can be sensitive and difficult to discuss honestly in a public or with a stranger. People are more likely to share honest answers if they can respond to questions anonymously. This type of information is **qualitative data**—results are subjective and often based on what is experienced in a natural setting. Qualitative information is harder to organize and tabulate. The researcher will end up with a wide range of responses, and some may be unexpected.

An **interview** is a one-on-one conversation between the researcher and the subject. Interviews are similar to short answer questions on surveys because the researcher asks questions. They can be quantitative if the questions are standardized and have numerically quantifiable answers: Are you employed? (Yes=0, No=1); On a scale of 1 to 5 how would you describe your level of optimism?

Interviews can also be qualitative if participants are free to respond as they wish. In the back-and-forth conversation of an interview, a researcher can ask for clarification, spend more time on a subtopic, or ask additional questions. In an interview, a subject will ideally feel free to open up and answer questions that are more complex. There are no right or wrong answers. The subject might not even know how to answer the questions honestly. Questions such as “How did society’s view of alcohol consumption influence your decision whether or not to take your first sip of alcohol?” or “Did you feel that the divorce of your parents would put a social stigma on your family?” involve so many factors that the answers are difficult to categorize. A researcher needs to avoid steering or prompting the subject to respond in a specific way; otherwise, the results will prove to be unreliable.

**Experiments**

You have probably tested personal social theories. “If I study at night and review in the morning, I’ll improve my marks.” Or, “If I stop drinking soda, I’ll feel better.” When you test “if this, then that” you are looking for cause and effect,. When you test a theory, your results either prove or disprove your hypothesis. One way researchers test social theories is by conducting an **experiment**, meaning they investigate relationships to test a hypothesis. There are two main types of experiments: lab-based experiments, and natural or field experiments.
In a lab setting, the research can be controlled. In field-based experiment, the data cannot be controlled, but the information might be considered more accurate since it was collected without interference by the researcher. As a research method, either type of sociological experiment is useful for testing if-then statements: if a particular thing happens, then another particular thing will result.

To set up a lab-based experiment, sociologists create artificial situations that allow them to manipulate variables. The sociologist selects a set of people with similar characteristics, such as age, class, race, or education. Those people are divided into two groups. One is the experimental group and the other is the control group. The experimental group is exposed to the independent variable(s) and the control group is not. This is similar to pharmaceutical drug trials in which the experimental group is given the test drug and the control group is given a placebo or sugar pill.

To test the benefits of tutoring, for example, a researcher might arrange tutoring for an experimental group of students, while the control group does not receive tutoring. Then both groups would be tested for differences in grades to see if tutoring influenced the experimental group. The researcher would not want to jeopardize either group of students, so the setting would be artificial. The test would not be for a grade on their transcript, for example.

The Stanford Prison Experiment is one of the most famous social science experiments. In 1971, 24 healthy, middle-class male university students were selected to take part in a simulated jail environment. The purpose: to examine the effects of social setting and social roles on individual psychology and behaviour. They were randomly divided into 12 guards and 12 prisoners. The prisoner subjects were arrested at home and taken blindfolded to the simulated prison in the basement of a Stanford University building. Within a day of arriving, the prisoners and the guards began to display signs of trauma and sadism, respectively.
After some prisoners revolted by blockading themselves in their cells, the guards resorted to using increasingly humiliating and degrading tactics to control the prisoners through psychological manipulation. The experiment had to be abandoned after only six days because the abuse had grown out of hand (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973). While the insights into the social dynamics of authoritarianism are fascinating, the Stanford Prison Experiment also serves as an example of the ethical issues when experimenting on human subjects.

Field Research

Sociologists seldom study subjects in laboratories. Sociologists go out into the world. They meet subjects where they live, work, and play. Field research is doing research in a natural environment without doing a lab experiment or a survey. It is an interpretive approach rather than a positivist approach. The researcher interacts with or observes people, gathering data along the way. Field research takes place in the subject’s natural environment, whether it’s a coffee shop or tribal village, a homeless shelter or a care home, a hospital, airport, mall, or beach resort.
Fieldwork is useful for observing how people behave. It is less useful, however, for developing causal explanations of why they behave that way. From the small size of the groups studied in fieldwork, it is difficult to make predictions to a larger population. Similarly, it can be difficult to know whether another researcher would see the same things or record the same data. We will look at two types of field research: participant observation and the case study.

