SECOND EDITION

RUSSELL K. SCHUTT

Understanding the SOCIAL WORLD

Research Methods for the 21st Century

Understanding the Social World

Second Edition

To Julia Ellen Schutt

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Russell K. Schutt, Ph.D., is Professor of Sociology at the University of Massachusetts Boston and Lecturer (part-time) in the Department of Psychiatry (Massachusetts Mental Health Center, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center) at the Harvard Medical School. He is also Research Associate at the Edith Nourse Rogers Veterans Administration Hospital, Bedford, Massachusetts. He completed his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees at the University of Illinois at Chicago and was a postdoctoral fellow in the Sociology of Social Control Training Program at Yale University. In addition to *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research*, now in its ninth edition, and adaptations of that text—*Making Sense of the Social World* (with Dan Chambliss), *Research Methods in Psychology* (with Paul G. Nestor), *The Practice of Research in Criminology and Criminal Justice* and *Fundamentals of Research in Criminology and Criminal Justice* (with Ronet Bachman), *The Practice of Research in Social Work* and *Fundamentals of Social Work Research* (with Ray Engel), and *Research Methods in Education* (with Joseph Check), he is the author of *Homelessness, Housing, and Mental Illness* and coeditor of *Social Neuroscience: Brain, Mind, and Society* (both with Harvard University Press) and author of *Organization in a Changing Environment* (SUNY), coauthor of *Responding to the Homeless: Policy and Practice* (Plenum), and coeditor of *The Organizational Response to Social Problems* (JAI). He has authored and coauthored more than 60 peer-reviewed journal articles as well as many book chapters and research reports on homelessness, service preferences and satisfaction, mental health, organizations, law, and teaching research methods. His research has included mixed-methods investigations of public health programs, a study of community health workers and recruitment for cancer clinical trials, a mixed-methods study of a youth violence reduction program, a randomized trial of a peer support program for homeless dually diagnosed veterans, and a randomized evaluation of housing alternatives for homeless persons diagnosed with severe mental illness, with funding from the National Cancer Institute, the Veterans Health Administration, the National Institute of Mental Health, the John E. Fetzer Institute, and state agencies, as well as a new grant for a cluster randomized study of alternative treatments for social skills deficits by the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute. His current scholarly foci are the impact of social relations and the social environment on cognitive and community functioning, the meaning of housing and service preferences, and the value of alternative organizational and occupational structures for service delivery. His prior research has also included investigation of social factors in legal decisions and admission practices and of influences on job and service satisfaction. Details are available at http:// http://blogs.umb.edu/russellkschutt/.

PREFACE

"Social inequality in the United States is sickening. Literally." So begins Patricia Homan's (2019) *American Sociological Review* article on sexism and health in the United States. It's a good example of the problems the 21st-century social world presents and of the tools social research provides for understanding them. Appendix B reprints the entire article so that you can read more about this important social research as you learn how to review research articles.

Rapid advances in information technology and intersecting social, environmental, and economic transformations require innovative social research methods to describe our increasingly complex social world and to understand social processes within it. The way you interact with the social world already differs in many ways from the patterns of the last century. *Understanding the Social World: Research Methods for the 21st Century* is a new type of research methods textbook for this new environment. Chapter 1 begins with an example of the impact of the internet on social relations. Throughout the book, your study of enduring social research standards will be enriched by recognizing the requirements for successful research in a social world shaped by Big Data and social media, Instagram and avatars, blogs and tweets, and by confronting the difficulties for social research created by cell phones, privacy concerns, linguistic diversity, and community demands.

What most distinguishes *Understanding* from *Investigating the Social World*, the more comprehensive text on which this book is based, and from other texts is its brevity, its focus on the methods most relevant to the 21st-century social world, and its engagement with the most pressing issues in this social world. At the same time, all core social science methods are explained clearly and key research standards are highlighted; throughout, engaging material connects with your experiences and relates to the social theories you are learning. *Understanding the SocialWorld* is fast paced and visually sleek, so that it can take you across disciplinary and national boundaries, with an emphasis on tailoring research designs to research questions, to making ethical decisions, and to considering practical application.

Each of the major elements and methods in social research is represented in *Understanding the Social World*: inductive and deductive reasoning, contributing to social theory and reviewing research literature, qualitative and quantitative approaches, measurement validity and reliability, ethical standards and procedures, as well as experiments, surveys, qualitative methods, and various unobtrusive methods. Basic techniques in both quantitative and qualitative data analysis are presented, and guidelines for research reporting are reviewed. Each chapter uses research examples from the 21st century and provides features that enhance engagement, including **Research in the News** and **Careers and Research**. Ethics in research is the focus of an early chapter and then a section of each research design chapter. End-of-chapter materials provide summaries for review, questions for discussion, and exercises for practice.

Many research studies related to examples in *Understanding* are available on the student study site, with questions that encourage further exploration. The study site also offers quizzes, flashcards, interactive exercises, links to relevant resources on the internet, and extra appendices.

Teaching and Learning Goals

The first goal of this book is to introduce you to the social science research methods that shape the content of your courses, the programs of government agencies, the sales strategies of businesses, and the news of the day. Each chapter integrates instruction in research methods with investigation of interesting aspects of today's social world, such as social networking; intimate partner violence; crime and police practices; responding to disasters; and political preferences. You will learn in each chapter how learning the methods of social research can help you to answer questions about the social world.

The other key goal of this book is to give you the critical skills necessary to evaluate research. Just "doing research" is not enough. Just reading that some conclusions are "based on a research study" is not sufficient. You must learn to ask many questions before deciding that research-based conclusions are appropriate. What did the researchers set out to investigate? How were people selected for study? What information was collected, and how was it analyzed? Throughout this book, you will learn what questions to ask when critiquing a research study and how to evaluate the answers. You can begin to sharpen your critical teeth on the illustrative studies throughout the book.

This book also provides you the foundation for doing research. Substantive examples will help you see how methods are used in practice. Exercises at the end of each chapter give you ways to try different methods alone or in a group. Research methods cannot be learned by rote and applied mechanically. Thus, you will learn the benefits and liabilities of each major approach to research and why employing a combination of them is often preferable. You will learn throughout the book how to conduct research, and by the time you finish it, you will be ready to be a full participant in research projects and to study more advanced research methods.

Organization of the Book

Understanding the Social World is organized in four sections that reflect the process of conducting and critiquing research: developing a research question with a foundation in the research literature and social theory and attention to ethical procedures; identifying the fundamental challenges of conceptualization and measurement, generalizability and sampling, and causation and its connection to experimental design; and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data and reporting findings. The three chapters in the first section, "Foundations for Social Research," introduce the why and how of research in general. Chapter 1 shows how research has helped us understand the impact of the internet on social relations. It also introduces some alternative approaches to social research, with a particular emphasis on the contrast between quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Chapter 2 illustrates the basic stages of research with studies of intimate partner violence, emphasizes the role of theory in guiding this research, and describes the major strategies and goals for research projects on any topic. Chapter 3 highlights issues of research ethics by reviewing classic studies and contemporary debates and by introducing the institutional review boards that examine the ethics of proposed research.

The three chapters in the second section, "Fundamentals of Social Research," discuss how to evaluate the way researchers develop their concepts and design their measures (Chapter 4), draw their samples and evaluate generalizability (Chapter 5), and design research to test causal hypotheses (Chapter 6). As you learn about these processes, you will also read about research on poverty, trust, gangs, homelessness, and crime. Chapter 6 also serves as a bridge to the next section by introducing experimental methods, a basic research design that focuses attention on tests about cause–effect relationships.

"Basic Social Research Designs," the third section, presents the primary designs used by researchers to collect data about the social world (in addition to experiments): survey research, qualitative methods, and unobtrusive methods. Each chapter presents several different approaches to these basic research designs, so that part of what you will learn is how to select the best possible design for a research question (and how to critique researchers' choices to rely on a particular design). Chapter 7, on survey methods, reviews multiple variable features that shape the success of survey designs, while Chapter 8, on qualitative methods, reviews the logic of qualitative research as well as the different types of participant observation methods and the strategies of intensive interviewing and focus groups. Chapter 9, on unobtrusive methods, presents five different approaches that are all "unobtrusive" but that require very different techniques: unobtrusive measures, secondary data analysis, Big Data analysis, historical and comparative methods, and content analysis. You will learn about research on social trends, disasters, and inequality.

The final section, "Analyzing and Reporting of Social Research," presents the processes required for successful completion of a research project. Chapter 10 gives you a hands-on introduction to analyzing quantitative data, with interesting statistical examples you can carry out on the web. This chapter will also show you exactly what to look for when evaluating basic statistics in research reports. Chapter 11 takes you through the process of analyzing qualitative data and illustrates different approaches, ranging from grounded theory to community-engaged methods. You will also learn about using computer programs for analyzing qualitative data. Chapter 12 finishes up with an overview of the process of writing and organizing journal articles and research reports and a discussion of ethical problems related to social research and reporting.

Distinctive Features of the Second Edition

Understanding the Social World's second edition continues the innovative approach of the first edition, with attention to newly popular research methods, enhanced tools for learning in the text and online, and contemporary, fascinating research findings. Other new features keep *Understanding* on the cutting edge of our rapidly changing social world and the research environment it creates.

- ***Up-to-date coverage of research methods.*** Research methods continue to develop, and new challenges must be overcome as our social world continues to change. The second edition includes new sections on searching the web, systematic literature reviews, unobtrusive measures and combining measurement methods, sampling on the internet, building online panels, and community-engaged

research. Material from eight new SAGE books and many recent articles informs the presentation of new techniques and perspectives.

