Unobtrusive Measures

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter presents overviews of three unobtrusive research methods: content analysis, the analysis of existing statistics, and comparative and historical research. Each of these methods allows researchers to study social life from afar, without influencing it in the process.

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Introduction

With the exception of the complete observer in field research, each of the modes of observation discussed so far requires the researcher to intrude to some degree on whatever he or she is studying. This is most obvious in the case of experiments, followed closely by survey research. Even the field researcher, as we've seen, can change things in the process of studying them.

At least one previous example in this book, however, was totally exempt from that danger. Durkheim's analysis of suicide did nothing to affect suicides one way or the other (see Chapter 6). His study is an example of **unobtrusive research**, or methods of studying social behavior without affecting it. As you'll see, unobtrusive measures can be qualitative or quantitative.

This chapter examines three types of unobtrusive research methods: content analysis, analysis of existing statistics, and comparative and historical research. In content analysis, researchers examine a class of social artifacts that usually are written documents such as newspaper editorials. Next, the Durkheim study is an example of the analysis of existing statistics. As you'll see, there are great masses of data all around you, awaiting your use in the understanding of social life. Finally, comparative and historical research, a form of research with a venerable history in the social sciences, is currently enjoying a resurgence of popularity. Like field research, comparative and historical research is usually a qualitative method, one in which the main resources for observation and analysis are historical records. The method's name includes the word *comparative* because social scientists—in contrast to historians who may simply describe a particular set of events—seek to discover common patterns that recur in different times and places.

To set the stage for our examination of these three research methods, I want to draw your attention to an excellent book that should sharpen your senses about the potential for unobtrusive measures in general. It is, among other things, the book from which I take the term *unobtrusive measures*.

In 1966, Eugene Webb and three colleagues published an ingenious little book on social research (revised in 2000) that has become a classic. It focuses on the idea of unobtrusive or nonreactive research. Webb and his colleagues have played freely with the task of learning about human behavior by observing what people inadvertently leave behind them. Do you want to know what exhibits are the most popular at a museum? You could conduct a poll, but people might tell you what they thought you wanted to hear or what might make them look intellectual and serious. You could stand by different exhibits and count the viewers that came by, but people might come over to see what you were doing. Webb and his colleagues suggest that you check the wear and tear on the floor in front of various exhibits. Those that have the most-worn tiles are probably the most popular. Want to know which exhibits are popular with little kids? Look for mucus on the glass cases. To get a sense of the most popular radio stations, you could arrange with an auto mechanic to check what radio stations are programmed in for cars brought in for repair.

The possibilities are limitless. Like a detective investigating a crime, the social researcher looks for clues. If you stop to notice, you'll find that clues of social behavior are all around you. In a sense, everything you see represents the answer to some important social science question—all you have to do is think of the question.

Although problems of validity and reliability crop up in unobtrusive measures, a little ingenuity can either handle them or put them in perspective.

Content Analysis

As I mentioned in the chapter introduction, **content analysis** is the study of recorded human communications. Among the forms suitable for

unobtrusive research Methods of studying social behavior without affecting it. Such methods can be qualitative or quantitative.

content analysis The study of recorded human communications, such as books, websites, paintings, and laws.

study are books, magazines, web pages, poems, newspapers, songs, paintings, speeches, letters, e-mail messages, bulletin board postings on the Internet, laws, and constitutions, as well as any components or collections thereof. Shulamit Reinharz points out that feminist researchers have used content analysis to study "children's books, fairy tales, billboards, feminist nonfiction and fiction books, children's art work, fashion, fat-letter postcards, Girl Scout Handbooks, works of fine art, newspaper rhetoric, clinical records, research publications, introductory sociology textbooks, and citations, to mention only a few" (1992: 146–47). In another example, when William Mirola set out to discover the role of religion in the movements to establish the eight-hour working day in America, his data were taken "from Chicago's labor, religious, and secular presses, from pamphlets, and from speeches given by eight-hour proponents from three representative factions within the movement" (2003: 273).

Topics Appropriate for Content Analysis

Content analysis is particularly well suited to the study of communications and to answering the classic question of communications research: "Who says what, to whom, why, how, and with what effect?" Are popular French novels more concerned with love than novels in the United States are? Was the popular British music of the 1960s more politically cynical than the popular German music during that period? Do political candidates who primarily address "bread and butter" issues get elected more often than those who address issues of high principle? Each of these questions addresses a social science research topic: The first might address national character, the second political orientations, and the third political process. Although you might study such topics by observing individual people, content analysis provides another approach.

An early example of content analysis is the work of Ida B. Wells. In 1891, Wells, whose parents had been slaves, wanted to test the widely held assumption that African American men were being lynched in the South primarily for raping white women. As a research method, she examined newspaper articles on the 728 lynchings reported during the previous ten years. In only a third of the cases were the lynching victims even accused of rape, much less proved guilty. Primarily, they were charged with being insolent, not staying in "their place" (cited in Reinharz 1992: 146).