**Participant Observation**

In **participant observation**, researchers join people and participate in a group’s routine to observe in their natural context. This method lets researchers study a naturally occurring social activity without imposing artificial or intrusive research devices, like fixed questionnaire questions. A researcher might work as a waitress in a diner, or live as a homeless person for several weeks, or ride with police officers on patrol. Often, these researchers try to blend in with the population they study, and they may not tell their true identity if that would interfere with the research results.

At the beginning of a field study, researchers might have a question: “What really goes on in the kitchen of the most popular diner in town?” or “What is it like to be homeless?” Participant observation can help explore an environment from the inside. In such a setting, the researcher will be alert and open minded to whatever happens, recording all observations. Soon, as patterns emerge, questions will become more specific, observations will lead to hypotheses, and hypotheses will guide the researcher in shaping data into results.

Researchers must pretend to be something they are not. The process could involve role playing, making contacts, networking, or applying for a job. Once inside a group, some researchers spend months or even years pretending to be one of the people they are observing. However, as observers, they cannot get too involved. They must keep their purpose in mind and apply the sociological perspective. That way, they illuminate social patterns that are often unrecognized. Because information gathered during participant observation is mostly qualitative, rather than quantitative, the results are often descriptive or interpretive. The researcher might present findings in an article or book, describing what he or she witnessed and experienced.
Barbara Ehrenreich conducted this type of research for her book *Nickel and Dimed*. One day over lunch with her editor, Ehrenreich mentioned an idea. “How can people exist on minimum-wage work? How do low-income workers get by?” she wondered. “Someone should do a study.” To her surprise, her editor responded, “Why don’t you do it?”

Ehrenreich joined the low-wage service sector. For several months, she left her comfortable home, lived, and worked with people who lacked higher education and job skills. Undercover, she worked minimum wage jobs as a waitress, a cleaning woman, a nursing home aide, and a retail chain employee. During her participant observation, she used only her income from those jobs to pay for food, clothing, transportation, and shelter. She discovered the obvious: In the United States, it’s almost impossible to get by on minimum wage work.

She also experienced and observed the treatment of service work employees. She saw the extreme measures people take to make ends meet and to survive. She described fellow employees who held two or three jobs, worked seven days a week, lived in cars, could not pay to treat illnesses, got randomly fired, submitted to drug tests, and moved in and out of homeless shelters. She described difficult working conditions and the poor treatment that low-wage workers suffer in her book.

**The Case Study**

Sometimes a researcher wants to study one specific person or event. A **case study** is an in-depth analysis of a single event, situation, or individual. A researcher examines existing documents, conducts interviews, engages in direct observation, and even participant observation. Researchers might use this method to study a single case of, for example, a foster child, drug lord, cancer patient, criminal, or rape victim.

While a case study gathers in-depth information, it does not provide enough evidence to make a generalized conclusion. Researchers can’t make universal claims based on just one person. One person does not verify a pattern. This is why most sociologists do not use case studies.
Secondary Data Analysis

Sociologists use secondary data analysis. Secondary data do not result from firsthand research but come from previous work of others. Sociologists might study texts written by historians, economists, or teachers. They might search through newspapers or magazines from any period in history. Using available information not only saves time and money, but it can add depth to a study.

Sociologists often interpret findings in a new way, a way that was not part of an author’s original purpose. To study how women were encouraged to behave in the 1960s, for example, a researcher might watch movies and television shows from that period.

One kind of secondary data analysis is content analysis. Content analysis is a quantitative approach to textual research that selects an item of textual content (a variable) that can be reliably and consistently observed and coded. Content analysis counts the frequency of that item in a sample of text.

For example, Gilens (1996) wanted to understand why survey research shows that the American public exaggerates the percentage of African Americans among the poor. He examined whether media representations influence public perception. He did content analysis of photographs of poor people in American news magazines. He coded and then recorded incidences of three variables: (1) race: white, black, indeterminate; (2) employed: working, not working; and (3) age.