- ***Timely and engaging research examples.*** Every chapter in the second edition includes a leading example that introduces research focused on an important contemporary social issue. As you learn (or teach) about social research, you will learn about the impact of the internet on social relations, the prevalence of and responses to domestic violence, the results of investigations of research project ethics, the causes of crime, and the effects of inequality. Research on these social issues as well as on disasters, American social trends and urban social processes, and public health programs also helps to demonstrate that the exigencies and complexities of real life shape the motivation for and application of research methods.
- ***Faster pace and smoother organization.*** The second edition focuses more intensely on the basic methods that must be mastered in order to understand the logic and process of social research. The first edition's separate chapter on evaluation research and mixed methods has been dropped, but related content has been added in many other chapters. New sections have been added to almost every chapter, some sections on infrequently used methods have been dropped, and chapters on causation and on qualitative data analysis have been reorganized to aid content mastery.
- ***Research in the News.*** Timely examples of research affecting today's social world are highlighted in each chapter, with links to an article previously published in the popular ***Pacific Standard*** magazine. Questions in the text encourage exploration of study details on the study site.
- ***Careers and Research.*** Each chapter highlights the career of a researcher—a former student like you—who participated in a research project highlighted in that chapter. What better incentive to study hard and master these methods!
- ***Web-based instructional aids.*** The book's study site includes multiple aids to learning, including online articles, videos on key topics, quizzes for self-testing, and questions for discussion with others. Online appendices provide instruction on using SPSS (IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and research resources on the web. It is important to spend enough time with these resources to become comfortable with the basic research concepts presented.

It is a privilege to be able to share with so many students the results of excellent social science investigations of the social world. If *Understanding the Social World, 2nd edition* communicates the excitement of social research and the importance of evaluating carefully the methods we use in that research, then I have succeeded in representing fairly what social scientists do. If this book conveys accurately the latest developments in research methods, it demonstrates that social scientists are themselves committed to evaluating and improving their own methods of investigation. I think it is fair to say that we practice what we preach.

Now you're the judge. I hope that you and your instructor enjoy learning how to understand the social world and perhaps do some investigating along the way. And I hope you find that the knowledge and (dare I say it?) enthusiasm you develop for social research in this course will serve you well throughout your education, in your career, and in your community.

A Note About Statistical Analysis

All you need to carry out the statistical analyses in Chapter 11 and the corresponding exercises is access to the Web. Data sets and interactive programs are available for analyses at the University of California, Berkeley, website (http://sda.berkeley.edu/archive.htm) and at the National Opinion Research Center site (www.norc.uchicago.edu/GSS+Website/).

Ancillaries

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- Open-access **research videos** with accompanying assessment options bring the research process to life
- Open-access **research articles** that have been carefully selected to support and expand on the concepts presented in each chapter

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SECTION I

FOUNDATIONS FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH

CHAPTER 1

SCIENCE, SOCIETY, AND SOCIAL RESEARCH

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe the four common errors in everyday reasoning
- Define social science and identify its limitations
- Identify the four types of social research
- Explain the difference between the orientations in the following two pairs: quantitative/qualitative; positivist/constructivist

"I'll jump online with the people I'm with, just briefly, to get a point across. . . . I never really learned how to do a good job with talking in person." Bree was a college senior in 2014 when she described her use of the internet with friends in this way to sociologist Sherry Turkle (2015:140). Do you use the internet in this way? Do any of your friends? How about Professor Turkle's (2015:212) own MIT students, who told her "they text in all their classes. . . . These students don't feel they can be present unless they are also, in a way, absent. For some, three minutes is too long to go without checking their phones. Some say two minutes is their rule." Does that apply to you? To your classmates? Have your experiences left you feeling that the internet improves or diminishes the quality of social interaction? Do others agree with you about that? Would more government regulation help?

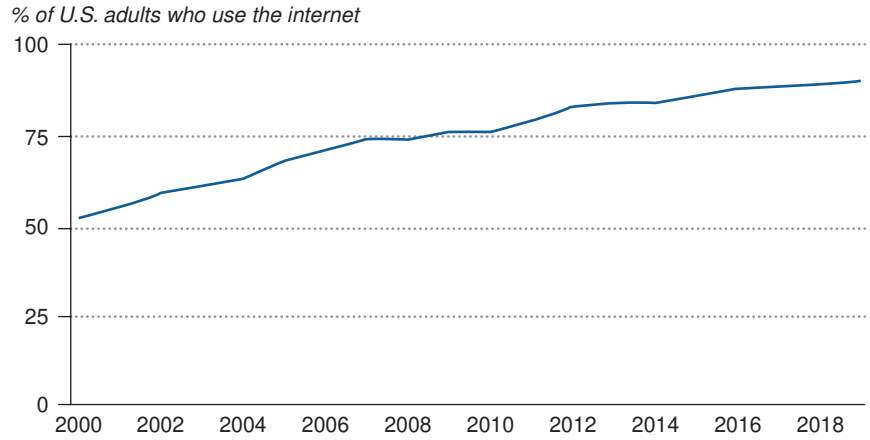
That's where social research begins, with questions about the social world that arise from our own experiences, from previously reported research (like Sherry Turkle's *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*), or from a desire to assess social policies and programs or to make changes to them. Of course, you already know from the books and articles you have been reading in other courses that what social scientists know is based on social research. I'll bet that you also have seen enough changes in the internet in your own lifetime—to use just one example—to know that the job of social research is never finished. In order to understand the ever-changing social world, we need to keep studying it. But now it's time to take the next step: to learn how social research differs from other ways of understanding the social world, to consider the advantages of this approach to understanding, and to compare the strengths and weaknesses of particular research methods. By the time you finish this book (with your professor's guidance 😉), you will know more when you read social research results, you will be able to contribute more to social research projects, and you will also understand more—and have more questions—about the social world.

Consider the internet itself. This aspect of our social world didn't even exist for most people before the 1990s, but by 2018, nine in ten American adults used the internet—including 98% of those 18 to 29 (but only two-thirds of those 65 and older) see exhibit 1.1. One-quarter of U.S. adults said they were almost constantly online (Pew Research Center 2019a, https://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/internet-broadband/ 6/9/2019), while more than two-thirds use social media (Facebook is most popular) and about three-quarters use YouTube (Pew Research Center 2019b, https://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/). A total of 4,383,81 persons used the internet around the world in May 2019, although that represented only 57% of the world's population, with the lowest level of internet penetration only 37% in Africa (6/9/2019, https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm).

So when we talk about our social world, the internet must be part of the conversation, but even that part quickly generates more questions than we can hope to answer without social research: How does internet use vary across social groups? What are different ways people use the internet? What are the social consequences of internet use?

▼ EXHIBIT 1.1

Internet Use Over Time



Pew Research Center, JUNE 12, 2019, "Internet/Broadband Fact Sheet", https://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/internet-broadband/.

This chapter gives special attention to questions about internet use, social networking services, and social ties, but its goal is to illustrate the value of social research and introduce the methods of social research in relation to a compelling contemporary issue. We cannot avoid asking questions about our complex social world or our position in it. In fact, the more you begin to "think like a social scientist," the more such questions will come to mind—and that's a good thing! But it is through learning how answers to questions about the social world can be improved with systematic methods of investigation that we can move beyond first impressions and gut reactions. The use of research methods to investigate questions about the social world results in knowledge that can be more important, more trustworthy, and more useful than reliance just on personal opinions and individual experiences. You will also learn about the challenges that researchers confront. By the chapter's end, you should know what is "scientific" in social science and appreciate how the methods of science can help us understand the problems of society.

The Value of Social Research

As you begin this book, you might wonder whether learning about social research methods is worth the effort. It is if you would like to do as well as possible in your other social science courses; if you want to maximize your career opportunities; and if you care about the community you live in, the schools your children may attend, and the direction of the nation. In courses ranging from the sociology of gender to the politics of communication, you will read about social research results and so need to know how to assess the quality of the evidence produced. Almost any organization for which you might work, from a government agency or a nonprofit organization to a private employer, conducts or at least uses social research methods to evaluate programs, identify client needs, or assess customer satisfaction. If you plan to work as a program director, social service worker, or in almost any other capacity, your ability to understand social research will help you to evaluate information and make decisions; of course, it is also a necessary foundation for graduate school. And there can be even more direct benefits if you take advantage of

one of the many job opportunities in social science research at one of the hundreds of organizations that evaluate and help to advance social policy, such as the RAND Corporation, the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), the Institute for Social Research (ISR), Mathematica, and ABT Associates (Prewitt, Schwandt, & Straf 2012:28). As you will see in the "Careers and Research" vignettes throughout *Understanding the Social World*, there are many opportunities to enhance your job prospects if you understand social research methods.

The U.S. federal government spent about $2.79 billion on social science research at higher education institutions (including psychology, anthropology, and economics) in fiscal year 2017, with about $552 million of that total in sociology, demography, and population studies (Gibbons 2018: table 3; https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2019/nsf19302/). The results have included programs to increase voter turnout, reduce violence in communities, lessen smoking and hence rates of lung cancer, improve the health and well-being of infants, and lower rates of domestic violence. From wellness visits by teen mothers to community-based policing, social science research has helped to improve social welfare (Abrams 2007:2–4; NIH n.d.). By learning the methods used in this type of research, you can begin to evaluate its quality and help to shape its impact. Are you ready to proceed?

Avoiding Errors in Reasoning About the Social World

How can we improve our reasoning about the social world? How do social research methods help us to avoid errors rooted in personal experiences? First, let's identify the different processes involved in learning about the social world and the types of errors that can result as we reason about the social world.

When we learn about the social world, we engage in one or more of four processes: (1) "*observing*" through our five senses (seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, or smelling); (2) *generalizing* from what we have observed to other times, places, or people; (3) *reasoning* about the connections between different things that we have observed; and (4) *reevaluating* our understanding of the social world on the basis of these processes. It is easy to make mistakes with each of them.

My favorite example of the errors in reasoning that occur in the nonscientific, unreflective discourse about the social world that we hear on a daily basis comes from a letter to famous advice columnist Ann Landers. The letter was written by someone who had just moved with her two cats from the city to a house in the country. In the city, she had not let her cats outside and felt guilty about confining them. When they arrived in the country, she threw her back door open. Her two cats cautiously went to the door and looked outside for a while then returned to the living room and lay down. Her conclusion was that people shouldn't feel guilty about keeping their cats indoors. Even when they have the chance, cats don't really want to play outside, she reasoned.

