

What Is a Valid Sociological Topic?

Sociologists do research on just about every area of human behavior. On the macro level, they study such broad matters as race relations (Wilson 2000), the military (Moscos and Butler 1997), and multinational corporations (Kanter et al. 1997). On the micro level, they study such individualistic matters as pelvic examinations (Henslin and Biggs 1971/2003), how people interact on street corners (Whyte 1989, 2001), and even how people decorate their homes at Christmas (Caplow 1991). In fact, no human behavior is ineligible for sociological scrutiny—whether that behavior is routine or unusual, respectable or reprehensible.

What happened to Cindy and Buba, then, is also a valid topic of sociological research. But exactly *how* would you research spouse abuse? As we look at how sociologists conduct their research, we shall try to answer this question.

Common Sense and the Need for Sociological Research

First, why do we need sociological research? Why can't we simply depend on common sense, on "what everyone knows"? As noted in Chapter 1 (pages 9–10), commonsense ideas may or may not be true. Common sense, for example, tells us that spouse abuse has a significant impact on the lives of the people who are abused.

Although this particular idea is accurate, we need research to test commonsense ideas, because not all such ideas are true. After all, common sense also tells us that if a woman is abused she will pack up and leave her husband. Research, however, shows that the reality of abuse is much more complicated than this. Some women do leave right away, some even after the first incident of abuse. For a variety of reasons, however, some women suffer abuse for years. The main reason is that they feel trapped and don't see viable alternatives.

This brings us to the need for sociological research, for we may want to know why some women put up with abuse, while others don't. Or we may want to know something entirely different, such as why men are more likely to be the abusers. Or why some people abuse the people they say they love.

In order to answer a question, we need to move beyond guesswork and common sense. We want to *know* what is really going on. To find out, sociologists do research on about every aspect of social life. Let's look at how they do their research.

A Research Model

As shown in Figure 5.1, scientific research follows eight basic steps. This is an ideal model, however, and in the real world of research some of these steps may run together. Some may even be omitted.

1. Selecting a Topic

The first step is to select a topic. What do you want to know more about? Many sociologists simply follow their curiosity, their drive to know. They become interested in a particular topic, and they pursue it, as I did in studying the homeless. Some sociologists choose a topic because funding is available for that topic, others because a social problem such as domestic violence is in the news and the sociologist wants to help people better understand it—and perhaps to help solve it. Let's use spouse abuse as our example.

2. Defining the Problem

The second step is to define the problem, to specify what you want to learn about the topic. My interest in the homeless increased until I wanted to learn about homelessness



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“Anthropologists! Anthropologists!”

A major concern of sociologists and other social scientists is that their research methods do not influence their findings. Respondents often change their behavior when they know they are being studied.

hypothesis a statement of how variables are expected to be related to one another, often according to predictions from a theory

variable a factor thought to be significant for human behavior, which varies from one case to another

operational definition the way in which a researcher measures a variable

research method (or research design) one of six procedures that sociologists use to collect data: surveys, participant observation, secondary analysis, documents, experiments, and unobtrusive measures

not considered abuse by others. Which will you choose? In other words, your operational definitions must be so precise that no one has any question about what you are measuring.

You must also be sure your data are reliable. **Reliability** means that if other researchers use your operational definitions, their findings will be consistent with yours. If your operational definitions are sloppy, husbands who have committed the same act of violence might be included in some research but excluded in other studies. You would end up with erratic results. You might show a 10 percent rate of spousal violence, but another researcher finds it to be 30 percent. This would make your research unreliable.

7. Analyzing the Results

After you gather the data, it is time to analyze them. You can choose from qualitative and quantitative techniques. *Qualitative analysis* would include classifying novels, movies, television programs, and people’s conversations in order to identify their main themes. The goal is to faithfully reproduce the world of the people you are studying. In my research on cabdrivers (1993), for example, I tried to picture the world as cabbies see it so anyone reading the report would understand not just what cabbies do but also why they do it. Software, such as Nvivo, provides tools to help researchers organize their data.

Quantitative analysis involves crunching numbers. Using today’s software to test hypotheses, which is done at this stage, in just seconds you can run tests on your data that used to take days, or even weeks. Two basic programs that sociologists and many undergraduates use are Microcase and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Some software, such as the Methodologist’s Toolchest, provides advice about collecting data and even about ethical issues.

8. Sharing the Results

The final step after analyzing the data is to wrap up the research (or, if it is a broad project, at least some part of it). At this point, you write a report to share your findings with

4. Formulating a Hypothesis

The fourth step is to formulate a **hypothesis**, a statement of what you expect to find according to predictions from a theory. A hypothesis predicts a relationship between or among **variables**, factors that change, or vary, from one person or situation to another. For example, the statement, “Men who are more socially isolated are more likely to abuse their wives than are men who are more socially integrated” is a hypothesis. Hypotheses need **operational definitions**—that is, precise ways to measure their variables. In this example, we would need operational definitions for three variables: social isolation, social integration, and spouse abuse.

5. Choosing a Research Method

The fifth step is to choose a **research method** (or research design), the means by which you will collect your data. Sociologists use six basic research methods, selecting the one that will best answer their particular questions. We’ll examine these methods in the next section.

6. Collecting the Data

The next step is to gather the data. You have to take care to assure the **validity** of your data; that is, your operational definitions must measure what they are intended to measure. In this case, you must be certain that you really are measuring social isolation, social integration, and spouse abuse—and not something else. Spouse abuse, for example, seems to be obvious. Yet acts that some people consider to be abuse are

the scientific community. To help others evaluate your research, the report includes a review of these first steps. It also reviews what has already been published on the topic, shows how your research is related to these earlier findings, and demonstrates how your research supports, refutes, or modifies the theories that apply to the topic.

When research is published, usually in a scientific journal or a book, it “belongs” to the scientific community. Table 5.1 below is an example of published research. These findings

validity the extent to which an operational definition measures what it was intended to measure

reliability the extent to which research produces consistent or dependable results

Table 5.1 How to Read a Table

Tables summarize information. Because sociological findings are often presented in tables, it is important to understand how to read them. Tables contain six elements: title, headnote, headings, columns, rows, and source. When you understand how these elements work together, you know how to read a table.

The title states the topic. It is located at the top of the table. What is the title of this table? Please determine your answer before looking at the correct answer at the bottom of the page.

The headnote is not always included in a table. When it is, it is located just below the title. Its purpose is to give more detailed information about how the data were collected or how data are presented in the table. What are the first seven words of the headnote of this table?

The headings tell what kind of information is contained in the table. There are three headings in this table. What are they? In the second heading, what does $n = 25$ mean?

Comparing Violent and Nonviolent Husbands

Based on interviews with 150 husbands and wives in a Midwestern city who were getting a divorce.

Husband's Achievement and Job Satisfaction	Violent Husbands $n = 25$	Nonviolent Husbands $n = 125$
He started but failed to complete high school or college.	44%	27%
He is very dissatisfied with his job.	44%	18%
His income is a source of constant conflict.	84%	24%
He has less education than his wife.	56%	14%
His job has less prestige than his father-in-law's.	37%	28%

Source: Modification of Table 1 in O'Brien 1975.

The columns present information arranged vertically. What is the fourth number in the second column and the second number in the third column?