Gilens discovered that not only were African Americans overrepresented in news magazine photographs of poverty, but that the photos also tended to under-represent other subgroups of the poor—the elderly and working poor—while over-representing less sympathetic groups—unemployed, working age adults. Gilens concluded that through a distorted representation of poverty, U.S. news magazines “reinforce negative stereotypes of blacks as mired in poverty and contribute to the belief that poverty is primarily a ‘black problem’” (1996).
Social scientists also learn by analyzing the research of a variety of agencies like government departments, public research groups, and organizations like Statistics Canada and the World Health Organization. These all publish studies useful to sociologists. Statistics that measure income inequality are useful understanding who benefited or lost as a result of federal budget, for example.

Secondary data analysis is not always easy. Public records are sometimes not easy to access. Sometimes there is no way to check their accuracy. It is easy, for example, to count how many drunk drivers are pulled over by the police. But how many are not? While it’s possible to discover the percentage of teenage students who drop out of high school, it might be more challenging to determine the number who return to school or get their high school diplomas later.

Secondary data analysis must consider the publication date of sources. Attitudes and common cultural ideas may have influenced the research.
Summary

There are not only several theoretical perspectives in sociology, but also many research methodologies. The choice of research methodology depends on the research question. The choice of the research question depends on

- the sociology perspective of the researcher
- the nature of the social phenomenon being studied
- and the purpose of the research.

Table 2.5. Main Sociological Research Methods. Sociological research methods have advantages and disadvantages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>Yields many responses</td>
<td>Can be time consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Can survey a large sample</td>
<td>Can be difficult to encourage participant response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Data generalizable</td>
<td>Captures what people think and believe, but not necessarily how they behave in real life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quantitative data are easy to chart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Work</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Yields detailed, accurate, real-life information</td>
<td>Time consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant</td>
<td></td>
<td>Data are often descriptive and not conducive to generalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>observation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher bias is difficult to control for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td></td>
<td>Qualitative data are difficult to organize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.5. Main Sociological Research Methods. Sociological research methods have advantages and disadvantages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>• Deliberate manipulation of social customs and mores</td>
<td>• Tests cause and effect relationships</td>
<td>• Hawthorne effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Artificial conditions of research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ethical concerns about people’s wellbeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Data</td>
<td>• Analysis of government data (census, health, crime statistics)</td>
<td>• Makes good use of previous sociological</td>
<td>• Data could be focused on a purpose other than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>• Research of historic documents</td>
<td>information</td>
<td>yours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Content analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Data can be hard to find</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Taking into account the historical or cultural context of texts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethical Concerns

Sociologists conduct studies to understand human behaviour. Many also use sociological studies to improve people’s lives. Conducting a sociological study comes with much responsibility. Sociologists must consider their ethical duty to avoid harming people while conducting research.

The Canadian Sociological Association (CSA) has a code of ethics—formal guidelines for conducting sociological research — consisting of principles and ethical standards to be used in the discipline. It also describes procedures for filing, investigating, and resolving complaints of unethical conduct.
Some of the guidelines state that researchers must try to be skillful and fair-minded in their work, especially as it relates to human subjects. Researchers must obtain participants’ informed consent, and before participants agree to participate, researchers must inform subjects of the responsibilities and risks. During a study, sociologists must ensure the safety of participants and immediately stop work if a subject is potentially endangered.

Researchers are required to protect the privacy of participants. Even if pressured by authorities, such as police or courts, researchers are not ethically allowed to release confidential information. Researchers must make results available to other sociologists, must make public all sources of financial support, and must not accept funding from any organization that might seek to influence the research results for its own purposes. The CSA’s ethical considerations shape not only the study but also the publication of results.

Although some aspects of research design might be influenced by personal values, it’s inappropriate to allow personal values to shape the interpretation of results. Sociologists must establish value neutrality, a practice of remaining impartial, without bias or judgement, during the course of a study and in publishing results (Weber 1949). Sociologists must disclose research findings without omitting or changing significant data.

Value neutrality does not mean having no opinions. It means striving to overcome personal biases when analyzing data. It means avoiding spinning data to match a desired outcome, such as a political or moral point of view. Investigators are ethically obligated to report results, even when they contradict personal views, predicted outcomes, or widely accepted beliefs. Is value neutrality possible?