Do you see this person's errors in her approach to

- *Observing?* She observed the cats at the outside door only once.
- *Generalizing?* She observed only two cats, both of which previously were confined indoors.
- *Reasoning?* She assumed that others feel guilty about keeping their cats indoors and that cats are motivated by feelings about opportunities to play.
- *Reevaluating?* She was quick to conclude that she had no need to change her approach to the cats.

Photo 1.1 What could the woman with the cats have done to avoid the four errors in reasoning?
©iStockphoto.com/w-ings

You don't have to be a scientist or use sophisticated research techniques to avoid these four errors in reasoning, but the methods of social science are designed to reduce greatly the risk of making them. **Science** relies on logical and systematic methods to answer questions. Science does this in a way that allows others to inspect and evaluate its methods. In this way, scientific research develops a body of knowledge that is continually refined, as beliefs are rejected or confirmed on the basis of testing empirical evidence. **Social science** relies on scientific methods to investigate individuals, societies, and social processes. Although the activities involved in social science methods—asking questions, observing social groups, or counting people—are similar to things we do in our everyday lives, social scientists develop, refine, apply, and report their understanding of the social world more systematically, or "scientifically," than does Joanna Q. Public.

Observing

One common mistake in learning about the social world is **selective observation**—choosing to look only at things that are in line with our preferences or beliefs. When we are inclined to criticize individuals or institutions, it is all too easy to notice their every failure. For example, if we are convinced in advance that all heavy internet users are antisocial, we can find many confirming instances. But what about elderly people who serve as internet pen pals for grade-school children? Couples who maintain their relationships when working in faraway cities? If we acknowledge only the instances that confirm our predispositions, we are victims of our own selective observation.

British internet researcher Gina Neff has observed both positive and negative effects:

> *"Apps and websites cannot replace the communities that have always connected and supported us, but they can help diverse and dispersed groups coordinate care in unprecedented ways."*
>
> —Gina Neff, Associate Professor and Senior Research Fellow at the Oxford Internet Institute

Source: Pew Research Center https://www.pewinternet.org/2018/07/03/shareable-quotes-from-experts-about-the-impact-of-digital-life/.

Science: A set of logical, systematic, documented methods for investigating nature and natural processes; the knowledge produced by these investigations.

Social science: The use of scientific methods to investigate individuals, societies, and social processes; the knowledge produced by these investigations.

Selective observation: Choosing to look only at things that are in line with our preferences or beliefs.

Inaccurate observation: An observation based on faulty perceptions of empirical reality.

Our observations can also simply be inaccurate. If, after a quick glance around the computer lab, you think there are 14 students present, when there are actually 17, you have made an **inaccurate observation**. If you hear a speaker say that "for the oppressed, the flogging never really stops," when what she said was, "For the obsessed, the blogging never really stops" (Hafner 2004), you have made an inaccurate observation.

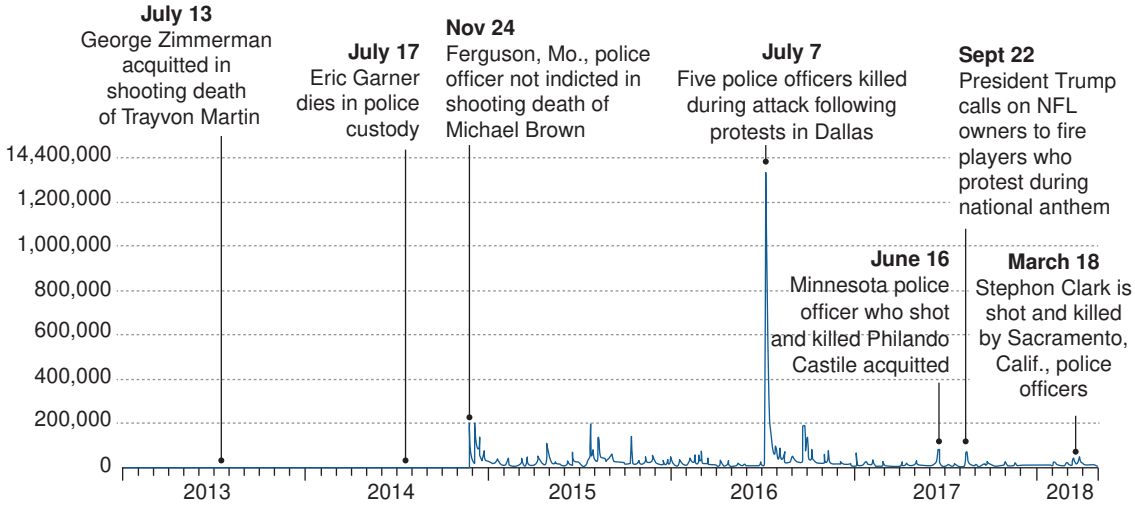
Such errors occur often in casual conversation and in everyday observation of the world around us. In fact, our perceptions do not provide a direct window onto the world around us, for what we think we have sensed is not necessarily what we have seen (or heard, smelled, felt, or tasted). Even when our senses are functioning fully, our minds have to interpret what we have sensed (Humphrey 1992). The optical illusion in Photo 1.2,

▼ EXHIBIT 1.2

Twitter Posts Mentioning #BlackLivesMatter Over Time

Use of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag on Twitter periodically spikes in response to major news events

Number of Twitter posts mentioning the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, Jan.1, 2013–May 1, 2018



Pew Research Center, July 2018, "Activism in the Social Media Age", https://www.pewinternet.org/2018/07/11/activism-in-the-social-media-age/pi_2018-07-10_social-activism_0-01/.

which comes from a JCPenney billboard that could be seen as either a teakettle or a saluting Adolf Hitler, should help you realize that perceptions involve interpretations. Different observers may perceive the same situation differently because they interpret it differently (so JCPenney quickly took down the billboard after complaints).

Social science methods can reduce the risk of selective or inaccurate observation by requiring that we measure and sample phenomena systematically. For example, what role has social media played in the 21st-century movement arising in the wake of highly publicized police killings of black civilians known as Black Lives Matter? It's easy to make up a "story" based on some messages sent by participants, but did this really involve lots of people? In the study of the role of social media in the Black Lives Matter movement highlighted in Exhibit 1.2, a Pew Research Center analysis finds there were almost 30 million tweets of the BLM hashtag by May 1, 2018—about 17,002 per day, but spiking in days after police-related deaths. They also reported that black Americans felt more positive than white Americans about the value of social media for promoting important issues or giving underrepresented groups a voice, based on a survey of 4,594 U.S. adults between May 29 and June 11, 2018.

Generalizing

Overgeneralization occurs when we conclude that what we have observed or what we know to be true for some cases is true for all or most cases (Exhibit 1.3). We are always drawing conclusions about people and society from our own interactions, but sometimes we forget that our experiences are limited. The social world is, after all, a complex place. We can interact with just a small fraction of individuals in the social world, and we may do so in a limited span of time. Lara Aknin, Michael Northom, and Elizabeth Dunn (2009) demonstrated considerable overgeneralization in Americans' beliefs about money buying

Overgeneralization: Concluding unjustifiably that what is true for some cases is true for all cases.

Photo 1.2 An optical illusion: What do you see?
FREDERIC J. BROWN/AFP/Getty Images

happiness. People tended to think that more money would increase happiness much more among those with less income than themselves than it actually did. Do you ever find yourself making a quick overgeneralization like that?

Social science research methods can reduce the likelihood of overgeneralization by using systematic procedures to select individuals, groups, events, messages or other units of interest. We can then be more confident in our generalizations. For example, rather than receiving money, giving money to others—particularly to those you care about—increased happiness for most people (Aknin et al. 2013; 2019). Jean Twenge (2019) identified increasing time spent on the internet as a likely factor in this decline (Exhibit 1.4).

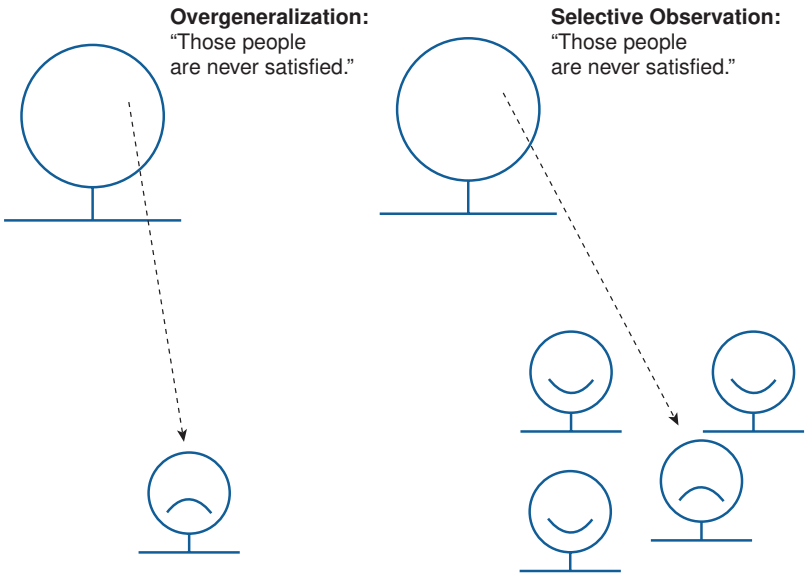
Reasoning

When we jump to conclusions or argue on the basis of invalid assumptions, we are using **illogical reasoning**. It is not always so easy to spot illogical reasoning. For example, would it be reasonable to propose that the 10% of U.S. adults who don't participate in the "information revolution" avoid the internet simply because they don't want to participate? In fact, the rate of internet use falls off sharply for households with less than $30,000 in income and for those in rural areas, suggesting they lack the financial resources to buy a computer or pay for an internet connection or do not have a high-speed connection; that's probably not because they don't want to use it (https://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/internet-broadband/; income chart, community chart). Conversely, an unquestioned assumption that everyone wants to connect to the internet may overlook some important considerations; for example, one-third of nonusers of the internet in 2013 said they had

Illogical reasoning: Jumping to conclusions or arguing on the basis of invalid assumptions.