The rows present information arranged horizontally. In the fourth row, which husbands are more likely to have less education than their wives?

The source of a table, usually listed at the bottom, provides information on where the data shown in the table originated. Often, as in this instance, the information is specific enough for you to consult the original source. What is the source for this table?

Some tables are much more complicated than this one, but all follow the same basic pattern. To apply these concepts to a table with more information, see page 345.

ANSWERS

1. Comparing Violent and Nonviolent Husbands
2. Based on interviews with 150 husbands and wives
3. Husband's Achievement and Job Satisfaction, Violent Husbands, Nonviolent Husbands. The n is an abbreviation for number, and $n = 25$ means that 25 violent husbands were in the sample.
4. 56%, 18%
5. Violent Husbands
6. A 1975 article by O'Brien (listed in the References section of this text).

are available for **replication**; that is, others can repeat the study to see if they come up with similar results. As finding is added to finding, scientific knowledge builds.

Let's look in greater detail at the fifth step to see what research methods sociologists use.

Research Methods

As we review the six research methods (or *research designs*) that sociologists use, we will continue our example of spouse abuse. As you will see, the method you choose will depend on the questions you want to answer. So you can have a yardstick for comparison, you will want to know what "average" is in your study. Table 5.2 discusses ways to measure average.

Surveys

Let's suppose that you want to know how many wives are abused each year. Some husbands are abused, of course, but let's assume that you are going to focus on wives. An appropriate method for this purpose would be the **survey**, in which you would ask individuals a series of questions. Before you begin your research, however, you must deal with practical matters that face all researchers. Let's look at these issues.

Selecting a Sample Ideally, you might want to learn about all wives in the world. Obviously, your resources will not permit such a study, and you must narrow your **population**, the target group that you are going to study.

Let's assume that your resources (money, helpers, time) allow you to investigate spouse abuse only on your campus. Let's also assume that your college enrollment is large, so you won't be able to survey all the married women who are enrolled. Now you must select a **sample**, individuals from among your target population. How you choose a sample is cru-

Table 5.2 Three Ways to Measure "Average"

The Mean	The Median	The Mode																					
<p>The term average seems clear enough. As you learned in grade school, to find the average you add a group of numbers and then divide the total by the number of cases that were added. For example, assume that the following numbers represent men convicted of battering their wives:</p> <p>321 229 57 289 136 57 1,795</p> <p>The total is 2,884. Divided by 7 (the number of cases), the average is 412. Sociologists call this form of average the <i>mean</i>.</p> <p>The mean can be deceptive because it is strongly influenced by extreme scores, either low or high. Note that six of the seven cases are less than the mean.</p> <p>Two other ways to compute averages are the median and the mode.</p>	<p>To compute the second average, the <i>median</i>, first arrange the cases in order—either from the highest to the lowest or the lowest to the highest. In this example, that arrangement will produce the following distribution:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>57</td> <td></td> <td>1,795</td> </tr> <tr> <td>57</td> <td></td> <td>321</td> </tr> <tr> <td>136</td> <td></td> <td>289</td> </tr> <tr> <td>229</td> <td>or</td> <td>229</td> </tr> <tr> <td>289</td> <td></td> <td>136</td> </tr> <tr> <td>321</td> <td></td> <td>57</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1,795</td> <td></td> <td>57</td> </tr> </table> <p>Then look for the middle case, the one that falls halfway between the top and the bottom. That number is 229, for three numbers are lower and three numbers are higher. When there is an even number of cases, the median is the halfway mark between the two middle cases.</p>	57		1,795	57		321	136		289	229	or	229	289		136	321		57	1,795		57	<p>The third measure of average, the mode, is simply the cases that occur the most often. In this instance the mode is 57, which is way off the mark. Because the mode is often deceptive, and only by chance comes close to either of the other two averages, sociologists seldom use it. In addition, it is obvious that not every distribution of cases has a mode. And if two or more numbers appear with the same frequency, you can have more than one mode.</p>
57		1,795																					
57		321																					
136		289																					
229	or	229																					
289		136																					
321		57																					
1,795		57																					



Because sociologists usually cannot interview or observe every member of a group they wish to study, such as the spectators and riot police at this soccer match in Belgrade, Serbia, they must select a sample that will let them generalize to the entire group. The text explains how samples are selected.

cial, for your choice will affect the results of your study. For example, to survey only women enrolled in introductory sociology courses, or only those in advanced physics classes, would produce skewed results.

Because you want to generalize your findings to your entire campus, you need a sample that is representative of the campus. How do you get a representative sample?

The best is a **random sample**. This does *not* mean that you stand on some campus corner and ask questions of any woman who happens to walk by. *In a random sample, everyone in your population has the same chance of being included in the study.* In this case, because your population is every married woman enrolled in your college, all married women—whether first-year or graduate students, full- or part-time—must have the same chance of being included in your sample.

How can you get a random sample? First, you need a list of all the married women enrolled in your college. Then you assign a number to each name on the list. Using a table of random numbers, you then determine which of these women become part of your sample. (Random numbers are available on tables in statistics books, or they can be generated by a computer.)

Because a random sample represents your study's population—in this case, married women enrolled at your college—you can generalize your findings to all the married women students on your campus, even if they were not included in your sample.

What if you want to know only about certain subgroups, such as freshmen and seniors? You could use a **stratified random sample**. You would need a list of the freshmen and senior married women. Then, using random numbers, you would select a sample from each group. This would allow you to generalize to all the freshmen and senior married women at your college, but you would not be able to draw any conclusions about the sophomores or juniors.

Asking Neutral Questions After you have decided on your population and sample, your next task is to make certain that your questions are neutral. Your questions must allow **respondents**, the people who answer your questions, to express their own opinions. Otherwise, you will end up with biased answers—which are worthless. For example, if you were to ask, “Don’t you think that men who beat their wives should go to prison?” you would be tilting the answer toward agreement with a prison sentence. The *Doonesbury* cartoon on page 131 illustrates a more blatant example of biased questions. For examples of flawed research, see the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page.

replication repeating a study in order to test its findings

survey the collection of data by having people answer a series of questions

population the target group to be studied

sample the individuals intended to represent the population to be studied

random sample a sample in which everyone in the target population has the same chance of being included in the study

stratified random sample a sample of specific subgroups of the target population and in which everyone in the subgroups has an equal chance of being included in the study

respondents people who respond to a survey, either in interviews or by self-administered questionnaires



Doonesbury © G. B. Trudeau. Reprinted with permission of Universal Press Syndicate. All rights reserved.

Questionnaires and Interviews Even if you have a representative sample and ask neutral questions, you can still end up with biased findings. **Questionnaires**, the list of questions to be asked, can be administered in ways that are flawed. There are two basic techniques for administering questionnaires. The first is to ask the respondents to fill them out. These **self-administered questionnaires** allow a larger number of people to be sampled at a lower cost, but the researchers lose control. They don't know the conditions under which people answered the questions. For example, others could have influenced their answers.

The second technique is the **interview**. Researchers ask people questions, often face to face, but even by telephone or e-mail. The advantage of this method is that the researchers can ask each question in precisely the same way. The main disadvantage is that interviews are time-consuming, and researchers end up with fewer respondents. Interviews can also create **interviewer bias**; that is, the presence of interviewers can affect what people say. For example, instead of saying what they really feel, respondents might give "socially acceptable" answers. Although they may be willing to write their true opinions on an anonymous questionnaire, they won't tell them to another person. Some even shape their answers to match what they think an interviewer wants to hear.