Many sociologists believe it is impossible to set aside personal values and retain complete objectivity. Individuals inevitably see the world from a partial perspective. Their interests affect topics they choose, the types of questions they ask, the way they frame their research, and the research methodologies they select to pursue it. Moreover, facts, however objective, do not exist in a vacuum.
Positivist sociology researches knowledge useful for controlling and administering social life. Interpretive sociology pursues knowledge to promote greater mutual understanding. Critical sociology pursues knowledge to liberate people. Readers need to know the perspective of the research to judge its validity and applicability.

**Making Connections: The Hawthorne Effect**

In the 1920s, managers of a Chicago factory called Hawthorne Works commissioned a study to see whether changing certain aspects of working conditions could increase or decrease worker productivity. Sociologists were surprised when the productivity of a test group increased when the lighting of their workspace was improved. They were even more surprised when productivity improved when the lighting of the workspace was dimmed. In fact, almost every change of independent variable—lighting, breaks, work hours—resulted in an improvement of productivity. But when the study was over, productivity dropped again.

Why did this happen? In 1953, Henry A. Landsberger analyzed the results. He realized that employees’ productivity increased because sociologists were paying attention. The sociologists’ presence influenced the study results. Worker behaviours changed not because of lighting but because of the study itself. From this, sociologists learned the importance of carefully planning their roles as part of their research design (Franke & Kaul, 1978). Landsberger called the workers’ response the Hawthorne effect — people changing their behaviour because they know they are being studied.

The Hawthorne effect is unavoidable in some research. Sociologists have to make the purpose of the study known for ethical reasons. Subjects must be aware that they are being observed, and a certain amount of artificiality may result (Sonnenfeld, 1985). Making sociologists’ presence invisible is not always realistic for other reasons. Researchers cannot just stroll into prisons, kindergarten classrooms, or Ku Klux Klan meetings and unobtrusively observe behaviours. Situations like these require other methods. All studies shape the research design, but research design also shapes the study. Researchers choose methods that best suit their study topic and fit with their overall goal for the research.
Making Connections: An Experiment in Action: Mincome

Figure 2.6. Mincome was a large-scale experiment conducted in Dauphin, Manitoba, between 1974 and 1979. (Photo courtesy of Bobak Ha’Eri/Wikimedia commons)

A real-life example can help understand the experimental process in sociology. Between 1974 and 1979 an experiment was conducted in the small town of Dauphin, Manitoba. Each family received a modest monthly guaranteed income—a “mincome”—equivalent to a maximum of 60 percent of the “low-income cut-off figure” (a Statistics Canada measure of poverty, which varies with family size).

The income was 50 cents per dollar less for families who had incomes from other sources. Families earning over a certain income level did not receive mincome. Families that were already collecting social assistance or unemployment insurance were also excluded. The test families in Dauphin were compared with control groups in other rural Manitoba communities on a range of indicators such as number of hours worked per week, school performance, high school dropout rates, and hospital visits (Forget, 2011).

A guaranteed annual income was seen at the time as a less costly, less bureaucratic public alternative for addressing poverty than the existing employment insurance and welfare programs. Today it is an active proposal being considered in Switzerland (Lowrey, 2013).
It seems logical that lack of income is the cause of poverty and poverty-related issues. One of the main concerns, however, was whether a guaranteed income would create a disincentive to work. The study did find very small decreases in hours worked per week: about 1 percent for men, 3 percent for married women, and 5 percent for unmarried women. Forget (2011) argues this was because the income provided an opportunity for people to spend more time with family and school, especially for young mothers and teenage girls. There were also significant social benefits from the experiment, including better test scores in school, lower high school drop out rates, fewer visits to hospital, fewer accidents and injuries, and fewer mental health issues.

Ironically, due to lack of guaranteed funding (and lack of political interest by the late 1970s), the data and results of the study were not analyzed or published until 2011. The data were archived and sat gathering dust in boxes. The mincome experiment demonstrated the benefits that even a modest guaranteed annual income supplement could have on health and social outcomes in communities. People seem to live healthier lives and get a better education when they do not need to worry about poverty. In her summary of the research, Forget notes that the impact of the income supplement was surprisingly large given that at any one time only about a third of the families were receiving the income and, for some families, the income amount would have been very small. The income benefit was largest for low-income working families, but

The research showed that the entire community profited. The improvement in overall health outcomes for the community suggest that a guaranteed income would also result in savings for the public health system.
Making Connections: When Is Sharing Not Such a Good Idea?