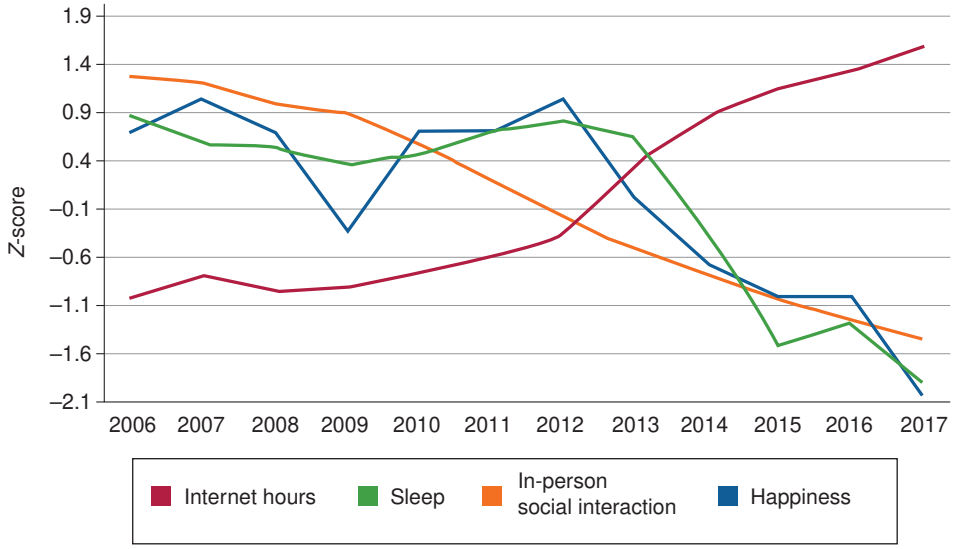
▼ EXHIBIT 1.3

The Difference Between Selective Observation and Overgeneralization



▼ EXHIBIT 1.4

Time Spent on the Internet, Sleeping More Than 7 Hours a Night Most Nights, Frequency of In-person Social Interaction Across 7 Activities, and General Happiness, Standardized (*Z*) Scores, 8th and 10th Graders, Monitoring the Future, 2006–2017



Helliwell, J., Layard, R., & Sachs, J. (2019). World Happiness Report 2019, New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

no interest in it or thought it was irrelevant to their lives (Andersen et al. 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/22/some-americans-dont-use-the-internet-who-are-they/). Logic that seems impeccable to one person can seem twisted to another.

To avoid illogical reasoning, social researchers use explicit criteria for describing events and identifying causes and for determining whether these criteria are met in a particular instance.

Reevaluating

Resistance to change, the reluctance to reevaluate our ideas in light of new information, may occur for several reasons:

- *Ego-based and institutional commitments.* We all learn to greet with some skepticism the claims by leaders of companies, schools, agencies, and so on that people in their organization are happy, that revenues are growing, and that services are being delivered in the best possible way. We know how tempting it is to make statements about the social world that conform to our own needs or the needs of our employers rather than to the observable facts. It can also be difficult to admit that we were wrong once we have staked out a position on an issue. Barry Wellman recounts a call from a reporter after the death of what he believed were four "cyber addicts" (Boase, Horrigan, Wellman, & Rainie 2006:1). The reporter just wanted a quote from a computer-use expert, such as Wellman, that would affirm his belief. But the interview didn't last long: The reporter lost interest when Wellman pointed out that other causes might be involved, that "addicts" were a low percentage of users, and that no one worries about "neighboring addicts" who chat daily in their front yards. (Boase et al. 2006:1)

Resistance to change: The reluctance to reevaluate our ideas in light of new information.

RESEARCH IN THE NEWS

SOCIAL MEDIA USE IS LINKED TO A FEAR OF CRIME

Previous research indicated that people who watch more TV tend to be more afraid of crime. That's not entirely surprising, given all the dramas and news reports that focus on crime. But what about time spent on social media? Recent research by Jonathan Intravia, Rocio Paez, and Benjamin Gibbs at Ball State University in Indiana and Kevin Wolff at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice (2017) finds that young people (college students at three universities) were more fearful of crime if they spent more time on social media.

Are you surprised? Perhaps you were thinking that, of course, people who are more fearful of crime will also watch more crime stories on any medium. But it turns out that fear of crime wasn't associated with watching more crime stories on social media; it was using more social media itself that made a difference. Are you convinced? The findings were not limited to one region of the country, since the researchers sampled students at universities in the Midwest, South, and Northeast. The findings also did not seem to reflect more experience with crime, since the link between social media use and fear of crime was strongest for those who lived in more safe neighborhoods. Tom Jacobs, *Pacific Standard*'s writer, speculated that the intertwining of important news with trivia on social media sites creates an impression that the world is disordered and so perhaps more crime prone.

For Further Thought?

1. Media images as well as personal experiences have always influenced popular understanding of the social world. Do social media take this process of media influence to a whole new level?
2. What are the consequences for our everyday lives?
3. After reading this story, what related question would you like to study with research methods in the social world?

Jacobs, Tom. 2017. "Social Media Use Is Linked to a Fear of Crime." *Pacific Standard Magazine,* December 15. Retrieved from https://psmag.com/news/social-media-use-is-linked-to-a-fear-of-crime.

- *Excessive devotion to tradition.* Some degree of devotion to tradition is necessary for the predictable functioning of society. Social life can be richer and more meaningful if it is allowed to flow along the paths charted by those who have preceded us. But too much devotion to tradition can stifle adaptation to and understanding of changing circumstances.
- *Uncritical agreement with authority.* If we do not have the courage to evaluate critically the ideas of those in positions of authority, we will have little basis for complaint if they exercise their authority over us in ways we don't like. And if we do not allow new discoveries to challenge our beliefs, our understanding of the social world will remain limited. Do you see some of the challenges social science faces?

The Internet

Because they require that we base our beliefs on evidence that can be examined and critiqued by others, scientific methods lessen the tendency to develop answers about the social world from ego-based or institutional commitments, excessive devotion to tradition, or unquestioning respect for authority. For example, when Alice Marwick and danah boyd investigated what adults usually refer to as "bullying" on social media, they found that teens themselves often instead used the term *drama* as a way of distancing themselves from the concept of bullying. According to the researchers, "'drama' connotes something

immature, petty, and ridiculous," even though the communications themselves may be quite hurtful. Marwick and boyd did not accept without question either the adult concept of bullying or the teen concept of drama as the appropriate way to think about the gossip, jokes, and arguments on social media. Instead, they examined these communications critically and so were able "to recognize teens' own defenses against the realities of aggression, gossip, and bullying in networked publics" (Marwick & boyd 2011:23).

Photo 1.3 Would this teen say that she is being bullied? Or would she say it's just drama?
©iStockphoto.com/SolStock

Types of Social Research

Whatever the motives, there are four types of social research projects. This section illustrates each type with examples from the large body of research about various aspects of social ties.

Descriptive Research

Defining and describing social phenomena of interest is a part of almost any research investigation, but **descriptive research** is often the primary focus of the first research about some issue. For example, Monica Anderson, Andrew Perrin, Jingjing Jiang, and Madhumitha Kumar (2019) at the Pew Research Center designed social research to answer the descriptive questions: How has internet use changed over time in the United States, and who still doesn't use the internet? Measurement (the topic of Chapter 4) and sampling (Chapter 5) are central concerns in descriptive research. Survey research (Chapter 7) is often used for descriptive purposes. Some unobtrusive research also has a descriptive purpose (Chapter 9).

Example: Nonuse of the internet

The Pew Research Center survey of internet use demonstrated a marked decline in the percentage of Americans who say they never go online over the last two decades. To investigate this issue, Pew researchers combined data from 102 surveys they had conducted since 2000, involving 237,421 American adults (Pew Research Center 2019c, https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/FT_19.04.22_NonInternetUsers_Methods.pdf.

While in 2000, almost half of U.S. adults never used the internet, by 2017, nonuse dropped to 10 percent (see Exhibit 1.5; Anderson et al. 2019). They also found that nonusers were more likely to be black and Hispanic than white, to be older, and to have low incomes, less education, and rural residence.

Descriptive research: Research in which social phenomena are defined and described.

Exploratory Research

Exploratory research seeks to find out how people get along in the setting under question, what meanings they give to their actions, and what issues concern them. The goal is to learn "What is going on here?" and to investigate social phenomena without explicit expectations. Exploratory research frequently involves qualitative methods, which are the focus of Chapters 8 and 12.

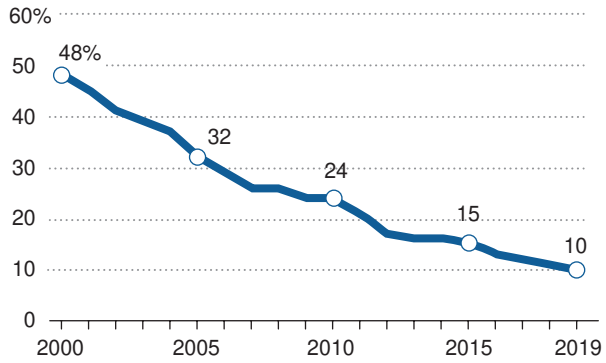
Exploratory research: Seeks to find out how people get along in the setting under question, what meanings they give to their actions, and what issues concern them.

▼ EXHIBIT 1.5

The Decline in Nonuse of the Internet

Population not online has declined substantially since 2000

% of U.S. adults who say they do not use the internet



Source: Pew Research Center. 2019. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/22/some-americans-dont-use-the-internet-who-are-they/.

Example: How do child sex offenders perceive their actions on the internet?

Reyerson University anthropologist Jonah R. Rimer (2017) was concerned by the prevalence of online child sexual exploitation and wondered how offenders perceived their actions and the internet as a medium. For his investigation, he participated for 17 months in UK group programs for offenders and interviewed participants and program staff. When he explored the comments, he identified many that pointed to a view of the online environment as lacking the boundaries and observation that normally reinforces social norms. For example, one offender explained, "it was a solitary activity, I only did this when my wife wasn't in the house, because being at home on my own, off sick, depressed… fed up with watching daytime TV, I'd go online." (p. 39)

Explanatory Research

Explanatory research seeks to identify the causes and effects of social phenomena and to predict how one phenomenon will change or vary in response to variation in some other phenomenon. Internet researchers adopt explanation as a goal when they ask such questions as whether media exposure influences attitudes about social issues and whether this influence varies by type of media (Simmons 2017). Chapter 6 focuses on the meaning of causation and how to identify causal effects with experimental methods; Chapter 7 addresses this issue in relation to survey methods.