In some cases, **structured interviews** work best. This type of interview uses **closed-ended questions**—each question is followed by a list of possible answers. Structured interviews are faster to administer, and they make it easier to *code* (categorize) answers so they can be fed into a computer for analysis. As you can see from Table 5.3, the answers listed on a questionnaire may not include the respondent's opinions. Consequently, some researchers prefer **unstructured interviews**. Here the interviewer asks **open-ended questions**, which allow people to answer in their own words. Although open-ended questions allow you to tap the full range of people's opinions, they make it difficult to compare

Improperly worded questions can steer respondents toward answers that are not their own, thus producing invalid results.

questionnaires a list of questions

self-administered questionnaires questionnaires filled out by respondents

interview direct questioning of respondents

interviewer bias effects that interviewers have on respondents that lead to biased answers

structured interviews interviews that use closed-ended questions

closed-ended questions questions that are followed by a list of possible answers to be selected by the respondent

unstructured interviews interviews that use open-ended questions

open-ended questions questions that respondents are able to answer in their own words

Table 5.3 Closed and Open-Ended Questions

A. Closed-Ended Question

Which of the following best fits your idea of what should be done to someone who has been convicted of spouse abuse?

1. probation
2. jail time
3. community service
4. counseling
5. divorce
6. nothing—it's a family matter

B. Open-Ended Question

What do you think should be done to someone who has been convicted of spouse abuse?

rapport (ruh-pour) a feeling of trust between researchers and subjects

participant observation (or fieldwork) research in which the researcher participates in a research setting while observing what is happening in that setting

answers. For example, how would you compare these answers to the question “What do you think causes men to abuse their wives?”

“They’re sick.”

“I think they must have had problems with their mother.”

“We ought to string them up!”

Establishing Rapport Research on spouse abuse brings up another significant issue. You may have been wondering if your survey would be worth anything even if you rigorously followed scientific procedures. Will women who have been abused really give honest answers to strangers?

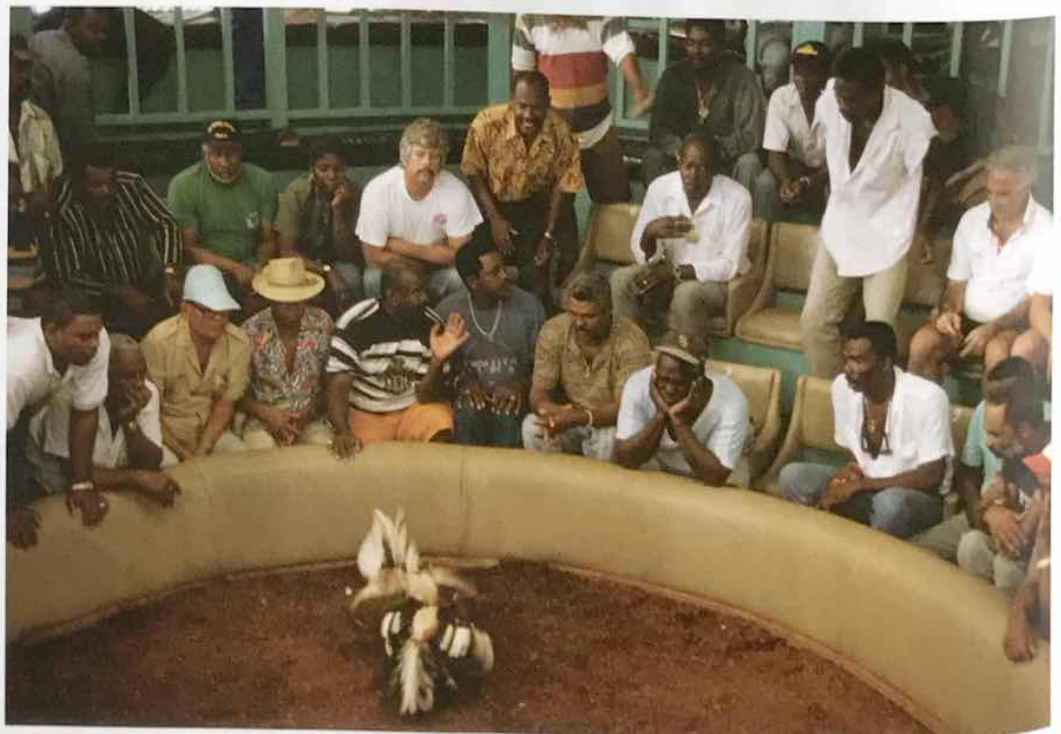
If you were to walk up to a woman on the street and ask if her husband had ever beaten her, there would be little basis for taking your findings seriously. Researchers have to establish **rapport** (“ruh-pour”), a feeling of trust, with their respondents, especially when it comes to sensitive topics—those that elicit feelings of embarrassment, shame, or other deep emotions.

We know that once rapport is gained (for example, by first asking nonsensitive questions), victims will talk to researchers about personal, sensitive issues. A good example is rape. To go beyond police statistics, each year researchers conduct a national crime survey. They interview a random sample of 100,000 Americans, asking them if they have been victims of burglary, robbery, and so on. After establishing rapport, the researchers ask about rape. They find that rape victims will talk about their experiences. The national crime victimization survey shows that rape is *three* times as high as the official statistics indicate (*Statistical Abstract* 2002: page 180).

Participant Observation (Fieldwork)

In the second method, **participant observation**, the researcher *participates* in a research setting while *observing* what is happening in that setting. But how is it possible to study spouse abuse by participant observation? Obviously, this method does not mean that you would sit around and watch someone being abused. Spouse abuse, however, is a broad topic, and many questions about abuse cannot be answered adequately by any method other than participant observation.

Sociologists who enter a research setting to discover information are following a research method known as participant observation. As discussed in the text, sociologists also conduct research in controversial settings such as this cockfight in Marigot, on the island of Saint Martin.



Let's suppose that you are interested in learning how spouse abuse affects wives. You may want to know how the abuse has changed their relationship with their husbands. How has it changed their hopes and dreams? Or their ideas about men? Certainly it has affected their self-concept as well. But how? Participant observation may be able to provide insight into such questions.

For example, if your campus has a crisis intervention center, you may be able to observe victims of spouse abuse from the time they first report the attack through their participation in counseling. With good rapport, you may even be able to spend time with victims in other settings, observing other aspects of their lives. What the victims say and how they interact with others may be the keys that help you unlock answers about how the abuse has affected them. This, in turn, may allow you to make suggestions about how to improve college counseling services.

Participant observers face a problem with **generalizability**, being able to apply their findings to larger populations. Most of these studies are exploratory, documenting in detail the experiences of people in a particular setting. Although such research suggests that other people who face similar situations react in similar ways, it is difficult to know just how far the findings apply beyond their original setting. The results of participant observation, however, can stimulate hypotheses and theories that can be tested in other settings, using other research techniques.

Secondary Analysis

In **secondary analysis**, a third research method, researchers analyze data that have already been collected by others. For example, if you were to examine the original data from a study of women who had been abused by their husbands, you would be doing secondary analysis. Ordinarily, researchers prefer to gather their own data, but lack of resources, especially money, may make this impossible. In addition, existing data may contain a wealth of information that wasn't pertinent to the goals of the original researchers, which you can analyze for your own purposes.