Choosing a research methodology depends on a number of factors, including the purpose of the research and the audience for whom the research is intended. A government policy document on the effectiveness of safe injection sites for reducing the public health risks of intravenous drug use would usually want “hard” (i.e. quantitative) evidence of high reliability. The most reliable data would come from an experimental research model in which a control group can be compared with an experimental group using quantitative measures.

This approach has been used by researchers studying InSite in Vancouver (Marshall et al., 2011; Wood et al., 2006). InSite is a supervised safe-injection site where intravenous drug users can inject drugs in a safe, clean environment. Clean needles are provided and health professionals are present in case of overdoses or other medical emergency. It is a controversial program for two reasons: because heroin use is against the law (the facility operates through a federal ministerial exemption) and because the heroin users involved are not obliged to quit using or seek therapy. To assess the effectiveness of the program, researchers compared the risky use of drugs in populations before and after the opening of the facility. They looked at places geographically near and distant to the facility. The results showed that InSite has reduced both deaths from overdose and risky behaviours, such as the sharing of needles, without increasing the levels of crime associated with drug use and addiction.
On the other hand, if the research question is more exploratory (for example, to learn why individuals in the crack smoking subculture engage in the risky activity of sharing pipes), a more nuanced approach of fieldwork is more appropriate. The research would need to focus on the subcultural context, rituals, and meaning of sharing pipes, and why these phenomena override known health concerns. Graduate student Andrew Ivsins at the University of Victoria studied the practice of sharing pipes among 13 habitual users of crack cocaine in Victoria, B.C. (Ivsins, 2010). He met crack smokers in their typical setting downtown and used an unstructured interview method to try to draw out the informal norms that lead to sharing pipes. One factor he discovered was the bond that formed between friends or intimate partners when they shared a pipe. He also discovered that there was an elaborate subcultural etiquette of pipe use that revolved around the benefit of getting the crack resin smokers left behind. Both of these motives tended to outweigh the recognized health risks of sharing pipes (such as hepatitis) in decision making. This type of research was valuable in illuminating the unknown subcultural norms of crack use. This knowledge could be useful in a harm reduction strategy such as distributing safe crack kits to addicts.

Section Summary

Approaches to Sociological Research

Using the scientific method, a researcher conducts a study in five phases: asking a question, researching existing sources, formulating a hypothesis, conducting a study, and drawing conclusions. The scientific method provides a clear method of organizing a study. Some sociologists conduct scientific research through a positivist framework utilizing a hypothesis as a research question. Other sociologists conduct scientific research using an interpretive framework that is often inductive in nature. Scientific sociological studies often observe relationships between variables. Researchers study how one variable changes another. Prior to conducting a study, researchers are careful to apply operational definitions to their terms and to establish dependent and independent variables.
Research Methods

Even a simple research design involves much work and planning. The scientific method provides a system of organization to help researchers plan and conduct a study. The scientific method ensured that data and results are reliable, valid, and objective. The many methods available to researchers—including experiments, surveys, field studies, and secondary data analysis—all have advantages and disadvantages. Depending on the topic, a study might use a single method or a combination of methods. The study design should provide a solid framework in which to analyze predicted and unpredicted data.

Ethical Concerns

Sociologists and sociology students must take ethical responsibility for their research.

- They must first and foremost guarantee the safety of their participants.
- Whenever possible, they must ensure that participants have been fully informed before consenting to be part of a study.

The Canadian Sociological Association (CSA) maintains ethical guidelines for research. The guidelines address conducting studies, properly using existing sources, accepting funding, and publishing results. Sociologists must try to maintain value neutrality. They must gather and analyze data objectively, setting aside their personal preferences, beliefs, and opinions. They must report findings accurately, even if they contradict personal convictions.
Key terms

authoritative knowledge: Knowledge based on the accepted authority of the source.

case study: In-depth analysis of a single event, situation, or individual.

casual observation: Knowledge based on observations without any systematic process for observing or assessing the accuracy of observations.

code of ethics: A set of guidelines that the Canadian Sociological Association has established to foster ethical research and professionally responsible scholarship in sociology.

content analysis: A quantitative approach to textual research that selects an item of textual content that can be reliably and consistently observed and coded, and surveys the prevalence of that item in a sample of textual output.

control group: An experimental group that is not exposed to the independent variable.

correlation: When a change in one variable coincides with a change in another variable, but does not necessarily indicate causation.

dependent variable: Variable changed by another variable.

empirical evidence: Evidence corroborated by direct experience and/or observation.

experiment: The testing of a hypothesis under controlled conditions.

field research: Gathering data from a natural environment without doing a lab experiment or a survey.