Example: What effect do media news sources have on punitiveness?

Alicia D. Simmons (2017) at Colgate University sought to understand how exposure to different types of media influences affected support for punitive criminal justice policies. For this purpose, she analyzed data from 1,288 white, black, and Hispanic respondents to the internet-based Race Cues, Attitudes, and Punitiveness Survey (RCAPS) conducted in July 2009. Simmons (2017) found that punitiveness tended to increase with media exposure, but among white respondents, this effect was much stronger the lower the crime rate in their own area (see Exhibit 1.6).

In terms of type of media, watching more local TV news was associated with more punitive attitudes, reading the newspaper with less punitive attitudes, and relying on the internet for news was not associated with overall support for punitiveness. However, more conservative respondents who relied more on the internet for news were more punitive (presumably, they picked more conservative internet sites as their news sources).

Explanatory research: Seeks to identify causes and effects of social phenomena and to predict how one phenomenon will change or vary in response to variation in some other phenomenon.

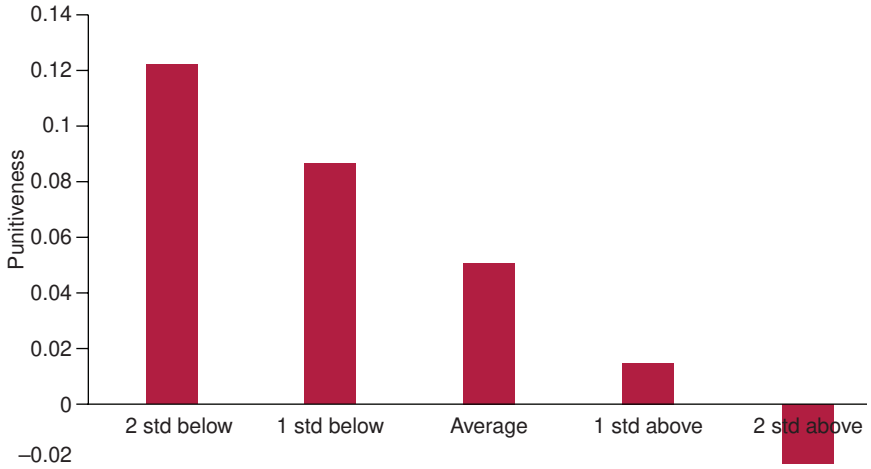
Evaluation research: Research that describes or identifies the impact of social policies and programs.

Evaluation Research

Evaluation research examines programs, policies, or other efforts to affect social patterns, whether by government agencies, private nonprofits, or for-profit businesses.

▼ EXHIBIT 1.6

Relationship Between an Average Amount of Local News Viewership and Whites' Punitiveness Across Index Crime Rates



Source: Alicia D. Simmons, 2017. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press .

Evaluation can include elements of descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory research. The focus of evaluation research on programs, policies, and other conscious efforts to create change raises some issues that are not relevant in other types of research (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao 2004:337).

Example: Does avatar-assisted therapy improve the treatment of substance use disorders?

Michael S. Gordon and his colleagues (2017) in Baltimore at the Friends Research Institute developed an avatar-assisted therapy program to aid in providing treatment to individuals with substance use disorders who could not come to the clinic for treatment. They then needed to test its effect. Of 78 outpatients seeking treatment for substance abuse who they screened, 62 were identified as eligible and participated in the research. Those who completed the avatar-based program attended more treatment sessions and were less likely to have a positive urine drug screen than those who did not complete it. Avatar-assisted therapy seemed to help.

Quantitative and/or Qualitative Methods

Did you notice the difference between the types of data used in the studies? The primary data used in the descriptive surveys about internet use were counts of the number of users, as well as their age, education, and other characteristics (Anderson et al. 2019). These data were numerical, so we say that this study used **quantitative methods**. Data analyzed by Alicia Simmons (2017) in her explanatory study of punitive attitudes and by Michael Gordon's group (2017) in the avatar-assisted therapy evaluation study were also quantitative. In contrast, Jonah Rimer (2017) interviewed in depth internet sex offenders in a treatment program. Because he recorded the text of the interviews and did not attempt to quantify what respondents said, we say that Rimer (2017) used **qualitative methods**.

Quantitative methods: Methods such as surveys and experiments that record variation in terms of amounts. Data that are treated as quantitative are either numbers or attributes that can be ordered by magnitude.

Qualitative methods: Methods such as participant observation, intensive interviewing, and focus groups that are designed to capture social life as participants experience it rather than in categories predetermined by the researcher. These methods rely on written or spoken words or observations that do not often have a direct numerical interpretation and typically involve exploratory research questions, an orientation to social context and human subjectivity, and the meanings attached by participants to events and to their lives.

CAREERS AND RESEARCH

JESSICA LEBLANC, RESEARCH ASSISTANT

Jessica LeBlanc majored in sociology at the University of New Hampshire, but she didn't really know what kind of career it would lead to. Then she took an undergraduate statistics course and found she really enjoyed it. She took additional methods courses—survey research and an individual research project course—and really liked those also.

By the time she graduated, LeBlanc knew she wanted a job in social research. She looked online for research positions in marketing, health care, and other areas. She noticed an opening at a university-based research center and thought their work sounded fascinating. As a research assistant, LeBlanc designed survey questions, transcribed focus group audiotapes, programmed web surveys, and managed incoming data. She also conducted interviews, programmed computer-assisted telephone surveys, and helped conduct focus groups.

The knowledge that LeBlanc gained in her methods courses about research designs, statistics, question construction, and survey procedures prepared her well for her position. Her advice to aspiring researchers: Pay attention in your first methods class!

The distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods involves more than just the type of data collected. Quantitative methods are most often used when the motives for research are explanation, description, or evaluation. Quantitative researchers are often guided by a positivist philosophy. **Positivism** asserts that a well-designed test of a specific prediction—for example, the prediction that social ties decrease among those who use the internet more—can move us closer to understanding actual social processes. Research guided by positivism presumes that our perceptions and understanding of the social world can be distorted by errors like those discussed in this chapter, but scientific methods can help us to see and understand reality more clearly.

Positivism: The belief, shared by most scientists, that there is a reality that exists quite apart from our own perception of it, that it can be understood through observation, and that it follows general laws.

Exploration is more often the motive for using qualitative methods, although researchers also use these methods for descriptive, explanatory, and evaluative purposes. Qualitative research is often guided by the philosophy of **constructivism**. Constructivist social scientists believe that social reality is socially constructed and that the goal of social scientists is to understand what meanings people give to reality, not to determine how reality works apart from these constructions. This philosophy rejects the positivist belief that there is a concrete, objective reality that scientific methods help us understand (Lynch & Bogen 1997); instead, constructivists believe that people construct an image of reality based on their own preferences and prejudices and their interactions with others and that this is as true of scientists as it is of everyone else in the social world.

Constructivism: Methodology based on questioning belief in an external reality; emphasizes the importance of exploring the way in which different stakeholders in a social setting construct their beliefs.

Chapters 2 and 3 highlight several other differences between quantitative and qualitative methods, and Chapters 8 and 12 present qualitative methods in much more detail.

Important as it is, the distinction between quantitative and qualitative orientations or methods shouldn't be overemphasized. Social scientists often combine these methods to enrich their research (Campbell & Russo 1999:141).

The use of multiple methods to study one research question is called **triangulation**. The term suggests that a researcher can get a clearer picture of the social reality being studied by viewing it from several different perspectives. Each will have some liabilities in a specific research application, and all can benefit from a combination of one or more other methods (Brewer & Hunter 1989; Sechrest & Sidani 1995).

The distinction between quantitative and qualitative data is not always sharp. Qualitative data can be converted to quantitative data, for example, when we count the frequency of particular words or phrases in a text or measure the time elapsed between different observed behaviors. Surveys that collect primarily quantitative data may also include questions asking for written responses, and these responses may be used in a qualitative, textual analysis. Qualitative researchers may test explicit explanations of social phenomena using textual or observational data.

Conclusions

I hope this first chapter has given you an idea of what to expect from the rest of the book. The aim is to introduce you to social research methods by describing what social scientists have learned about the social world as well as how they have learned it. The substance of social science is inevitably more interesting than its methods, but the methods become more interesting when they're linked to examples from substantive investigations.

Understanding the Social World is organized into four sections. The first section on Foundations for Social Research includes the introduction in Chapter 1 and then an overview of the research process in Chapter 2 and an introduction to issues in research ethics and an overview of research proposals in Chapter 3. The second section, Fundamentals of Social Research, presents methods for conceptualization and measurement (Chapter 4), sampling (Chapter 5), and causation (Chapter 6) that must be considered in any social research project. The third section, Social Research Designs, introduces the major methods of data collection used by sociologists: survey research (Chapter 7), qualitative methods (Chapter 8), and unobtrusive methods ranging from historical and comparative methods to secondary data analysis (Chapter 9). The last section, Analyzing and Reporting, introduces techniques for analyzing quantitative data with statistics (Chapter 10) and analyzing qualitative data with a variety of techniques (Chapter 11), as well as guidelines for evaluating research reports (Chapter 12).

Each chapter ends with several helpful learning tools. Lists of key terms and chapter highlights will help you review the ideas that have been discussed. Chapter questions and practice exercises will help you apply and deepen your knowledge. A "Careers and Research" example may help you envision future job possibilities, and a "Research in the News" vignette in each chapter will tie research methods to current events.

The study site for this book on the SAGE website provides interactive exercises and quizzes for reviewing key concepts, as well as research articles to review, websites to visit, data to analyze, and short lectures to hear. Check it out at edge.sagepub.com/schuttusw2e.

Triangulation: The use of multiple methods to study one research question; also used to mean the use of two or more different measures of the same variable.