More recently, the best-selling book *Megatrends 2000* (Naisbitt and Aburdene 1990) used content analysis to determine the major trends in modern U.S. life. The authors regularly monitored thousands of local newspapers a month in order to discover local and regional trends for publication in a series of quarterly reports. Their book examines some of the trends they observed in the nation at large. In a follow-up book (Aburdene 2005), this kind of analysis pointed to such trends as "The Power of Spirituality" and "The Rise of Conscious Capitalism."

Some topics are more appropriately addressed by content analysis than by any other method of inquiry. Suppose that you're interested in violence on television. Maybe you suspect that the manufacturers of men's products are more likely to sponsor violent TV shows than other kinds of sponsors are. Content analysis would be the best way of finding out.

Briefly, here's what you'd do. First, you'd develop operational definitions of the two key variables in your inquiry: *men's products* and *violence.* The section on coding, later in this chapter, will discuss some of the ways you could do that. Ultimately, you'd need a plan that would allow you to watch TV, classify sponsors, and rate the degree of violence on particular shows.

Next, you'd have to decide what to watch. Probably you'd decide (1) what stations to watch, (2) for what period, and (3) at what hours. Then, you'd stock up on beer and potato chips and start watching, classifying, and recording. Once you'd completed your observations, you'd be able to analyze the data you collected and determine whether men's product manufacturers sponsored more blood and gore than other sponsors did.

Gabriel Rossman (2002) had a somewhat different question regarding the mass media. Public concern over the concentration of media in fewer

and fewer corporate hands has grown, so Rossman decided to ask the following question: If a newspaper is owned by the same conglomerate that owns a movie production company, can you trust that newspaper's movie reviews of its parent company's productions?

You can't, according to Rossman's findings. Because many newspapers rate movies somewhat quantitatively (for example, three stars out of four), he could perform a simple quantitative analysis. For each movie review, he asked two main questions: (1) Was the movie produced by the same company that owned the newspaper? and (2) What rating did the film receive? He found that, indeed, movies produced by the parent company received higher ratings than other movies did. Further, the ratings given to movies by newspapers with the same parent company were higher than the ratings those movies received from other newspapers. This discrepancy, moreover, was strongest in the case of big-budget movies in which the parent company had invested heavily.

As a mode of observation, content analysis requires a thoughtful handling of the "what" that is being communicated. The analysis of data collected in this mode, as in others, addresses the "why" and "with what effect."

Sampling in Content Analysis

In the study of communications, as in the study of people, you often can't observe directly all you would like to explore. In your study of TV violence and sponsorship, for example, I'd advise against attempting to watch everything that's broadcast. It wouldn't be possible, and your brain would probably short-circuit before you came close to discovering that for yourself. Usually, it's appropriate to sample. Let's begin by revisiting the idea of units of analysis. We'll then review some of the sampling techniques that might be applied to such units in content analysis.

Units of Analysis

As I discussed in Chapter 4, determining appropriate units of analysis—the individual units that we make descriptive and explanatory statements

about—can be a complicated task. For example, if we wish to compute average family income, the individual family is the unit of analysis. But we'll have to ask individual members of families how much money they make. Thus, individuals will be the units of observation, even though the individual family remains the unit of analysis. Similarly, we may wish to compare crime rates of different cities in terms of their size, geographic region, racial composition, and other differences. Even though the characteristics of these cities are partly a function of the behaviors and characteristics of their individual residents, the cities would ultimately be the units of analysis.

The complexity of this issue is often more apparent in content analysis than in other research methods, especially when the units of observation differ from the units of analysis. A few examples should clarify this distinction.

Let's suppose we want to find out whether criminal law or civil law makes the most distinctions between men and women. In this instance, individual laws would be both the units of observation and the units of analysis. We might select a sample of a state's criminal and civil laws and then categorize each law by whether or not it makes a distinction between men and women. In this fashion, we could determine whether criminal or civil law distinguishes by sex the most.

Somewhat differently, we might wish to determine whether states that enact laws distinguishing between different racial groups are also more likely than other states to enact laws distinguishing between men and women. Although the examination of this question would also involve the coding of individual acts of legislation, the unit of analysis in this case is the individual state, not the law.

Or, changing topics radically, let's suppose we're interested in representationalism in painting. If we wish to compare the relative popularity of representational and nonrepresentational paintings, the individual paintings will be our units of analysis. If, on the other hand, we wish to discover whether representationalism in painting is more characteristic of wealthy or impoverished painters, of educated or uneducated painters, of capitalist or

socialist painters, the individual painters will be our units of analysis.