Like the other methods, secondary analysis also poses its own problems. How can a researcher who did not carry out the research be sure that the data were systematically gathered and accurately recorded, and that biases were avoided? This problem plagues researchers who do secondary analysis, especially if the original data have been gathered by a team of researchers, not all of whom were equally qualified.

Documents

The fourth method sociologists use is the study of **documents**, written sources. To investigate social life, they examine such diverse documents as books, newspapers, diaries, bank records, police reports, immigration files, and records kept by organizations.

To study spouse abuse, you might examine police reports and court records. These could reveal what proportion of complaints result in arrest and what proportion of the men arrested are charged, convicted, or put on probation. If these were your questions, police statistics would be valuable.

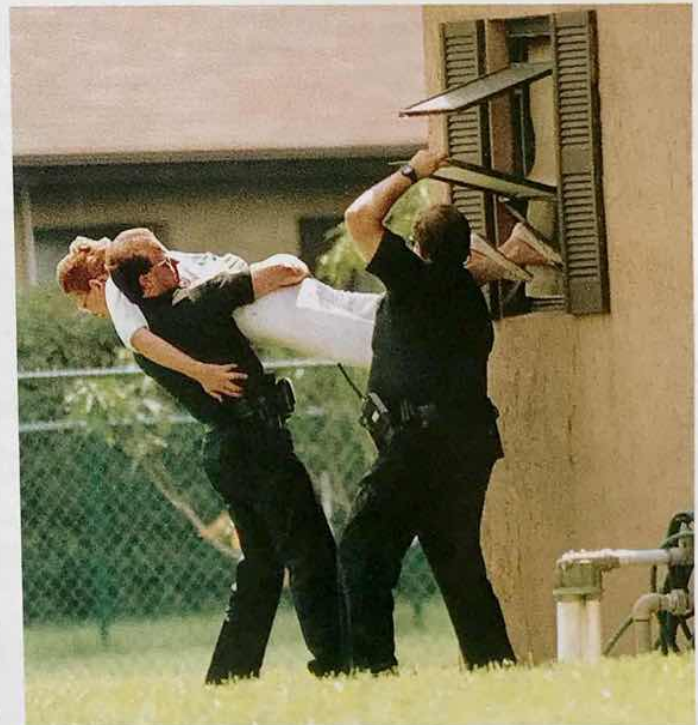
But for other questions, those records would be useless. If you want to know about the victims' social and emotional adjustment, for example, those records would tell you little. Other documents, however, might provide answers. For example, diaries kept by victims could yield insight into their reactions to abuse, showing how their attitudes and relationships change. If no diaries were available, you might ask victims to keep diaries. Perhaps the director of a crisis intervention center might ask clients to keep diaries for you—or get the victims' permission for you to examine records of

generalizability the extent to which the findings from one group (or sample) can be generalized or applied to other groups (or populations)

secondary analysis the analysis of data that have been collected by other researchers

documents in its narrow sense, written sources that provide data; in its extended sense, archival material of any sort, including photographs, movies, CD disks, and so on

Domestic abuse is one of the most common forms of violence. Until recently, it was treated by the police as a private family matter. Shown here are police pulling a woman from her bathroom window, where she had fled from her armed husband, who was threatening to shoot her.





Sociologists use different methods of research to answer different questions. One method that can be used to study spouse abuse is to examine the documents kept by shelters for battered women, which log the number of calls and visits made by victims. This woman is being counseled at a rape crisis center in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

their counseling sessions. To my knowledge, no sociologist has yet studied spouse abuse in this way.

Of course, I am presenting an ideal situation, a crisis intervention center that opens its arms to you. In actuality, the center might not cooperate at all. It might refuse to ask victims to keep diaries, and it might not even let you near its records. *Access*, then, is another problem researchers face. Simply put, you can't study a topic unless you can gain access to it.

Experiments

A lot of people say that abusers need therapy. But no one knows if therapy really works. Let's suppose that you want to find out. Frankly, no one knows how to change a wife abuser into a loving husband—which may be impossible—but knowing if therapy works would certainly be a step in the right direction. To find out, you may want to conduct an **experiment**, for experiments are useful for determining cause and effect. Causation has three necessary conditions, which

are discussed in Table 5.4 on page 136.

Let's suppose that a judge likes your idea, and she gives you access to men who have been arrested for spouse abuse. You would randomly divide the men into two groups. (See Figure 5.2 on page 135.) This would help to ensure that their individual characteristics (attitudes, number of arrests, severity of crimes, jail time, education, race-ethnicity, age, and so on) are distributed evenly between the groups. You then would arrange for the men in the **experimental group** to receive some form of therapy. The men in the **control group** would not get therapy.

Your **independent variable**, something that causes a change in another variable, would be therapy. Your **dependent variable**, the variable that may change, would be the men's behavior: whether they abuse women after they get out of jail. To make that determination, you would need to rely on a sloppy operational definition: either reports from the wives or records indicating the men were rearrested for abuse. This is sloppy because some of the women will not report the abuse, and some of the men who abuse their wives will not be rearrested. Yet it may be the best you can do.

Let's assume that you choose rearrest as your operational definition. If you find that the men who received therapy are less likely to be rearrested for abuse, you can attribute the difference to the therapy. If you find no difference in rearrest rates, you can conclude that the therapy was ineffective. If you find that the men who received the therapy have a *higher* rearrest rate, you can conclude that the therapy backfired.

Ideally, you would test different types of therapy. Perhaps only some work. You might even want to test self-therapy by assigning articles, books, and videos.

As described in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on page 136, some experiments are not conducted this rigorously. This increases the likelihood that cause and effect will be confused.

Unobtrusive Measures

Researchers sometimes use **unobtrusive measures**, observing the behavior of people who do not know they are being studied. For example, social researchers studied the level of whisky consumption in a town that was officially "dry" by counting empty bottles in trashcans. To study the degree of fear induced by ghost stories, they measured the shrinking diameter of a circle of seated children. Some sociologists even examined garbage. They found that more beef is wasted during a beef shortage—presumably because people buy more than they can store properly (Lee 2000). Researchers have also gone high-tech in their unobtrusive measures (Selingo 2001). They have outfitted shopping carts with infrared surveillance equipment to trace customers' paths through stores. Retailers use these findings to place items in their stores in more strategic locations (McCarthy 1993).