Hawthorne effect: When study subjects behave in a certain manner due to their awareness of being observed by a researcher.

hypothesis: An educated guess with predicted outcomes about the relationship between two or more variables.

independent variable: Variable that causes change in a dependent variable.

interpretive approach: A sociological research approach that seeks in-depth understanding of a topic or subject through observation or interaction.
intervening variable: An underlying variable that explains the correlation between two other variables.

interview: A one-on-one conversation between a researcher and a subject.

literature review: A scholarly research step that entails identifying and studying all existing studies on a topic to create a basis for new research.

operational definitions: Specific explanations of abstract concepts that a researcher plans to study.

overgeneralization: Knowledge that draws general conclusions from limited observations.

participant observation: Immersion by a researcher in a group or social setting in order to make observations from an “insider” perspective.

population: A defined group serving as the subject of a study.

positivist approach: A research approach based on the natural science model of knowledge and using quantitative data.

qualitative data: Information based on interpretations of meaning.

quantitative data: Information from research collected in numerical form that can be counted.

random sample: A study’s participants being randomly selected to serve as a representation of a larger population

reliability: a measure of a study’s consistency that considers how likely results are to be replicated if a study is reproduced

research design a detailed, systematic method for conducting research and obtaining data.

sample: Small, manageable number of subjects that represent the population.
scientific method: A systematic research method that involves asking a question, researching existing sources, forming a hypothesis, designing and conducting a study, and drawing conclusions.

secondary data analysis: Using data collected by others but applying new interpretations.

selective observation: Knowledge based on observations that only confirm what the observer expects or wants to see.

surveys: Data collections from subjects who respond to a series of questions about behaviours and opinions, often in the form of a questionnaire.

traditional knowledge: Knowledge based on received beliefs or the way things have always been done.

validity: The degree to which a sociological measure accurately reflects the topic of study.

value neutrality: A practice of remaining impartial, without bias or judgment, during the course of a study and in publishing results.

variable: A characteristic or measure of a social phenomenon that can take different values.
Chapter Quiz

Approaches to Sociological Research

1. A measurement is considered ___________ if it actually measures what it is intended to measure
   a. reliable
   b. sociological
   c. valid
   d. quantitative

2. Sociological studies test relationships in which change in one ___________ causes change in another.
   a) test subject
   b) behaviour
   c) variable
   d) operational definition

3. In a study, a group of 10-year-old boys are fed doughnuts every morning for a week and then weighed to see how much weight they gained. Which factor is the dependent variable?
   a) the doughnuts
   b) the boys
   c) the duration of a week
   d) the weight gained

4. Which statement provides the best operational definition of “childhood obesity”?
   a) children who eat unhealthy foods and spend too much time watching television and playing video games
   b) a distressing trend that can lead to health issues including type 2 diabetes and heart disease
   c) body weight at least 20 percent higher than a healthy weight for a child of that height
   d) the tendency of children today to weigh more than children of earlier generations
Research Methods

5. Which materials are considered secondary data?
   a) photos and letters given to you by another person
   b) books and articles written by other authors about their studies
   c) information that you have gathered and included in your results
   d) responses from participants whom you both surveyed and interviewed

6. What method did Andrew Ivsins use to study crack cocaine users in Victoria?
   a) survey
   b) experiment
   c) field research
   d) content analysis

7. Why is choosing a random sample an effective way to select participants?
   a) Participants do not know they are part of a study.
   b) The researcher has no control over who is in the study.
   c) It is larger than an ordinary sample.
   d) Everyone has the same chance of being part of the study.

8. Which research approach is best suited to the positivist approach?
   a) questionnaire
   b) case study
   c) participant observation
   d) secondary data analysis

9. Which best describes the results of a case study?
   a) It produces more in-depth results than other methods
   b) Its results are not generally applicable.
   c) It relies solely on secondary data analysis.
   d) All of the above.