It's essential that this issue be clear, because sample selection depends largely on what the unit of analysis is. If individual writers are the units of analysis, the sample design should select all or a sample of the writers appropriate to the research question. If books are the units of analysis, we should select a sample of books, regardless of their authors. Bruce Berg (1989: 112–13) points out that even if you plan to analyze some body of textual materials, the units of analysis might be words, themes, characters, paragraphs, items (such as a book or letter), concepts, semantics, or combinations of these.

I'm not suggesting that sampling should be based solely on the units of analysis. Indeed, we may often subsample—select samples of subcategories—for each individual unit of analysis. Thus, if writers are the units of analysis, we might (1) select a sample of writers from the total population of writers, (2) select a sample of books written by each writer selected, and (3) select portions of each selected book for observation and coding.

Finally, let's look at a trickier example: the study of TV violence and sponsors. What's the unit of analysis for the research question "Are the manufacturers of men's products more likely to sponsor violent shows than other sponsors are?" Is it the TV show? The sponsor? The instance of violence?

In the simplest study design, it would be none of these. Though you might structure your inquiry in various ways, the most straightforward design would be based on the commercial as the unit of analysis. You would use two kinds of observational units: the commercial and the program (the show that gets squeezed in between commercials). You would want to observe both units. You would classify commercials by whether they advertised men's products and the programs by their violence. The program classifications would be transferred to the commercials occurring near them. Figure 10-1 provides an example of the kind of record you might keep.

Notice that in the research design illustrated in Figure 10-1, all the commercials occurring in the same program break are grouped and get the same scores. Also, the number of violent instances recorded as following one commercial break is the

same as the number preceding the next break. This simple design allows us to classify each commercial by its sponsorship and the degree of violence associated with it. Thus, for example, the first Grunt Aftershave commercial is coded as being a men's product and as having 10 instances of violence associated with it. The Buttercup Bra commercial is coded as not being a men's product and as having no violent instances associated with it.

In the illustration, we have four men's product commercials with an average of 7.5 violent instances each. The four commercials classified as definitely not men's products have an average of 1.75, and the two that might or might not be considered men's products have an average of 1 violent instance each. If this pattern of differences persisted across a much larger number of observations, we'd probably conclude that manufacturers of men's products are more likely to sponsor TV violence than other sponsors are.

The point of this illustration is to demonstrate how units of analysis figure into the data collection and analysis. You need to be clear about your unit of analysis before planning your sampling strategy, but in this case you can't simply sample commercials. Unless you have access to the stations' broadcasting logs, you won't know when the commercials are going to occur. Moreover, you need to observe the programming as well as the commercials. As a result, you must set up a sampling design that will include everything you need in order to observe enough.

In designing the sample, you'd need to establish the universe to be sampled from. In this case, which TV stations will you observe? What will be the period of the study—the number of days? And during which hours of each day will you observe? Then, how many commercials do you want to observe and code for analysis? Watch television for a while and find out how many commercials occur each hour; then you can figure out how many hours of observation you'll need (and can stand).

Now you're ready to design the sample selection. As a practical matter, you wouldn't have to sample among the different stations if you had assistants—each of you could watch a different channel during the same period. But let's suppose

Commercial Break	Sponsor	Men's Product?			Number of Instances of Violence	
		Yes	No	?	Before the Commercial Break	After the Commercial Break
1st	Grunt Aftershave	✓			6	4
	Brute Jock Straps	✓			6	4
2nd	Bald-No-More Lotion	✓			4	3
3rd	Grunt Aftershave	✓			3	0
	Snowflake Toothpaste		✓		3	0
	Godliness Cleanser		✓		3	0
4th	Big Thumb Hammers			✓	0	1
5th	Snowflake Toothpaste		✓		1	0
	Big Thumb Hammers			✓	1	0
6th	Buttercup Bras		✓		0	0

FIGURE 10-1

Example of Recording Table for TV Violence

you're working alone. Your final sampling frame, from which a sample will be selected and watched, might look something like this:

Jan. 7, Channel 2, 7–9 P.M.
Jan. 7, Channel 4, 7–9 P.M.
Jan. 7, Channel 9, 7–9 P.M.
Jan. 7, Channel 2, 9–11 P.M.
Jan. 7, Channel 4, 9–11 P.M.
Jan. 7, Channel 9, 9–11 P.M.
Jan. 8, Channel 2, 7–9 P.M.
Jan. 8, Channel 4, 7–9 P.M.
Jan. 8, Channel 9, 7–9 P.M.
Jan. 8, Channel 2, 9–11 P.M.
Jan. 8, Channel 4, 9–11 P.M.
Jan. 8, Channel 9, 9–11 P.M.
Jan. 9, Channel 2, 7–9 P.M.
Jan. 9, Channel 4, 7–9 P.M. etc.