KEY TERMS

Constructivism **14**
Descriptive research **11**
Evaluation research **12**
Explanatory research **12**
Exploratory research **11**
Illogical reasoning **8**
Inaccurate observation **6**
Overgeneralization **7**
Positivism **14**
Qualitative methods **13**
Quantitative methods **13**
Resistance to change **9**
Science **6**
Selective observation **6**
Social science **6**
Triangulation **15**

HIGHLIGHTS

- Social research differs from the ordinary process of thinking about our experiences by focusing on broader questions that involve people outside our immediate experience and issues about why things happen and by using systematic research methods to answer those questions. Four common errors in reasoning are (1) selective or inaccurate observation, (2) overgeneralization, (3) illogical reasoning, and (4) resistance to change. These errors result from the complexity of the social world, subjective processes that affect the reasoning of researchers and those they study, researchers' self-interestedness, and unquestioning acceptance of tradition or of those in positions of authority.
- Social science is the use of logical, systematic, documented methods to investigate individuals, societies, and social processes, as well as the knowledge produced by these investigations.
- Social research can be descriptive, exploratory, explanatory, or evaluative—or some combination of these.
- Quantitative and qualitative methods structure research in different ways and are differentially appropriate for diverse research situations. They may be combined in research projects.
- Positivism is a research philosophy that emphasizes the goal of understanding the real world; this philosophy guides most quantitative researchers.
- Constructivism is a research philosophy that emphasizes the importance of exploring and representing the ways in which different stakeholders in a social setting construct their beliefs. Constructivists interact with research subjects to develop a shared perspective on the issue being studied.

CHAPTER QUESTIONS

The ethical challenges that arise in social research are discussed throughout the book. At the end of each chapter, one of the questions you are asked to consider may be about ethical issues related to that chapter's focus. This critical topic is introduced formally in Chapter 3, but let's begin here with a few questions for you to ponder:

1. The chapter refers to research on social isolation. What would *you* do if you were interviewing elderly persons in the community and found that one was very isolated and depressed or even suicidal, apparently as a result of his or her isolation? Do you believe that social researchers have an obligation to take action in a situation like this? What if you discovered a similar problem with a child? What guidelines would you suggest for researchers?
2. Pick a contemporary social issue of interest to you. Describe different approaches to research on this issue that would involve descriptive, exploratory, explanatory, and evaluative approaches.
3. Review the description of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Which approach do you prefer, and what is the basis of your preference? Would you prefer to take a mixed-methods approach? Why or why not?

PRACTICE EXERCISES

1. Review the "Letters to the Editor" section of a local newspaper. Which errors in reasoning do you find? What evidence would be needed to correct these errors?
2. Review "Types of Research" from the Interactive Exercises link on the book's study site. To use these lessons, choose one of the four "Types of Research" exercises from the opening menu. About 10 questions are presented in each version of the lesson. After reading each question, choose one answer from the list presented. The program will evaluate your answers. If an answer is correct, the program will explain why you were right and go on to the next question. If you have made an error, the program will explain the error to you and give you another chance to respond.
3. Scan the articles on the book's study site for this chapter. Classify the research represented in each article as primarily descriptive, exploratory, explanatory, or evaluative. Describe the evidence for your classification (even if the abstract mentions the type of research, look for other evidence). If more than one type of research is represented in an article, also mention that type.
4. Now read one of the articles in detail and decide whether the approach was quantitative or qualitative (or mixed) and whether the authors were guided primarily by a positivist or a constructivist philosophy. Explain your answer.

STUDENT RESOURCES

SAGE edge™

The student resource site, available at **edge.sagepub.com/schuttusw2e** offers useful study materials, such as eFlashcards, eQuizzes, and curated research articles.

CHAPTER 2

THE PROCESS AND PROBLEMS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Name the three characteristics of a good research question
- Discuss the role of theory in social research
- Demonstrate how to search and review the research literature
- Develop a strategy for searching the web
- Describe three key social research strategies and when they are best used
- Name and illustrate the three different longitudinal designs
- Define the standards of measurement validity, generalizability, causal validity, and authenticity

About 30% of women worldwide who have ever had an intimate partner have experienced **intimate partner violence (IPV)**, with prevalence in different global regions ranging from 23% to 38% (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2013:16-17;Yakubovich 2018). An extensive body of research (reflected in more than 16,800 articles) has identified an unplanned pregnancy and parents with less than a high school education as increasing risk and older age and being married as reducing risk, but fewer studies have evaluated the influence of criminal justice policies on IPV (Yakubovich et al. 2018). One policy that became the focus of a remarkable series of experiments is the nature of the police response to IPV.

In 1981, the Police Foundation in the United States and the Minneapolis Police Department began an experiment to determine whether arresting accused spouse abusers on the spot would deter repeat incidents. The study's results, which were publicized widely, indicated that arrests did have a deterrent effect. Partly as a result, the percentage of urban police departments that made arrest the preferred response to complaints of domestic violence rose from 10% in 1984 to 90% in 1988 (Sherman 1992:14). Researchers in six other cities then conducted similar experiments to determine whether changing the location or other research procedures would result in different outcomes (Sherman 1992; Sherman & Berk 1984).

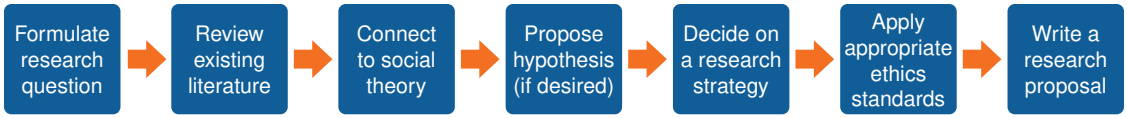
The Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment, the additional research inspired by it, and the controversies arising from it provide examples for our systematic overview of the social research process. Although the original Minneapolis experiment occurred decades ago, that in itself makes an important point about social research: No single study can be considered to provide the definitive answer to a research question, and every study generates additional questions that require more research. Social research is an ongoing process of testing propositions, refining knowledge, exploring new ideas, and adapting to changes, all the while enriching our understanding of the social world.

This chapter shifts from examining *why* social research is conducted to *how* it is carried out—the focus of the rest of the book. The chapter considers how questions for social research are developed, how the existing literature about research questions can be located, and how it should be reviewed. It also looks at how research questions can be connected to social theory and then expressed as testable hypotheses (Exhibit 2.1). Finally, the chapter discusses different social research strategies and standards for social research as a prelude to subsequent chapters. Appendices A and B contain more details related to reviewing the literature.

Intimate partner violence (IPV): Violence within an intimate relationship that can be physical, psychological, or sexual.

▼ EXHIBIT 2.1

Launching a Research Project



Social Research Questions

Social research begins with a question about the social world that a researcher seeks to answer through the collection and analysis of firsthand, verifiable, empirical data. It is not a question about who did what to whom but a question about people in groups, about general social processes, or about tendencies in community change such as the following: What distinguishes internet users from other persons? How has the level of social inequality changed over time? What influences the likelihood of spouse abuse?

Researchers may decide to focus on a particular **social research question** as a result of reading a research article, because of their personal experiences with the issue, or for any of several reasons. Most research projects focus on questions that arose in previous research. For example, after 30 years of efforts "to enhance policy and [criminal justice system] responses and interventions to IPV," Canadian social researchers Betty Jo Barrett, Amy Peirone, and Chi Ho Cheung (2019) asked whether victims of spousal violence differed from others in their perceptions of and confidence in police. Limited prior research in Canada had not provided a clear answer. Other social research questions may reflect a researcher's personal experiences—"personal troubles"—as C. Wright Mills (1959) put it. Social researchers may also want to help figure out how to lessen the harmful impact of a social problem.

Social research questions should be feasible, socially important, and scientifically relevant (King, Keohane, & Verba 1994). Any study must be possible within the time and resources available, so questions that involve long-term change, a large population, or secretive groups may not be feasible unless substantial funds or special access has been obtained. For research undertakings that are more than a class exercise, the research question should be important to other people and society. A research question meets the criterion of scientific relevance if it focuses on issues that have not been resolved by research already reported in the social science literature.

Social Research Preparation

Once they have formulated a research question, and sometimes even before that question has been settled, social researchers search the literature to find other research focused on the same or related research questions and to determine what can be learned from the methods and findings of these previous studies. Conducting a thorough search of the related research literature is also an essential foundation for evaluating the contribution made by a particular research article or research project.

Social research question: A question about the social world that is answered through the collection and analysis of firsthand, verifiable, empirical data.

Searching the Literature

The primary goal in searching the literature is to find reports of prior research investigations about the research question of interest. Focus on reports in scholarly journals—*refereed*

Photo 2.1 What research question would you ask about IPV?
©iStockphoto.com/Geber86

journals that publish *peer-reviewed articles*—because they have been screened for quality through critique by other social scientists before publication. Most often, editors of refereed journals send articles that authors submit to three or more other social scientists for anonymous review. Based on the reviewers' comments, the journal editor then decides whether to accept or reject the article or to invite the author to "revise and resubmit." This process results in the rejection of articles with major flaws and many improvements in most of the rest. You still have to make your own judgment about article quality, since journals vary in the rigor of their review standards, and, of course, different reviewers may be impressed by different types of articles.

Most articles published in academic journals will be available to you online only if you go through the website of your college or university library. The library pays a fee to companies that provide online journals so that you can retrieve this information without paying anything extra yourself. Since no library can afford to pay for every journal, you may still have to order some of the articles you need through interlibrary loan.

Of course, the web offers much useful material, including research reports from government and other sources, sites that describe social programs, and even indexes of the published research literature. Such material may be very useful in preparing, reviewing, and reporting research, but it is not a substitute for searching academic journals for relevant articles.

It can also help to locate reviews of already-published research. Some journals publish articles that review prior research about specific research questions. Such reviews are unlikely to focus on all the specific issues raised by a particular research question, but they can provide a framework for a more focused search of the literature. If you are not familiar with the major concepts, scholars, or research findings pertaining to your research question, you should also consider reading background information in one of the Annual Review volumes available for most disciplines (e.g., the *Annual Review of Sociology*) and even the relevant entries in an encyclopedia for the discipline, such as the *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* or the *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. These resources may be available online from your college or university library.