experiment the use of control and experimental groups and dependent and independent variables to test causation

experimental group the group of subjects exposed to the independent variable

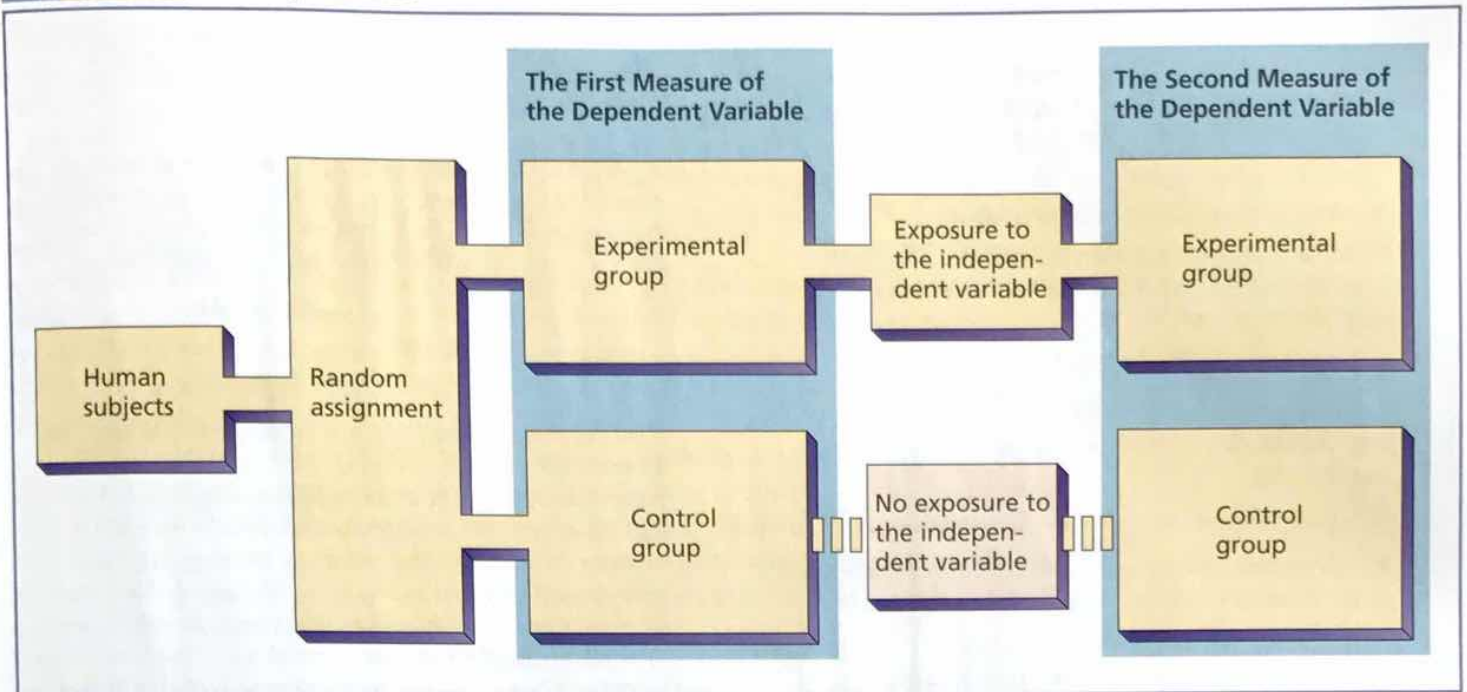
control group the group of subjects not exposed to the independent variable

independent variable a factor that causes a change in another variable, called the dependent variable

dependent variable a factor that is changed by an independent variable

unobtrusive measures ways of observing people who do not know they are being studied

Figure 5.2 The Experiment



DOWN-TO-EARTH SOCIOLOGY

The Hawthorne Experiments

RESEARCH FROM THE 1920s, KNOWN AS the Hawthorne experiments, has become a classic in sociology. This research drives home how necessary it is to accurately identify independent and dependent variables.

The managers of the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company near Chicago wanted to know if different levels of lighting would affect productivity. Several groups of women participated in what are known as the Relay Room Experiments. In the control room, the level of lighting was held constant, while in the experimental room, the lighting was varied. To everyone's surprise, output increased at *both* locations. In the experimental room, productivity remained high even when the lights were dimmed to about the level of moonlight—so low that workers could barely see what they were doing!

To solve this mystery, management called in a team of researchers headed by Elton Mayo of the University of Chicago.

This team tested thirteen different work conditions. When they changed the women's pay from hourly wages to piecework (paying them at a set rate for each unit they produce), productivity increased. When they served refreshments, output again went up. When they added two 5-minute rest periods, productivity jumped. When they changed the rest periods to two 10-minute periods, again output increased. When they let the workers go home early, they found the same result. Confused, the researchers restored the original conditions, offering none of these added benefits. The result? Even higher productivity.

The situation grew even more confusing when they observed men workers in what is known as the Bank Wiring Room Study. Here, the researchers didn't change the work conditions at all. They simply observed the men while they worked and interviewed them after work. They expected no change in productivity. What happened was that productivity *dropped*.

None of this made sense. Finally, Mayo concluded that the changes in productivity were due to the research itself. The women, pleased at the attention being paid to them, responded by increasing their efforts. The men, in contrast, became suspicious about why the researchers were observing them. They feared that if they had higher productivity, they would be expected to produce more each day, or that higher productivity might even cost some of them their jobs. Consequently, they decreased their output.

The Hawthorne research is important—not for its findings on worker productivity, but for what it revealed about the research process itself. Today, researchers carefully monitor the *Hawthorne effect*, the change in behavior that occurs when people know they are being studied.

Sources: Based on Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939; Mayo 1966; Baron and Greenberg 1990.



Table 5.4 Cause, Effect, and Spurious Correlations

Causation means that a change in one variable is caused by another variable. Three conditions are necessary for causation: correlation, temporal priority, and no spurious correlation. Let's apply each of these conditions to spouse abuse and alcohol abuse.

1. The first necessary condition is **correlation**.

If two variables exist together, they are said to be correlated. If batterers have drunk alcohol, battering and alcohol abuse are correlated.

Spouse Abuse + Alcohol Abuse

People sometimes assume that correlation is causation. In this instance, they conclude that alcohol abuse causes spouse abuse.

Alcohol Abuse → Spouse Abuse

But *correlation never proves causation*. Either variable could be the cause of the other. Perhaps battering pushes men into getting drunk.

Spouse Abuse → Alcohol Abuse

2. The second necessary condition is **temporal priority** (one variable must occur before the other).

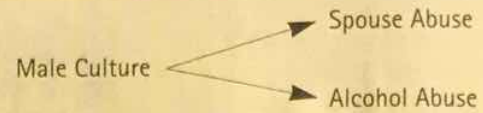
Temporal priority means that one thing happens before something else does. For a variable to be a cause (the *independent* variable), it must *precede* that which is changed (the *dependent* variable). If the men had not drunk alcohol until after they beat their wives, obviously alcohol abuse could not be the cause of the spouse abuse. Although the necessity of temporal priority is obvious, in many studies this is not easy to determine.

3. The third necessary condition is **no spurious correlation**.

This is the necessary condition that really makes things difficult. Even if we identify correlation and can determine temporal priority, we still don't know that alcohol abuse is the cause. It is possible that we have a *spurious correlation*; that is, the cause may be some underlying third variable that is not easily visible. Some sociologists identify male culture as that underlying third variable.

Male Culture → Spouse Abuse

Socialized into dominance, some males learn to view women as objects on which to take out their frustration. In fact, this underlying third variable could be a cause of both spouse abuse and alcohol abuse.



But since only some men beat their wives, while all males are exposed to male culture, other variables must also be involved. Perhaps specific subcultures that promote violence and denigrate women lead to both spouse abuse and alcohol abuse.



If so, this does *not* mean that it is the only causal variable, for spouse abuse probably has many causes. Unlike the movement of amoebas or the action of heat on some object, human behavior is infinitely complicated. What is especially important is people's *definitions of the situation*, including their views of right and wrong. To explain spouse abuse, then, we need to add such variables as men's views of violence and their definitions of the relative rights of women and men. It is precisely to help unravel such complicating factors in human behavior that we need the experimental method.