Notice that I've made several decisions for you in the illustration. First, I've assumed that channels 2, 4, and 9 are the ones appropriate to your study. I've assumed that you found the 7–11 P.M. prime-time hours to be the most relevant and that two-hour periods will do the job. I picked January 7 out of the hat for a starting date. In practice, of course, all these decisions should be based on your careful consideration of what would be appropriate to your particular study.

Once you have become clear about your units of analysis and the observations best suited to those units and have created a sampling frame like the one I've illustrated, sampling is simple and straightforward. The alternative procedures available to you are the same ones described in Chapter 5: random, systematic, stratified, and so on.

Sampling Techniques

As we've seen, in the content analysis of written prose, sampling may occur at any or all of several levels, including the contexts relevant to the works. Other forms of communication may also be sampled at any of the conceptual levels appropriate to them.

In content analysis, we could employ any of the conventional sampling techniques discussed in Chapter 5. We might select a random or systematic sample of French and U.S. novelists, of laws passed in the state of Mississippi, or of Shakespearean soliloquies. We might select (with a random start) every 23rd paragraph in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Or we might number all of the songs recorded by the Beatles and select a random sample of 25.

Stratified sampling is also appropriate for content analysis. To analyze the editorial policies of U.S. newspapers, for example, we might first group all newspapers by the region of the country or size of the community in which they are published, frequency of publication, or average circulation. We might then select a stratified random or systematic sample of newspapers for analysis. Having done so, we might select a sample of editorials from each selected newspaper, perhaps stratified chronologically.

Cluster sampling is equally appropriate to content analysis. Indeed, if individual editorials are our units of analysis, then the selection of newspapers at the first stage of sampling would be a cluster sample. In an analysis of political speeches, we might begin by selecting a sample of politicians; each politician would represent a cluster of political speeches. The TV commercial study described previously is another example of cluster sampling.

It should be repeated that sampling need not end when we reach the unit of analysis. If novels are the unit of analysis in a study, we might select a sample of novelists, a subsample of novels written by each selected author, and a subsample of paragraphs within each novel. We would then analyze

the content of the paragraphs for the purpose of describing the novels themselves. (If you haven't realized this yet, researchers speak of samples within samples as "subsamples.")

Let's turn now to the coding or classification of the material being observed. Part 4 discusses the manipulation of such classifications to draw descriptive and explanatory conclusions.

Coding in Content Analysis

Content analysis is essentially a coding operation. **Coding** is the process of transforming raw data into a standardized form. In content analysis, communications—oral, written, or other—are coded or classified according to some conceptual framework. Thus, for example, newspaper editorials may be coded as liberal or conservative. Radio broadcasts may be coded as propagandistic or not, novels as romantic or not, paintings as representational or not, and political speeches as containing character assassinations or not. Recall that because terms such as these are subject to many interpretations, the researcher must specify definitions clearly.

Coding in content analysis involves the logic of conceptualization and operationalization, which I discussed in Chapter 6. As in other research methods, you must refine your conceptual framework and develop specific methods for observing in relation to that framework.

Manifest and Latent Content

In the earlier discussions of field research, we found that the researcher faces a fundamental choice between depth and specificity of understanding. Often, this represents a choice between validity and reliability, respectively. Typically, field researchers opt for depth, preferring to base their judgments on a broad range of observations and information, even at the risk that another observer might reach a different judgment of the same situation. Survey research—through the use of standardized questionnaires—represents the other extreme: total specificity, even though the specific measures of variables may not be adequately valid reflections of those variables. The content analyst has some choice in this matter, however.

coding The process whereby raw data are transformed into standardized form suitable for machine processing and analysis.

Coding the **manifest content**—the visible, surface content—of a communication is analogous to using a standardized questionnaire. To determine, for example, how erotic certain novels are, you might simply count the number of times the word *love* appears in each novel or the average number of appearances per page. Or, you might use a list of words, such as *love, kiss, hug,* and *caress,* each of which might serve as an indicator of the erotic nature of the novel. This method would have the advantage of ease and reliability in coding and of letting the reader of the research report know precisely how eroticism was measured. It would have a disadvantage, on the other hand, in terms of validity. Surely the phrase *erotic novel* conveys a richer and deeper meaning than the number of times the word *love* is used.

Alternatively, you could code the **latent content** of the communication: its underlying meaning. In the present example, you might read an entire novel or a sample of paragraphs or pages and make an overall assessment of how erotic the novel was. Although your total assessment might very well be influenced by the appearance of words such as *love* and *kiss*, it would not depend fully on their frequency.

Clearly, this second method seems better designed for tapping the underlying meaning of communications, but its advantage comes at a cost to reliability and specificity. Especially if more than one person is coding the novel, somewhat different definitions or standards may be employed. A passage that one coder regards as erotic may not seem erotic to another. Even if you do all of the coding yourself, there is no guarantee that your definitions and standards will remain constant throughout the enterprise. Moreover, the reader of your research report will likely be uncertain about the definitions you've employed. See Figure 10-2 to compare manifest and latent coding.