Ethical Concerns

10. To study the effects of fast food on lifestyle health, and culture, from which group would a researcher ethically be unable to accept funding?
    a) a fast-food restaurant
    b) a nonprofit health organization
    c) a private hospital
    d) a governmental agency like Health and Social Services

    • [Quiz answers at the end of the chapter]
Approaches to Sociological Research

1. Write down the first three steps of the scientific method.
   - Think of a topic that would make a good sociological study—for example, ethnic diversity in a college, homecoming rituals, athletic scholarships, or teen driving.
   - Take that topic through the first steps of the process. For each step, write a few sentences or a paragraph:
     • Ask a question about the topic.
     • Do some research and write down the citations for articles or books you’d want to read about the topic.
     • Formulate a hypothesis.

Research Methods

2. What type of data do surveys gather? For what topics would surveys be the best research method? What drawbacks might you expect to encounter when using a survey?

3. Ask a research question and write a hypothesis.
   - Create a survey (six questions) for the topic. Provide a rationale for each question.
   - Define your population.
   - Create a plan for recruiting a random sample and administering the survey.

4. Imagine you are about to do field research in a specific place for a set time. Consider how you will have to prepare for the study. What personal, social, and physical sacrifices will you have to make? How will you manage your personal effects? What organizational equipment and systems will you need to collect the data?

5. Create a brief research design about a topic of interest.

   Write a letter to an organization requesting funding for your study. Describe your project in a convincing, realistic and objective way. Explain how the results of your study will contribute to sociology.
Ethical Concerns


7. What type of study could put participants at risk? Think of some examples of studies that might be harmful. Do you think that, in the name of sociology, some researchers might be tempted to cross boundaries that threaten human rights? Why?

8. Would you willingly participate in a sociological study that could put your health and safety at risk if the study also had the potential to help thousands of people? For example, would you participate in a study of a new drug that could cure diabetes or cancer, even if it meant great inconvenience, physical discomfort or possible permanent damage?
Further Research

Approaches to Sociological Research


Research Methods

- Information on current real-world sociology experiments: https://revisesociology.com/2016/08/12/field-experiments-examples/

Ethical Concerns

Founded in 1966, the CSA is a nonprofit organization located in Montreal, Quebec, with a membership of 900 researchers, faculty members, students, and practitioners of sociology. Its mission is to promote “research, publication and teaching in Sociology in Canada.” Learn more about the Canadian Sociological Association at http://www.csa-scscs.ca/.
References

Approaches to Sociological Research

Research Methods


**Ethical Concerns**


**Image Attributions**

**Figure 2.1.** Research process. Photo courtesy of Lilia Efimova/Flickr Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 Generic (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) https://flic.kr/p/5AZwpn

**Figure 2.3.** Didn’t they abolish the mandatory census? Then what’s this? by Khosrow Ebrahimpour (https://flickr.com/photos/xosrow/5685345306/in/photolist-9EoT5W-ow4tdu-oeGG4m-oeMEcK-oy2jM2-ovJC8w-oePSRQ-9J2V24-of1Hnu-of243u-of2K2B-of2FHn-owwBA-owtQN3-of1Td-oitLSC-oeVJe- oop8KX-ovEz8w-oeohhF-oww5Xb-owwdWN-owavju-oeMEhN-owwHcN-owwEPGG-owwQUX-ooe2eL-ooe3Ff-oeeqhx-oxCKn-ovEzA5-owwFHa-ovwRSz-oww8Qy-oewQY6-oeZReR-oeQmHw-oeXid-oeQLKa-oy6fNT-oww4sVT-owwQMq-oeQQpr-oeQyBl-oww8hS1-oww4n8v-owiPKS-oeQ41-oeiH5z) used under CC BY 2.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/)

**Figure 2.5.** Punk Band by Patrick (https://www.flickr.com/photos/lordkhan/181561343/in/photostream/) used under CC BY 2.0
Figure 2.6. Dauphin Canadian Northern Railway Station by Bobak Ha’Eri (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2009-0520-TrainStation-Dauphin.jpg) used under CC BY 3.0 license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.en)

Figure 2.7. Crack Cocaine Smokers in Vancouver Alleyway (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Crack_Cocaine_Smokers_in_Vancouver_Alleyway.jpg) is in the public domain

Solutions to Section Quiz

1 C, | 2 C, | 3 D, | 4 C, | 5 B, | 6 C, | 7 D, | 8. A | 9 A, | 10 A, |