Newspaper and magazine articles may raise important issues or summarize social research investigations, but they are not an adequate source for understanding the research literature.

A search of the academic journal literature should include the following steps:

1 *Specify your research question.* Your research question should be neither so broad that hundreds of articles are judged relevant nor so narrow that you miss important literature. "Is informal social control effective?" is probably too broad. "Does informal social control reduce rates of burglary in my town?" is probably too narrow. "Is informal social control more effective than policing in reducing crime rates?" provides about the right level of specificity.

2. *Identify appropriate bibliographic databases to search.* Sociological Abstracts or SocINDEX may meet many of your needs, but if you are studying a question about social factors in illness, you should also search in Medline, the National Library of Medicine database for searching the medical literature. You may also want to include a search in the online Psychological Abstracts database, PsycINFO, or the version that also contains the full text of articles, PsycARTICLES. Search Criminal Justice Abstracts, if your topic is in the area of criminology or criminal justice, or EconLit, if your topic might be addressed in the economic literature. Some combined indexes like Academic Search Complete may be most useful for searches that should span multiple disciplines.

   To find articles that refer to a previous publication, such as Sherman and Berk's study of the police response to domestic violence, the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) will be helpful. SSCI has a unique "citation searching" feature that allows you to look up articles or books and find other articles that have cited these sources.

3. *Create a tentative list of search terms.* List the parts and subparts of your research question and any related issues that you think are important: "informal social control," "policing," "influences on crime rates," and perhaps "community cohesion and crime." List the authors of relevant studies. Specify the most important journals that deal with your topic.

4. *Narrow your search.* The sheer number of references you find can be a problem. For example, searching for "social capital" in June 2019 resulted in 8,366 citations in SocINDEX. Depending on the database you are working with and the purposes of your search, you may want to limit your search to English-language publications, to journal articles rather than conference papers or dissertations (both of which are more difficult to acquire), and to materials published in recent years. If your search yields too many citations, try specifying the search terms more precisely (e.g., "neighborhood social capital"). If you have not found much literature, try using more general or multiple terms (e.g., "social relations" OR "social ties"). Whatever terms you search first, don't consider your search complete until you have tried several different approaches and have seen how many articles you find. Photo 2.2 shows a computer screenshot from a search in SocINDEX to find research on "domestic violence" and "police response."

5. *Check the results.* Read the titles and abstracts you have found and identify the articles that appear to be most relevant. If possible, click on these article titles and generate a list of their references. See if you find more articles that are relevant to your research question but that you have missed so far. You will be surprised (I always am) at how many important articles your initial online search missed.

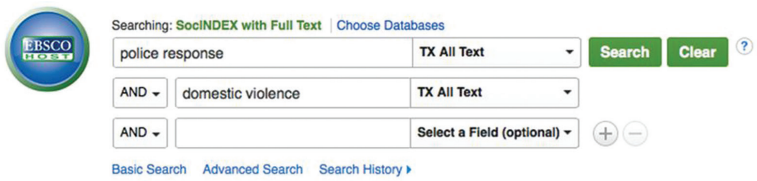


Photo 2.2 When starting a search in Sociological Abstracts, multiple key words can be used to narrow search results. Thinking back to the social problem you identified at the beginning of the chapter, what key words could you use to find more information?

Ebscohost

6. *Locate the articles.* Whatever database you use, the next step after finding your references is to obtain the articles themselves. You will probably find the full text of

many articles available online, but this will be determined by what journals your library subscribes to and the period for which it pays for online access. The most recent issues of some journals may not be available online. If an article that appears to be important for your topic isn't available from your own library or online, you may be able to request a copy online through your library site or by asking a member of the library staff. Your library may also have the print version.

Searching the Web

The World Wide Web provides access to vast amounts of information, with more than 1.7 billion websites (http://www.internetlivestats.com/total-number-of-websites/) in June 2019. You can search the holdings of other libraries and download the complete text of government reports, some conference papers, and newspaper articles. You can find policies of local governments, descriptions of individual social scientists and particular research projects, and postings of advocacy groups. It's also hard to avoid finding a lot of information in which you have no interest, such as political propaganda, third-grade homework assignments, or advertisements galore.

So *caveat emptor* (buyer beware) is the watchword when you search the web. After all, it is a medium in which anyone with basic skills can post almost anything. Limit your inspection of websites to the first few pages that turn up in your list (they're ranked by relevance). See what those first pages contain and then try to narrow your search by including some additional terms. Putting quotation marks around a phrase that you want to search will also help to limit your search—searching for "informal social control" on Google (on June 11, 2019) produced about 233,000 sites, compared with the roughly 208,000,000 sites retrieved when I omitted the quotation marks—so Google searched "informal" *and* "social" *and* "control." You can also focus just on photos, videos, news sites, and so on.

Google Scholar is of special interest, since it provides a publicly accessible tool for searching the scholarly literature across disciplines—but also including technical reports, theses, books, and other types of documents. Google Scholar found 1,920 documents in a search for "police response to domestic violence" (on June 11, 2019), and since it lists articles in order of use of the search terms, frequency of citation, and other reasonable factors, the first several pages of citations provide a good way to identify potentially important omissions from your literature searches in bibliographic databases available at your library. However, in most cases, you will still need to go through your library to obtain the full text of the articles that interest you (if your library subscribes to the source journals).

Before you begin, be sure to clarify the goals of your search. Will you check on the coverage of your literature searching? Review related government programs? Find reports and statistics about the research question? Examine commentary about it? No matter what, be sure to record the URL (web address) for the useful sites you find.

Reviewing Research

A social science review of the literature describes prior research about one or more related research questions, identifies points of similarity and difference and highlights the strong and weak points in this body of research, and develops general conclusions about the implications of this research and the questions that require further research. Reviewing the literature that you have located is a two-stage process. In the first stage, you must assess each relevant article you have located separately. As a result of this review, you may decide to

discard some of the articles as not sufficiently relevant or of inadequate quality and you may identify other articles as particularly important. In the second stage of the review process, you should assess the implications of the set of articles (and other materials) you have reviewed for the relevant aspects of your research question and procedures. The result of these two stages should be an integrated review that highlights these implications.

The next two sections illustrate these stages. The first section presents a summary review of a single article found in a search of recent research on the effectiveness of the police response to domestic violence. The second section shows how a single-article review can be incorporated within an integrated review of prior research on this research question. These two sections are followed by a third section on systematic literature reviews. Systematic reviews use an explicit method of locating and comparing different studies of the same research question.

This is only an introduction to the process of reviewing the literature. In each subsequent chapter, you will learn how to evaluate more of the specific features of research projects that are discussed in research articles. By the time you finish *Understanding the Social World*, you will be able to write detailed critiques of research articles and then develop persuasive integrated reviews of the body of research about a research question. Appendix A contains a comprehensive set of questions to guide you in your article reviews, but because at this early point in the text you won't be familiar with all the terminology used in those questions, you should wait to practice reviewing articles with the questions in Appendix A until later in the course.

Single-Article Reviews

It has been four decades since the original Minneapolis experiment by Richard Berk and Larry Sherman on the police response to domestic violence. Although the prevalence of intimate partner violence appears to have declined since then in the United States, the question of how best to respond is still not resolved. One of the complicating factors is the continuation of abuse by the perpetrators after victimized women and their children have been separated from them. April M. Zeoli, Echo A. Ribera, Cris M. Sullivan, and Sheryl Kubiak (2013) from Michigan State University focused on this problem in a research project designed to explore how women respond to abuse by ex-husbands with whom they have had custody disputes.

Zeoli and her colleagues (2013) prepared to investigate this research question by reviewing the literature on intimate partner violence after separation. They found reports that many victimized women were threatened after their abusive relationship was formally ended and that court hearings often led to requirements of joint custody that created opportunities for continued abuse of both mothers and children. However, their literature search identified few studies of how women coped. They decided to contribute to filling this gap in understanding by conducting qualitative interviews with mothers who had been through custody disputes in family court. Their article describes how they made arrangements to review family court records, screened divorce cases for indications of a history of abuse, and then telephoned women to confirm their eligibility and to ask if they would consent to be interviewed. Of 174 women whose telephone numbers they obtained, only 58 (33%) could be contacted, and only 23 were ultimately determined to be eligible for the study. As we learn in this way about Zeoli and her colleagues' experience with selecting study participants, we can see that the women they interviewed might not be comparable to those who had moved or changed their phone numbers for other reasons.

▼ EXHIBIT 2.2

Fathers' Harm to Children Postdivorce and Mothers' Strategies to Protect Them (*n* = 10)

Fathers' harm or likely harm to children	Mothers' strategies to protect children			
	Avoid family court (*n* = 2)	Family court provides no support (*n* = 5)	Family court provides support after extreme harm (*n* = 2)	Family court is supportive (*n* = 2)
Physical harm (*n* = 3)		Kim, Jesy		Vanessa
Emotional abuse precipitating self-injury (*n* = 2)			Jennifer, Meaghan	
Neglect (*n* = 3)	Kathleen	Christina		Meredith
Likely future physical harm (*n* = 4)	Kathleen, Carole	Carole, Karen		Vanessa
Likely kidnapping (*n* = 2)	Carole	Carole		Vanessa

April M. Zeoli, Echo A. Ribera, Cris M. Sullivan, and Sheryl Kubiak. 2013. Post-Separation Abuse of Women and their Children: Boundary-Setting and Family Court Utilization among Victimized Mothers." *Journal of Family Violence,* 28:547–560. Reprinted by permission of Springer Nature.

Zeoli and her colleagues use quotes from the interviews to illustrate how they classified fathers' harm to children postdivorce (Exhibit 2.2). For example, "neglect" was recorded as the type of harm resulting from a father whose former wife said he "would literally go to work in the morning and come home for five minutes to see . . . that they're still alive and then leave and these children were too little to take care of themselves" (p. 552). Such careful description of procedures allows readers to consider whether they agree with the researchers' decisions and to raise questions about what might have been missed. In their conclusions, the researchers note that they didn't examine all abusive tactics used and that their reliance on mothers as informants limited their knowledge about harm suffered by the children. The research thus improves understanding of this aspect of intimate partner violence while also pointing out the limitations of the research design and thus the need for more research.