Wherever possible, the best solution to this dilemma is to use both methods. For example, Carol Auster was interested in changes in the socialization of young women in Girl Scouts. To explore this, she undertook a content analysis of the Girl Scout manuals as revised over time. In particular, Auster was interested in the view that women

Manifest Coding of Materials (objective)
Manifest coding involves the counting of specific elements, such as the word *love*, to determine whether and to what degree the passage should be judged "romantic."

Latent Coding of Materials (subjective)
Latent coding calls for the researcher to view the entire unit of analysis (a paragraph in this case) and make a subjective assessment regarding whether and to what degree is "romantic."

FIGURE 10-2
Manifest and Latent Coding

should be limited to homemaking. Her analysis of the manifest content suggested a change: "I found

manifest content In connection with content analysis, the concrete terms contained in a communication, as distinguished from *latent content*.

latent content In connection with content analysis, the underlying meaning of communications, as distinguished from their *manifest content*.

that while 23% of the badges in 1913 centered on home life, this was true of only 13% of the badges in 1963 and 7% of the badges in 1980" (1985: 361).

An analysis of the latent content also pointed to an emancipation of Girl Scouts, similar to that occurring in U.S. society at large. The change of uniform was one indicator: "The shift from skirts to pants may reflect an acknowledgement of the more physically active role of women as well as the variety of physical images available to modern women" (Auster 1985: 362). Supporting evidence was found in the appearance of badges such as "Science Sleuth," "Aerospace," and "Ms. Fix-It."

Conceptualization and the Creation of Code Categories

For all research methods, conceptualization and operationalization typically involve the interaction of theoretical concerns and empirical observations. If, for example, you believe some websites to be liberal and others to be conservative, ask yourself why you think so. Read some content, asking yourself which ones are liberal and which ones are conservative. Was the political orientation of a particular editorial most clearly indicated by its manifest content or by its tone? Was your decision based on the use of certain terms (for example, *leftist*, *fascist*, and so on) or on the support or opposition given to a particular issue or political personality?

Both inductive and deductive methods should be used in this activity. If you're testing theoretical propositions, your theories should suggest empirical indicators of concepts. If you begin with specific empirical observations, you should attempt to derive general principles relating to them and then apply those principles to the other empirical observations.

Bruce Berg (1989: 111) places code development in the context of grounded theory and likens it to solving a puzzle:

> Coding and other fundamental procedures associated with grounded theory development are certainly hard work and must be taken seriously, but just as many people enjoy finishing a complicated jigsaw puzzle, many researchers find great satisfaction in coding and analysis. As

> researchers . . . begin to see the puzzle pieces come together to form a more complete picture, the process can be downright thrilling.

Throughout this activity, remember that the operational definition of any variable is composed of the attributes included in it. Such attributes, moreover, should be mutually exclusive and exhaustive. A political website, for example, should not be described as both liberal and conservative, though you should probably allow for some to be middle-of-the-road. It may be sufficient for your purposes to code novels as erotic or nonerotic, but you may also want to consider that some could be anti-erotic. Paintings might be classified as representational or not, if that satisfied your research purpose, or you might wish to classify them as impressionistic, abstract, allegorical, and so forth.

Realize further that different levels of measurement can be used in content analysis. You might, for example, use the nominal categories of liberal and conservative for characterizing political websites, or you might wish to use a more refined ordinal ranking, ranging from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Bear in mind, however, that the level of measurement implicit in your coding methods—nominal, ordinal, interval, or ratio—does not necessarily reflect the nature of your variables. If the word *love* appeared 100 times in Novel A and 50 times in Novel B, you would be justified in saying that the word *love* appeared twice as often in Novel A, but not that Novel A was twice as erotic as Novel B. Similarly, agreeing with twice as many anti-Semitic statements in a questionnaire as someone else does not necessarily make one twice as anti-Semitic as that other person.

Counting and Record Keeping

If you plan to evaluate your content analysis data quantitatively, your coding operation must be amenable to data processing. This means, first, that the end product of your coding must be numerical. If you're counting the frequency of certain words, phrases, or other manifest content, the coding is necessarily numerical. But even if you're coding latent content on the basis of overall judgments,

Newspaper ID	Number of editorials evaluated	SUBJECTIVE EVALUATION 1. Very liberal 2. Moderately liberal 3. Middle-of-road 4. Moderately conservative 5. Very conservative	Number of "isolationist" editorials	Number of "pro–United Nations" editorials	Number of "anti–United Nations" editorials
001	37	2	0	8	0
002	26	5	10	0	6
003	44	4	2	1	2
004	22	3	1	2	3
005	30	1	0	6	0

FIGURE 10-3
Sample Tally Sheet (Partial)

it will be necessary to represent your coding decision numerically: 1 = very liberal, 2 = moderately liberal, 3 = moderately conservative, and so on.