More on Correlations

Correlation simply means that two or more variables are present together. The more often they are found together, the stronger their relationship. To indicate their strength, sociologists use a number called a *correlation coefficient*. If two variables are always related, that is, they are always present together, they have what is called a *perfect positive correlation*. The number 1.0 represents this correlation coefficient. Nature has some 1.0's, such as the lack of water and the death of trees. 1.0's also apply to the human physical state, such as the absence of nutrients and the absence of life. But social life is much more complicated than physical conditions, and there are no 1.0's in human behavior.

Two variables can also have a *perfect negative correlation*. This means that when one variable is present, the other is always absent. The number -1.0 represents this correlation coefficient.

Positive correlations of 0.1, 0.2, and 0.3 mean that one variable is associated with another only 1 time out of 10, 2 times out of 10, and 3 times out of 10. In other words, in most instances the first variable is *not* associated with the second, indicating a weak relationship. The greater the correlation coefficient, the stronger the relationship. A strong relationship *may* indicate causation, but not necessarily. Testing the relationship between variables is the goal of some sociological research.

It would be considered unethical to use most unobtrusive measures to research spouse abuse. You could, however, analyze 911 calls. If there were a *public* forum held by abused or abusing spouses on the Internet, you could also record and analyze the online conversations. Ethics are still a matter of dispute: To secretly record the behavior of people in public settings, such as a crowd, is generally considered acceptable, but to do so in private settings is not.

Deciding Which Method to Use

How do sociologists choose among these methods? Four primary factors affect their decision. First, *resources* are crucial. Sociologists must match methods with available resources. For example, although they may want to conduct a survey, they may find that finances won't permit it, and instead they turn to the study of documents. The second significant factor is *access to subjects*. If the people who comprise a sample live in remote parts of the country, researchers may have to mail them questionnaires or conduct a telephone survey even if they would prefer face-to-face interviews. The third factor concerns the *purpose of the research*, the questions that the sociologist wishes to investigate and answer. Each method is better for answering some questions than for others. Participant observation, for example, is good for uncovering people's attitudes, while experiments work better for resolving questions of cause and effect. Fourth, *the researcher's background or training* comes into play. In graduate school, sociologists study many methods, but they are able to practice only some of them. Consequently, after graduate school they generally use the methods in which they have had the most training.

Thus, sociologists who have been trained in **quantitative research methods**, which emphasize measurement, numbers, and statistics, are likely to use surveys. Sociologists who have been trained in **qualitative research methods**, which emphasize describing, observing, and interpreting people's behavior, lean toward participant observation. In the Down-to-Earth Sociology box, you can see how applied sociologists use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

quantitative research methods research in which the emphasis is placed on precise measurement, the use of statistics and numbers

qualitative research methods research in which the emphasis is placed on observing, describing, and interpreting people's behavior

DOWN-TO-EARTH SOCIOLOGY

Applied Sociology: Marketing Research as a Blend of Quantitative and Qualitative Methods

IF A COMPANY IS GOING TO SURVIVE IN the highly competitive business world, it must figure out what consumers need and want, and then supply it—or else convince people that what they need or want is what the company is already producing.

What Marketing Research Is

To increase sales, manufacturers try to improve the position of their products. "Position" is marketing jargon for how customers think about a product.

This is where marketing researchers come into play. They find out what customers want, how they select products, how they use them, and what impressions they hold of a product or service. They also assess how the public will react to a new product or to a change in an established product.

Marketing researchers use both qualitative and quantitative methods. An example of a qualitative method is *focus groups*. Groups of about ten people are invited to discuss a product. A moderator leads a discussion while other team members observe or videotape the session from behind a one-way mirror. To control for

regional variations, the researchers may hold other focus groups at the same time in other cities. Sociologist Roger Straus points out that his training in symbolic interactionism has been especially useful for interpreting these results.

Marketing researchers also use quantitative techniques. For example, they may conduct surveys to determine what the public thinks of a new product. They also gather sales data from the "bar codes" found on products. They use statistics to analyze the data, and they prepare tables and graphics to summarize the findings for clients.

A Sociological Controversy

Marketing research occupies a controversial position in sociology. Most of the results of marketing research are proprietary (owned by the client) and are therefore confidential. This means that the findings do not appear in sociology journals and are not used to create social theory. In addition, clients are usually interested in specific marketing problems, and they seldom commission research on important social issues. For such reasons, many

sociologists do not consider marketing research a "legitimate" sociological activity. Some even scorn marketing researchers as wasting their sociological talents. They chide them for having "sold out"—for using sociological methods to help corporations exploit the public by convincing them to purchase unneeded goods and services.

Marketing researchers, of course, do not see things this way. They argue that marketing research is a neutral activity, that there is no reason to be against it on principle. They add that they do more than just help sell beer and soft drinks. They point out that they have helped colleges attract students and communities assess public needs. They argue that the decision to do research on any topic involves the researcher's own values. This applies to studying how to reduce juvenile delinquency as well as how to sell facial scrubs for acne. It is presumptuous, they say, for anyone to pass judgment on marketing research—as though other research were morally superior.

Sources: Based on Straus 1991 and communication with Straus 1993.



Sociologists sometimes find themselves in the hot seat because of their research. Some poke into private areas of life, which upsets people. Others investigate public matters, but their findings threaten those who have a stake in the situation. When a survey showed that if there were a peace settlement, most Palestinian refugees would be willing to accept compensation and not return to Israel, an enraged mob beat the researcher and trashed his office (Bennet 2003). From the following Thinking Critically section, you can see how using rigorous research methods on even such an innocuous topic as homelessness can land sociologists in the midst of controversy.

THINKING Critically

Doing Controversial Research— Counting the Homeless

What could be less offensive than counting the homeless? As sometimes occurs, however, even basic research lands sociologists in the midst of controversy. This is what happened to sociologist Peter Rossi and his associates.

There was a dispute between advocates for the homeless and the federal government. The advocates claimed that 3 to 7 million Americans were homeless; the government claimed that it was only one-twelfth to one-twenty-eighth that number, about a quarter of a million people. Each side accused the

other of gross distortion—the one to place undue pressure on Congress, the other to keep the public from knowing how bad the situation really was.

Only an accurate count could clear up the picture, for both sides were only guessing at the numbers. Peter Rossi and the National Opinion Research Center decided to make an accurate count. They had no vested interest in supporting one side or the other, only in answering this question honestly.

The challenge was immense. The *population* was evident—the U.S. homeless. A *survey* would be appropriate, but how do you survey a *sample* of the homeless? No one has a list of the homeless, and only some of the homeless stay at shelters. As for *validity*, to make certain that they were counting only people who were really homeless, the researchers needed a good *operational definition* of homelessness. To include people who weren't really



As discussed on this page, research sometimes lands sociologists in the midst of controversy. An example is a study conducted to determine how many homeless people there are in the United States. Homeless advocates were not pleased with the results. These homeless men in New Haven, Connecticut, are guarding the belongings of other homeless people who are eating at a nearby soup kitchen.

homeless would destroy the study's *reliability*. The researchers wanted results that would be consistent if others were to *replicate*, or repeat, the study. As an operational definition, the researchers used "literally homeless," people "who do not have access to a conventional dwelling and who would be homeless by any conceivable definition of the term." Because a national count would cost about \$6 million, far beyond their resources, the researchers decided to count just the homeless in Chicago. The cost was still high, however—about \$600,000.