Integrated Literature Reviews

The goal of the second stage of the literature review process is to integrate the results of separate article reviews and develop an overall assessment of the implications of prior research. The **integrated literature review** should accomplish three goals: (1) summarize prior research, (2) critique prior research, and (3) present pertinent conclusions (Hart 1998:186–187). Let's look at each of these goals in turn:

1. *Summarize prior research.* The summary of prior research should focus on the particular research question of concern, but it may also be necessary to provide some more general background. For example, in the Canadian study of victims' perceptions of police, Betty Jo Barrett and her colleagues (2019) begin their integrated literature review by citing several studies that indicate the impact of victims' perceptions of police on their help-seeking behavior. They then summarize prior research about three related issues: public perceptions of police (about 10 studies), perceptions of police by IPV victims (about 8 studies), and neighborhood context and perceptions of police. In each of these areas, Barrett et al.

Integrated literature review: A review of prior research on a particular research question that summarizes findings, critiques methods, and presents conclusions.

(2019) describe the key findings of each study and highlight similarities and differences between them. They note that "further research assessing a range of ecological variables and how these variables influence perceptions of the policy in Canada is needed to continue to illuminate the specific nature and conditions of these complexities" (Barrett et al. 2019:200). Their review focuses on articles published in academic peer-reviewed journals and written by credible authors who have been funded by reputable sources (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso 1998:37–44).

2. *Critique prior research.* An integrated review should also discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the body of prior research. What issues seem to have been resolved by multiple studies, and what issues remain as points of contention? Barrett et al. (2019) note that "findings vary substantially" (p. 200), that "research which focuses solely on individual level determinants may yield an incomplete picture" (p. 201), and that "it cannot be assumed that research findings emerging from one geopolitical environment are necessarily reflective of diverging contexts" (p. 201). When you are ready to study the article review questions in Appendix A, you will find that they will help to ensure that you consider many more possible problems with methodological issues.

3. *Present pertinent conclusions.* Don't leave the reader guessing about the implications of the prior research for your own research question. Present the conclusions you draw from the research you have reviewed and point out any limitations of that research (Fink 2005:190–192; Pyrczak 2005:53–56). The Barrett literature review noted the inadequacy of prior research but also identified what had been found about the differences in public perceptions of police and about the effects of victimization, of neighborhood social disorder, and of tensions between police and communities of color. These conclusions from prior research then shape the predictions they propose to test in their own research.

Systematic Literature Reviews

Any literature review should be systematic, but the term *systematic review* designates an approach to literature review that uses "a specific and reproducible method to identify, select and appraise studies of a previously agreed level of quality" (Booth et al. 2016:11). **Systematic literature reviews** are often the basis for a complete article—rather than only providing the background for an article that reports the results of research with new data—and so can be considered a distinct method of research. Published systematic reviews are now archived on searchable websites, including http://www.cochranelibrary.com/ (health care), https://www.campbellcollaboration.org/library.html (social interventions), and http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx? tabid=56 (multiple topic areas). Helpful related tools are available at http://systematicreviewtools.com/index.php.and https://systematicreviewsjournal.biomedcentral.com/.

Systematic literature review: A literature review that "uses a specific and reproducible method to identify, select, and appraise studies that are relevant to a particular question" (adapted from Booth et al. 2016:11).

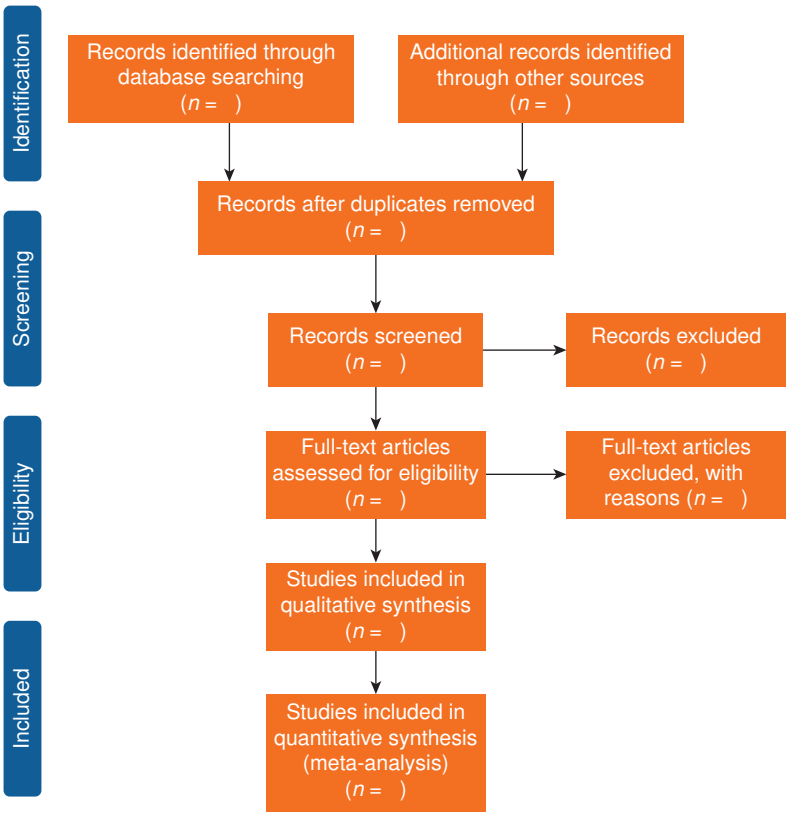
Developing a systematic review involves all of the activities I have just described for searching and reviewing the literature, but it proceeds with more explicit plans and reports at each stage of the process. Many systematic review efforts adhere to the PRISMA guidelines (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses): http://www.prisma-statement.org/Default.aspx. A systematic review by Robert Davis,

David Weisburd, and Bruce Taylor (2007) of research on the effects of using social workers or specially trained officers ("second responders") to follow up on incidents of family abuse provides an example.

1. *Define a specific research question.* An example of one of the three posed by Davis, Weisburd, and Taylor was "Do second responder programs decrease or increase abuse as measured on victim surveys?"
2. *List the terms to be used in searching and the specific sources to be searched.* After a detailed description of the criteria for inclusion of studies, Davis et al. listed sources including "Criminal Justice Abstracts" and "Sociological Abstracts" and search terms including "second responder programs" and "Police OR law enforcement AND repeat domestic violence OR wife abuse OR marital violence."

▼ EXHIBIT 2.3

PRISMA Flow Diagram



Source: Moher, D., A. Liberati, J. Tetzlaff, D. G. Altman, and the PRISMA Group. 2009. *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews* and *Meta-Analyses:* The PRISMA Statement. *PLoS Med* 6(7): e1000097.

3. *Report the results of the search and selection process,* often in the type of flow diagram recommended by PRISMA (see Exhibit 2.3).
4. *Code the characteristics of the selected studies.* An excerpt from the coding sheets used by Davis et al. appears in Exhibit 2.4.
5. *Summarize the results in a narrative review.* A statistical evaluation—termed a *meta-analysis*—of the outcomes of the previous studies may also be included.

▼ EXHIBIT 2.4

Second Responder Meta-Analysis Coding Sheets: Excerpt (Davis et al. 2007)

Describing the Response

18. What did home visits consist of? (Select all that apply)
    1. Assess victim's current situation and history of abuse in relationship
    2. Develop safety plan with victim
    3. Discuss nature of abuse
    4. Assess victim needs

(*Continued*)

(Continued)

5. Provide information and referrals to service programs
6. Interact with abuser
7. Other

18b. Specify (Other) _____

19. Who was involved in the implementation of the response? (Select all that apply)
    1. Domestic/family violence police officer
    2. Police victim caseworker
    3. Prosecutor victim caseworker
    4. Independent victim advocate
    5. Other (specify)

19b. Specify (Other) _____

20. How long after the incident was reported was the second response attempted?
    1. Within 24 hours
    2. Within several days of incident
    3. More than several days after incident
    4. Other (specify)

Source: Davis, R. C., D. Weisburd, and B. Taylor. "Effects of Second Responder Programs on Repeat Incidents of Family Abuse." *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 2008:15. © Davis et al.

Systematic reviews provide an excellent source of information about prior research in areas in which interventions have been tested and such reviews have been conducted. Be sure to read any that are available when you focus on a new research question.

Social Theories

The value of a social research project will also be increased if it is connected to social theory. Neither domestic violence nor police policies exist in a vacuum, set apart from the rest of the social world. We can understand behaviors and orientations better if we consider how they reflect broader social patterns. Although everyone has general notions about "how things work," "what people are like," and so on, social scientists draw on more formal sets of general ideas—social theories—to guide their research (Collins 1994). A **theory** is a logically interrelated set of propositions that helps us make sense of many interrelated phenomena. Theory helps social scientists decide which questions are important to ask about the social world and which are just trivial pursuits. Building and evaluating theory is one of the most important objectives of social science.

Theory: A logically interrelated set of propositions about empirical reality.

Specific deterrence theory: Predicts that punishing individuals for crime deters them from further criminal acts, due to their recognition that the costs incurred outweigh the benefits.

Labeling theory: Labels applied to people can result in behaviors and attitudes consistent with the label, with a particular focus on how labeling a person or group of people as deviant can result in their engaging in deviant behavior.

Lawrence Sherman and Richard Berk's (1984) domestic violence experiment tested predictions derived from two theories: **specific deterrence theory** and **labeling theory**. *Specific deterrence theory* predicts that arresting spouse abusers will lessen their likelihood of reoffending by increasing the costs of reoffending. Crime "doesn't pay" (as much) if the costs of punishment are high (Exhibit 2.5; Lempert & Sanders 1986:86–87).

By contrast, *labeling theory* suggests that persons arrested for domestic assault are more likely to reoffend than are those who are not punished. The basic idea is that once an offender is labeled as a deviant by being arrested and so is treated by other people as deviant, he or she will then be more likely to act in a way that is consistent with the label *deviant* (Becker 1963:9; Scull 1988:678).