Second, your record keeping must clearly distinguish between units of analysis and units of observation, especially if these two are different. The initial coding, of course, must relate to the units of observation. If novelists are the units of analysis, for example, and you wish to characterize them through a content analysis of their novels, your primary records will represent novels as the units of observation. You may then combine your scoring of individual novels to characterize each novelist, the unit of analysis.

Third, while you're counting, it will normally be important to record the base from which the counting is done. It would probably be useless to know the number of realistic paintings produced by a given painter without knowing the number he or she has painted all together; the painter would be regarded as realistic if a high percentage of paintings were of that genre. Similarly, it would tell us little that the word *love* appeared 87 times in a novel if we did not know about how many words there were in the entire novel. The issue of

observational base is most easily resolved if every observation is coded in terms of one of the attributes making up a variable. Rather than simply counting the number of liberal editorials in a given collection, for example, code each editorial by its political orientation, even if it must be coded "no apparent orientation."

Let's suppose we want to describe and explain the editorial policies of different newspapers. Figure 10-3 presents part of a tally sheet that might result from the coding of newspaper editorials. Note that newspapers are the units of analysis. Each newspaper has been assigned an identification number to facilitate mechanized processing. The second column has a space for the number of editorials coded for each newspaper. This will be an important piece of information, because we want to be able to say, for example, "Of all the editorials, 22 percent were pro–United Nations," not just "There were eight pro–United Nations editorials."

One column in Figure 10-3 is for assigning a subjective overall assessment of each newspaper's editorial policies. (Such assignments might later be compared with the several objective measures.) Other columns provide space for recording

numbers of editorials reflecting specific editorial positions. In a real content analysis, there would be spaces for recording other editorial positions plus noneditorial information about each newspaper, such as the region in which it is published, its circulation, and so forth.

The type of content analysis just described is sometimes referred to as *conceptual analysis*, to distinguish it from *relational analysis*. The latter goes beyond observing the frequency of particular concept in a sample of texts to examining the relationships among concepts. For example, you might look for references to "discrimination" in letters to the editor and also note the kind of discrimination being discussed: racial, religious, gender, and so forth. In fact, you could examine the change in that relationship over time.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Not all content analysis results in counting. Sometimes a qualitative assessment of the materials is most appropriate, as in Carol Auster's examination of changes in Girl Scout uniforms and handbook language.

Bruce Berg (1989: 123–25) discusses "negative case testing" as a technique for qualitative hypothesis testing. First, in the grounded theory tradition, you begin with an examination of the data, which may yield a general hypothesis. Let's say that you're examining the leadership of a new community association by reviewing the minutes of meetings to see who made motions that were subsequently passed. Your initial examination of the data suggests that the wealthier members are the most likely to assume this leadership role.

The second stage in the analysis is to search your data to find all the cases that contradict the initial hypothesis. In this instance, you would look for poorer members who made successful motions and wealthy members who never did. Third, you must review each of the disconfirming cases and either (1) give up the hypothesis or (2) see how it needs to be fine-tuned.

Let's say that in your analysis of disconfirming cases, you notice that each of the unwealthy leaders has a graduate degree, whereas each of the wealthy nonleaders has very little formal education. You may revise your hypothesis to consider both education and wealth as routes to leadership in the association. Perhaps you'll discover some threshold for leadership (a white-collar job, a level of income, and a college degree) beyond which those with the most money, education, or both are the most active leaders.

This process is an example of what Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) called *analytic induction*. It is inductive in that it begins primarily with observations, and it is analytic because it goes beyond description to find patterns and relationships among variables.

There are, of course, dangers in this form of analysis, as in all others. The chief risk is misclassifying observations so as to support an emerging hypothesis. For example, you may erroneously conclude that a nonleader didn't graduate from college or you may decide that the job of factory foreman is "close enough" to being white-collar.

Berg (1989: 124) offers techniques for avoiding these errors:

1. If there are sufficient cases, select some at random from each category in order to avoid merely picking those that best support the hypothesis.

2. Give at least three examples in support of every assertion you make about the data.

3. Have your analytic interpretations carefully reviewed by others uninvolved in the research project to see whether they agree.

4. Report whatever inconsistencies you do discover—any cases that simply do not fit your hypotheses. Realize that few social patterns are 100 percent consistent, so you may have discovered something important even if it doesn't apply to absolutely all of social life. However, you should be honest with your readers in that regard.

There are computer programs now available for content analysis. For example, you can try out MAXQDA online. Also, T-LAB provides for some interesting qualitative analyses, such as mapping word associations in a political speech.