By using a *stratified random sample*, the researchers were able to *generalize* to the entire city. How could they do this since there is no list of the homeless? For the homeless who sleep in shelters, they used a stratified random sample of the city's shelters. For the homeless who sleep in the streets, vacant buildings, and so forth, they used a stratified random sample of the city's blocks. To make doubly certain that their count was accurate, the researchers conducted two surveys. At night, trained teams visited the shelters and searched the alleys, bridges, and vacant houses.

They found that on an average night, Chicago has 2,722 homeless people. Because people move in and out of homelessness, between 5,000 and 7,000 are homeless at some point during the year. On warm nights, only two out of five sleep in the shelters, and even in winter only three out of four do so. The median age is 40; 75 percent are men, and 60 percent are African Americans. One in four is a former mental patient, one in five a former prisoner. A homeless person's income from all sources is less than \$6 a day. Projecting these findings to the United States

resulted in a national total of about 350,000 homeless people, a figure that was much closer to the government's estimate of 250,000 than to the advocates' estimate of 3 to 7 million.

The reactions were predictable. Government officials rubbed their hands in glee. The stunned homeless advocates denied the findings and began a sniping campaign at the researchers.

Remember that Rossi and his associates had no interest in proving which side in the debate was right, only in getting reliable figures. Using impeccable methods, this they did.

The researchers had no intention of minimizing the problem of homelessness. They stressed that 350,000 Americans are so poor that they sleep in city streets, live in shelters, eat out of garbage cans, and suffer from severe health problems. In short, these people live hopeless, desperate lives.

It is good to *know* how many Americans are homeless. Guesses aren't worth much. Even though the number is far less than what the homeless advocates had estimated, this information can still serve their cause: Having fewer homeless people makes the problem more manageable. It means that if we choose to do so, we can put our resources to work with greater certainty of success.

Those whose positions are not supported by research, however, are never pleased, and they tend to take potshots at the researchers. This is one of the risks of doing sociological research, for sociologists never know whose toes they will step on.

Sources: Based on Anderson 1986; Rossi et al. 1986; Rossi et al. 1987; Coughlin 1988; Rossi 1989; Rossi 1991; De Parle 1994; Rossi 1999.

Gender in Sociological Research

You know how significant gender is, how it affects your orientations and your attitudes. You may also be aware that it opens and closes doors to you, a topic that we will explore in Chapter 11. Gender can also be significant in social research, and researchers take steps to prevent gender from biasing their findings. For example, sociologists Diana Scully and Joseph Marolla (1984, 2003) interviewed convicted rapists in prison. They were concerned that their gender might lead to *interviewer bias*—that the prisoners might shift their answers, sharing certain experiences or expressing certain attitudes to Marolla, but saying something else to Scully. To prevent gender bias, each interviewed half the sample. Later in this chapter, we'll look at what they found out.

Gender certainly can be a major impediment in research. In our imagined research on spouse abuse, for example, could a man even do participant observation of women who have been beaten by their husbands? Technically, the answer is yes. But because the women have been victimized by men, they might be less likely to share their experiences and feelings with men. If so, women would be better suited to conduct this research, more likely to achieve valid results. The supposition that these victims will be more open

with women than with men, however, is just that—a supposition. Research alone will verify or refute this assumption.

Gender is significant in other ways, too. As feminist sociologists point out, it is a mistake to assume that what applies to one sex is also relevant to the other (Bird and Rieker 1999; Neuman 2000). Women's and men's lives differ significantly, and if we do research on just half of humanity, our research will be vastly incomplete. With today's huge numbers of women sociologists, there is little risk of ignoring women in contemporary research. In the past, however, when almost all sociologists were men, women's experiences were neglected.

Gender pops up in unexpected ways in sociological research. I vividly recall an incident in San Francisco.

The streets were getting dark, and I was still looking for homeless people. When I saw someone lying down, curled up in a doorway, I approached the individual. As I got close, I began my opening research line, "Hi, I'm Dr. Henslin from. . ." The individual began to scream and started to thrash wildly. Startled by this sudden, high-pitched scream and by the rapid movements, I quickly backed away. When I later analyzed what had happened, I concluded that I had intruded into a woman's bedroom.

Of course, one can draw another lesson from this incident. Researchers do their best, but they make mistakes. Sometimes these mistakes are minor, and even humorous. The woman sleeping in the doorway wasn't frightened. It was only just getting dark, and there were many people on the street. She was just assertively marking her territory and letting me know in no uncertain terms that I was an intruder. If we make a mistake in research, we pick up and go on. As we do so, we take ethical considerations into account, which is the topic of our next section.

Ethics in Sociological Research

In addition to choosing an appropriate research method, then, we must also follow the ethics of sociology, which center on assumptions of science and morality (American Sociological Association 1997). Research ethics require openness (sharing findings with the scientific community), honesty, and truth. Ethics clearly forbid the falsification of results. They also condemn plagiarism—that is, stealing someone else's work. Another ethical guideline is that research subjects should generally be informed that they are being studied and never be harmed by the research. Ethics also require that sociologists protect the anonymity of those who provide information. Sometimes people reveal things that are intimate, potentially embarrassing, or otherwise harmful to themselves. Finally, although not all sociologists agree, it generally is considered unethical for researchers to misrepresent themselves.

Sociologists take these ethical standards seriously. To illustrate the extent to which they will go to protect their respondents, consider the research conducted by Mario Brajuha.

Protecting the Subjects: The Brajuha Research

Mario Brajuha, a graduate student at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, was doing participant observation of restaurant work. He lost his job as a waiter when the restaurant where he was working burned down—due to a fire of "suspicious origin," as the police said. When detectives learned that Brajuha had taken field notes (Brajuha and Hallowell 1986), they asked to see them. Because he had promised to keep the information confidential, Brajuha refused. The district attorney then subpoenaed the notes. Brajuha still refused to hand them over. The district attorney threatened to put Brajuha in jail. By this time, Brajuha's notes had become rather famous, and unsavory characters—perhaps those who had set the fire—also wanted to know what was in them. They accompanied their demands with threats of a different nature. Brajuha found himself between a rock and a hard place.

For two years Brajuha refused to hand over his notes, even though he grew anxious and had to appear at several court hearings. Finally, the district attorney dropped the subpoena. When the two men under investigation for setting the fire died, so did the threats to Brajuha, his wife, and their children.

Misleading the Subjects: The Humphreys Research

Sociologists agree on the necessity to protect respondents, and they applaud the professional manner in which Brajuha handled himself. Although there is less agreement that researchers should not misrepresent themselves, sociologists who violate this norm can become embroiled in ethical controversy. Let's look at the case of Laud Humphreys, whose research forced sociologists to rethink and refine their ethical stance.

Laud Humphreys, a classmate of mine at Washington University in St. Louis, was an Episcopal priest who decided to become a sociologist. For his Ph.D. dissertation, Humphreys (1970, 1971, 1975) studied social interaction in "tearooms," public restrooms where some men go for quick, anonymous oral sex with other men.

