

puter disks, CD-ROMs, or online servers. Second, whenever you're expected to return books to a conventional library, you can keep the data obtained from a data archive.

The best-known current example of a resource for secondary analysis is the General Social Survey (GSS). The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago conducts this major national survey, currently every other year, to collect data on a large number of social science variables. These surveys are conducted precisely for the purpose of making data available to scholars at little or no cost and are supported by a combination of private and government funding. Recall that the GSS was created by James A. Davis in 1972; it is currently directed by Davis, Tom W. Smith, and Peter V. Marsden. Their considerable ongoing efforts make an unusual contribution to social science research and to education in social science. You can learn more about the GSS at the link on this book's website: <http://www.norc.uchicago.edu/sociology/habib/>.

Numerous other resources are available for identifying and acquiring survey data for secondary analysis. The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut is one excellent resource. The center also publishes the journal *Public Opinion*, on public opinion polling. Polling the Nations is an online repository for thousands of polls conducted in the United States and 70 other nations. A paid subscription allows users to obtain specific data results from studies they specify, rather than obtaining whole studies. Although the cost of the subscription may be too steep for the average student, you might check to see if your school's library has subscribed. See the links for the Roper Center and Polling the Nations on this book's website.)

Because secondary analysis has typically involved obtaining a data set and undertaking an extensive analysis, I would like you to consider another approach as well. Often you can do limited analysis by investing just a little time. Let's say you're writing a term paper about the impact of religion in contemporary American life. You want to comment on the role of the Roman Catholic church in the debate over abortion. Although you

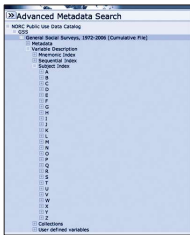


FIGURE 9-7 Subject Index for the General Social Survey

might get away with an offhand, unsubstantiated assertion, imagine how much more powerful your paper would be with the following addition.

1. Access the General Social Survey data set at the National Opinion Research Center, at the link on this book's website.
2. Follow the instructions by clicking successively on the following:
 - a. The plus sign beside "GSS"
 - b. The plus sign beside "General Social Surveys, 1972-2006"
 - c. The plus sign beside "Variable Descriptors"
 - d. The plus sign beside "Subject Index"

Your screen should now contain the excerpt shown in Figure 9-7.

In the header to the right of this excerpt on your screen, you'll see three tabs: DESCRIPTION, TABULATION, AND ANALYSIS. You'll see that DESCRIPTION has been selected. To begin creating

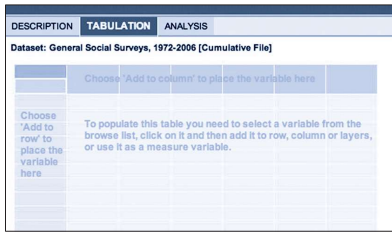


FIGURE 9-8 Instructions for Creating a Table

the analysis for your term paper, click the TABULATION tab. A portion of your screen will now look like Figure 9-8.

Let's select "Religious Preference" as the column variable in our table. You'll have to explore a bit, beginning with the plus sign beside the letter R in the Subject Index. Once you've opened that letter, open the entry for "Religion." Then open "R's Religious Preference." Finally, open "Respondent (current)." I know these are a lot of steps, but it demonstrates the wealth of data available for analysis. Once you get more familiar with the data set and the program, you'll move around deftly.

At this point, you'll find several options under "Respondent (current)." We're interested in the first of these: RS RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE. Notice that instead of a plus sign, this option is preceded by a right-pointing arrow. Click on the arrow, and you should see the display shown in Figure 9-9.

Click on the phrase "add to column." Your table is halfway complete. To add attitudes toward abortion, repeat the process just outlined but select the following:

A
Abortion
In case of . . .
any reason

This will show the GSS questionnaire items that asked respondents whether a woman should have the right to a legal abortion for any reason. Opening the arrow next to ABORTION IF WOMAN WANTS FOR ANY REASON should give you the display shown in Figure 9-10.

Click on the phrase "add to row" and you'll be presented with a two-variable table, a portion of which is shown in Figure 9-11. I've limited the display to those religious preferences with more than a few responses.) In reviewing these analytic results, you should realize that they represent the cumulation of surveys done between 1972 and 2006. If you want to limit your analysis to a single year, instructions on the website will tell you how to do that.

The results of this analysis may surprise you. Whereas Catholics are less supportive of abortion

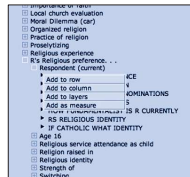


FIGURE 9-9 Selecting RS RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE as the Column Variable

(35.4 percent) than Jews (77.8 percent) and those with no religion (66.1 percent) are, they do not differ substantially from Protestants (36.0 percent). Imagine a term paper that says, "Whereas the Roman Catholic Church has taken a strong official position on abortion, many Catholics do not necessarily agree, as shown in Table . . ." Moreover, this might be just the beginning of an analysis that looks a bit more deeply into the matter, as described in Chapter 14, on quantitative analysis.