Matthias Romppel has provided an excellent online review of qualitative content analysis programs (see the links on your Sociology CourseMate at www.cengagebrain.com). Some of the programs appropriate for content analysis are discussed in Chapter 13 in connection with other kinds of qualitative data analysis.

Illustrations of Content Analysis

Several studies have indicated that historically women have been stereotyped on television. R. Stephen Craig (1992) took this line of inquiry one step further to examine the portrayal of both men and women during different periods of television programming.

To study sex stereotyping in television commercials, Craig selected a sample of 2,209 network commercials during several periods between January 6 and 14, 1990.

> The weekday day part (in this sample, Monday–Friday, 2–4 P.M.) consisted exclusively of soap operas and was chosen for its high percentage of women viewers. The weekend day part (two consecutive Saturday and Sunday afternoons during sports telecasts) was selected for its high percentage of men viewers. Evening "prime time" (Monday–Friday, 9–11 P.M.) was chosen as a basis for comparison with past studies and the other day parts.
>
> *(1992: 199)*

Each of the commercials was coded in several ways. "Characters" were coded as

All male adults

All female adults

All adults, mixed gender

Male adults with children or teens (no women)

Female adults with children or teens (no men)

Mixture of ages and genders

In addition, Craig's coders noted which character was on the screen longest during the commercial—the "primary visual character"—as well as the roles played by the characters (such as spouse, celebrity, parent), the type of product

TABLE 10-1

Percent of Adult Primary Visual Characters by Sex Appearing in Commercials in Three-Day Parts

	Weekend	Daytime	Evening
Adult male	40	52	80
Adult female	60	48	20

Source: R. Stephen Craig, "The Effect of Television Day Part on Gender Portrayals in Television Commercials: A Content Analysis," *Sex Roles* 26, nos. 5/6 (1992): 204.

advertised (such as body product, alcohol), the setting (such as kitchen, school, business), and the voice-over narrator.

Table 10-1 indicates the differences in the times when men and women appeared in commercials. Women appeared most during the daytime (with its soap operas), men predominated during the weekend commercials (with its sports programming), and men and women were equally represented during evening prime time

Craig found other differences in the ways men and women were portrayed.

> Further analysis indicated that male primary characters were proportionately more likely than females to be portrayed as celebrities and professionals in every day part, while women were proportionately more likely to be portrayed as interviewer/demonstrators, parent/ spouses, or sex object/models in every day part. . . . Women were proportionately more likely to appear as sex object/models during the weekend than during the day.
>
> *(1992: 204)*

The research also showed that different products were advertised during different time periods. As you might imagine, almost all the daytime commercials dealt with body, food, or home products. These products accounted for only one in three on the weekends. Instead, weekend commercials stressed automotive products (29 percent), business products or services (27 percent), or alcohol (10 percent). There were virtually no alcohol ads during evenings and daytime.

As you might suspect, women were most likely to be portrayed in home settings, men

most likely to be shown away from home. Other findings dealt with the different roles played by men and women.

> The women who appeared in weekend ads were almost never portrayed without men and seldom as the commercial's primary character. They were generally seen in roles subservient to men (e.g., hotel receptionist, secretary, or stewardess), or as sex objects or models in which their only function seemed to be to lend an aspect of eroticism to the ad.
>
> *(Craig 1992: 208)*

Although some of Craig's findings may seem unsurprising, remember that "common knowledge" does not always correspond with reality. It's always worthwhile to check out widely held assumptions. And even when we think we know about a given situation, it's often useful to know specific details such as those provided by a content analysis like this one.

In another content analysis that drew on popular culture for content, Charis Kubrin (2005) chose a primarily qualitative approach. Kubrin was interested in the themes put forth in rap music, particularly in gangsta rap, and the relationship of those themes to neighborhood culture and the "street code."

> In response to societal and neighborhood conditions, black youth in disadvantaged communities have created a substitute social order governed by their own code—a street code—and rituals of authenticity. . . . This social order reflects the subcultural locus of interests that emerges from pervasive race and class inequality and the social isolation of poor black communities.
>
> *(2005: 439)*

She began her study by identifying all the platinum rap albums released between 1992 and 2000: 130 albums containing a total of 1,922 songs. She then drew a simple random sample of one-third of the songs (632) and set about the task of listening to each. She did this twice with each song.

> First, I listened to a song in its entirety while reading the printed lyrics to determine what the song was about. Second, I listened to the song again and coded each line to determine whether the street code elements described earlier were present: (1) respect, (2) willingness to fight or use violence, (3) material wealth, (4) violent retaliation, (5) objectification of women, and (6) nihilism.
>
> *(2005: 443)*

Kubrin was particularly interested in the theme of nihilism—the rejection of traditional moral principles and a fundamental skepticism about the meaning of life. She was interested in how that theme was portrayed in gangsta rap and how it fit into the street code.