Humphreys found that some restrooms in Forest Park, just across from our campus, were tearooms. He began a participant observation study by hanging around these restrooms. He found that in addition to the two men having sex, a third man—called a "watchqueen"—served as a lookout for police and other unwelcome strangers. Humphreys took on the role of watchqueen, not only watching for strangers but also observing and systematically recording what the men did.

Humphreys decided he wanted to know more about the regular lives of these men. For example, what was the significance of the wedding rings that many of the men wore? He hit on an ingenious technique. Many of the men parked their cars near the tearooms, and Humphreys recorded their license numbers. A friend in the St. Louis police department gave Humphreys each man's address. About a year later, Humphreys arranged for these men to be included in a medical survey conducted by some of the sociologists on our faculty.

Disguising himself with a different hairstyle and clothing, and driving a different car, Humphreys visited their homes. He interviewed the men, supposedly for the medical study. He found that they led conventional lives. They voted, mowed their lawns, and



Ethics in social research are of vital concern to sociologists. As discussed in the text sociologists may disagree on some of the issue's finer points, but none would approve of slipping LSD to unsuspecting subjects like these Marine recruits at basic training in Miami, Florida. This was done to U.S. servicemen in the 1960s under the guise of legitimate testing—just "to see what would happen."

took their kids to Little League games. Many reported that their wives were not aroused sexually or were afraid of getting pregnant because their religion did not allow them to use birth control. Humphreys concluded that heterosexual men were also using the tearooms for a form of quick sex.

This study stirred controversy among sociologists and nonsociologists alike. Humphreys was criticized by many sociologists, and a national columnist even wrote a scathing denunciation of “sociological snoopers” (Von Hoffman 1970). As the controversy grew more heated and a court case loomed, Humphreys feared that his list of respondents might be subpoenaed. He gave me the list to take from Missouri to Illinois, where I had begun teaching. When he called and asked me to destroy it, I burned it in my backyard.

Was this research ethical? This question is not decided easily. Although many sociologists sided with Humphreys—and his book reporting the research won a highly acclaimed award—the criticisms mounted. At first, Humphreys vigorously defended his position, but five years later, in a second edition of his book (1975), he stated that he should have identified himself as a researcher.

How Research and Theory Work Together

Research cannot stand alone. Nor can theory. As sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959) so forcefully argued, research without theory is simply a collection of unrelated “facts.” But theory without research, Mills added, is abstract and empty—it can’t represent the way life really is.

Research and theory, then, are both essential for sociology. Every theory must be tested, which requires research. And as sociologists do research, they often come up with surprising findings. Those findings must be explained, and for that we need theory. As sociologists study social life, then, they combine research and theory.

The Real World: When the Ideal Meets the Real

Although we can list the ideals of research, real-life situations often force sociologists to settle for something that falls short of the ideal. Let’s look at how two sociologists confronted the ideal and the real in the following Thinking Critically section.

THINKING Critically

Are Rapists Sick? A Close-Up View of Research

Two sociologists, Diana Scully and Joseph Marolla, were not satisfied with the typical explanation that rapists are “sick,” psychologically disturbed, or different from other men. They developed the hypothesis that rape is like most human behavior—it is learned through interaction with others. That is,

some men learn to think of rape as appropriate behavior.

To test this hypothesis, it would be best to interview a random sample of rapists. But this is impossible. There is no list of all rapists, so there is no way to give them all the same chance of being included in a sample. You can’t even use prison populations to select a random sample, for many rapists have never been caught, some who were caught were found not guilty, and some who were found guilty were given probation. Some, too, who were convicted of rape are innocent. Consequently, Scully and Marolla confronted the classic dilemma of sociologists—

either to not do the study or to do it under less than ideal conditions.

They chose to do the study. When they had the opportunity to interview convicted rapists in prison, they jumped at it. They knew that whatever they learned would be more than we already knew. They sent out 3,500 letters to men serving time in seven prisons in Virginia, the state where they were teaching. About 25 percent of the prisoners agreed to be interviewed. They matched these men on the basis of age, education, race, severity of offense, and previous criminal record. This resulted in a sample of 98 prisoners who were convicted of rape and a control sample of 75 men convicted of other offenses.

As noted earlier, because the sex of the interviewer can bias research results, Scully and Marolla each interviewed half the sample. It took them 600 hours to gather information on the prisoners, including their psychological, criminal, and sexual history. To guard against lies, they checked what the individuals said against their institutional records. They used twelve scales to measure the men's attitudes about women, rape, and themselves. In order to find out what circumstances the men defined as rape or when they viewed the victim as responsible, they also gave the men nine vignettes of forced sexual encounters and asked them to determine responsibility in each one.

Scully and Marolla discovered something that goes against common sense—that most rapists are not sick, and that they are not overwhelmed by uncontrollable urges. The psychological histories of the rapists and the nonrapists were similar. Rapists, they concluded, are emotionally average men who have learned to view rape as appropriate in certain situations. Some rape spontaneously, while others plan their rapes. For some, rape is a form of recreation, and they rape with friends on weekends. Others use rape as a form of revenge, to get even with someone, not necessarily the woman.

Scully and Marolla also found support for what feminists had been pointing out for years, that power is a major element in rape. Here is what one man said:

Rape gave me the power to do what I wanted to do without feeling I had to please a partner or

respond to a partner. I felt in control, dominant. Rape was the ability to have sex without caring about the woman's response. I was totally dominant.

To discover that most rape is calculated behavior—that rapists are not "sick"; that the motivating force is power, not passion; that the behavior stems from the criminal pursuit of pleasure, not from mental illness—is significant. It makes the sociological quest worthwhile.

In comparing their sample of rapists with their control group of nonrapists, Scully and Marolla also made another significant finding: The rapists are more likely to believe "rape myths." They are more likely to believe that women cause their own rape by the way they act and the clothes they wear, that a woman who charges rape has simply changed her mind after participating in consensual sex, and that most men accused of rape are innocent.

Connecting Research and Theory

Such findings go far beyond simply adding to our storehouse of "facts." As indicated in Figure 5.1 on page 125, research stimulates both the development of theory and the need for more research. Scully and Marolla suggest that rape myths act as neutralizers, that they allow "potential rapists to turn off social prohibitions against injuring others."

This hypothesis, in turn, pinpoints the need to determine how such myths are transmitted. Which male subcultures perpetuate them? Do the mass media contribute to these myths? Do family, religion, and education create respect for females and help keep males from learning such myths? Or do they somehow contribute to these myths? If so, how?

Sociologists have begun to build on this path-breaking research, which was done, as usual, under less than ideal conditions. The resulting theorizing and research may provide the basis for making changes that reduce the incidence of rape in our society.

Sources: Marolla and Scully 1986; Scully 1990; Hale 2003; Scully and Marolla 1984, 2003.

Sociology needs more of this type of research—imaginative and sometimes daring investigations conducted in an imperfect world under less than ideal conditions. This is really what sociology is all about. Sociologists study what people do—whether their behaviors are conforming or deviant, whether they please others or disgust them and arouse intense anger. No matter the behavior that is studied, systematic research methods and the application of social theory take us beyond common sense. They allow us to penetrate surface realities so we can better understand human behavior—and, in the ideal case, make changes to help improve social life.