The key advantage of secondary analysis is that it's cheaper and faster than doing original surveys, and, depending on who did the original survey, you may benefit from the work of spotlight professionals. The case of secondary analysis has also enhanced the possibility of meta-analysis, in which a researcher brings together a body of past research on a particular topic, to gain confidence in your understanding of the relationship between religion and abortion, for example, you could go beyond the GSS to analyze similar data collected in dozens or even hundreds of other studies.

There are disadvantages inherent in secondary analysis, however. The key problem involves the recurrent question of validity: When one researcher collects data for one particular purpose, you have no assurance that those data will be appropriate for your research interest. Typically, you'll find



FIGURE 9-10 Selecting ABORTION IF WOMAN WANTS FOR ANY REASON as the Row Variable

RS RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE	PROTESTANT	CATHOLIC	JEWISH	NO RELIGION
RS	36.0	35.4	77.8	66.1
Row	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Col.	17,023	16,871	541	2,487

FIGURE 9-11 The Relationship between Religion and Attitudes toward Abortion

that the original researcher asked a question that "comes close" to measuring what you're interested in, but you'll wish the question had been asked just a little differently—or that another, related question had also been asked. For example, you may want to study how religious various people are and the survey data available to you only asked about attendance at worship services. Your quandary then, is whether the question that was asked provides a valid measure of the variable you want to analyze. Nevertheless, secondary analysis can be immensely useful. Moreover, it illustrates once again the range of possibilities available in finding the answers to questions about social life. Although no single method unlocks all puzzles, there is no limit to the ways you can find out about things. And when you zero in on an issue from several independent directions, you gain that much more exposure.

I've discussed secondary analysis in this chapter on survey research because it's the type of analysis most associated with the technique. However, there is no reason that the reanalysis of social

research data needs to be limited to those collected in surveys. Nigel Fielding (2004), for example, has examined the possibilities for the archiving and reanalysis of qualitative data as well.

Ethics and Survey Research

Survey research almost always involves a request that people provide us with information about themselves that is not readily available. Sometimes, we ask for information (about attitudes and behaviors, for example) that would be embarrassing to the respondents if that information became publicly known. In some cases, such revelations could result in the loss of a job or a marriage. Hence, maintaining the norm of confidentiality, mentioned earlier in the book, is particularly important in survey research.

Another ethical concern relates to the possibility of psychological injury to respondents. Even if the information they provide is kept confidential, simply forcing them to think about some matters can be upsetting. Imagine asking people for their attitudes toward suicide when one of them has recently experienced the suicide of a family member or close friend. Or asking people to report on their attitudes about different racial groups, which may cause them to reflect on whether they might be racist or at least appear as such to the interviewers. The possibilities for harming survey respondents are endless. While this fact should not prevent you from doing surveys, it should increase your considered efforts to avoid the problem wherever possible.

MAIN POINTS

Introduction

- Survey research, a popular social research method, is the administration of questionnaires to a sample of respondents selected from some population.

Topics Appropriate for Survey Research

- Survey research is especially appropriate for making descriptive studies of large populations; survey data may be used for explanatory purposes as well.

- Questionnaires provide a method of collecting data by (1) asking people questions or (2) asking them to agree or disagree with statements representing different points of view. Questions may be open-ended (respondents supply their own answers) or closed-ended (they select from a list of provided answers).

Guidelines for Asking Questions

- Items in a questionnaire should follow several guidelines: (1) The form of the items should be appropriate to the project; (2) the items must be clear and precise; (3) the items should ask only about one thing (that is, double-barreled questions should be avoided); (4) respondents must be competent to answer the item; (5) respondents must be willing to answer the item; (6) questions should be relevant to the respondent; (7) items should ordinarily be short; (8) negative terms should be avoided so as not to confuse respondents; (9) the items should be worded to avoid leading responses.

Questionnaire Construction

- The format of a questionnaire can influence the quality of data collected.
- A clear format for contingency questions is necessary to ensure that the respondents answer all the questions intended for them.
- The matrix question is an efficient format for presenting several items sharing the same response categories.
- The order of items in a questionnaire can influence the responses given.
- Clear instructions are important for getting appropriate responses in a questionnaire.
- Questionnaires should be pretested before being administered to the study sample.
- Questionnaires are usually administered in one of three main ways: through self-administered questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, or telephone surveys. Researchers are exploring online surveys as well.

Self-Administered Questionnaires

- It's generally advisable to plan follow-up mailings in the case of self-administered questionnaires, sending new questionnaires to those respondents who fail to respond to the initial appeal. Properly monitoring questionnaire returns will provide a good guide to when a follow-up mailing is appropriate.