Though she began with a sample of 632 songs, she found that no new themes appeared to be showing up after about 350 songs had been analyzed. To be safe, she coded another 50 songs and found no new themes, completing her coding process at that point.

Kubrin notes that rap music is typically regarded as antisocial and resistant to organized society, but her in-depth analysis of lyrics suggests something different:

> Rap music does not exist in a cultural vacuum; rather it expresses the cultural crossing, mixing, and engagement of black youth culture with the values, attitudes and concerns of the white majority. Many of the violent (and patriarchical, materialistic, sexist, etc.) ways of thinking that are glorified in gangsta rap are a reflection of the prevailing values created and sustained in the larger society.
>
> *(2005: 454)*

She traces the implications of this for understanding street life as well as for the likely success of various crime-control strategies.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Content Analysis

Probably the greatest advantage of content analysis is its economy in terms of both time and money. A college student might undertake a content analysis,

whereas undertaking a survey, for example, might not be feasible. There is no requirement for a large research staff; no special equipment is needed. As long as you have access to the material to be coded, you can undertake content analysis.

Content analysis also has the advantage of allowing the correction of errors. If you discover you've botched up a survey or an experiment, you may be forced to repeat the whole research project with all its attendant costs in time and money. If you botch up your field research, it may be impossible to redo the project; the event under study may no longer exist. In content analysis, it's usually easier to repeat a portion of the study than it is in other research methods. You might be required, moreover, to recode only a portion of your data rather than all of it.

A third advantage of content analysis is that it permits the study of processes occurring over a long time. You might focus on the imagery of Irish Americans conveyed in U.S. novels written between 1850 and 1860, for example, or you might examine how such imagery has changed from 1850 to the present.

Finally, content analysis has the advantage of all unobtrusive measures, namely, that the content analyst seldom has any effect on the subject being studied. Because the novels have already been written, the paintings already painted, the speeches already presented, content analyses can have no effect on them.

Content analysis has disadvantages as well. For one thing, it's limited to the examination of recorded communications. Such communications may be oral, written, or graphic, but they must be recorded in some fashion to permit analysis.

As we've seen, content analysis has both advantages and disadvantages in terms of validity and reliability. Problems of validity are likely unless you happen to be studying communication processes per se.

On the other side of the ledger, the concreteness of materials studied in content analysis strengthens the likelihood of reliability. You can always code your data and then recode the original documents from scratch. And you can repeat the process as many times as you want. In field research, by contrast, there's no way to return to the original events that were observed, recorded, and categorized.

Let's move from content analysis now and turn to a related research method: the analysis of existing data. Although numbers rather than communications are analyzed in this case, I think you'll see the similarity to content analysis.

Analyzing Existing Statistics

Frequently you can or must undertake social science inquiry through the use of official or quasi-official statistics. This differs from secondary analysis, in which you obtain a copy of someone else's data and undertake your own statistical analysis. In this section, we're going to look at ways of using the data analyses that others have already done.

This method is particularly significant because existing statistics should always be considered as at least a supplemental source of data. If you were planning a survey of political attitudes, for example, you would do well to examine and present your findings within a context of voting patterns, rates of voter turnout, or similar statistics relevant to your research interest. Or, if you were doing evaluation research on an experimental morale-building program on an assembly line, then statistics on absenteeism, sick leave, and so on would probably be interesting and revealing in connection with the data from your own research. Existing statistics, then, can often provide a historical or conceptual context within which to locate your original research.

Existing statistics can also provide the main data for a social science inquiry. An excellent example is the classic study mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Emile Durkheim's *Suicide* ([1897] 1951). Let's take a closer look at Durkheim's work before considering some of the special problems this method presents.

Durkheim's Study of Suicide

Why do people kill themselves? Undoubtedly every suicide case has a unique history and explanation,

yet all such cases could no doubt be grouped according to certain common causes: financial failure, trouble in love, disgrace, and other kinds of personal problems. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim had a slightly different question in mind when he addressed the matter of suicide, however. He wanted to discover the environmental conditions that encouraged or discouraged it, especially social conditions.

The more Durkheim examined the available records, the more patterns of differences became apparent to him. One of the first things to attract his attention was the relative stability of suicide rates. Looking at several countries, he found suicide rates to be about the same year after year. He also discovered that a disproportionate number of suicides occurred in summer, leading him to hypothesize that temperature might have something to do with suicide. If this were the case, suicide rates should be higher in the southern European countries than in the temperate ones. However, Durkheim discovered that the highest rates were found in countries in the central latitudes, so temperature couldn't be the answer.

He explored the role of age (35 was the most common suicide age), sex (men outnumbered women around four to one), and numerous other factors. Eventually, a general pattern emerged from different sources.

In terms of the stability of suicide rates over time, for instance, Durkheim found that the pattern was not totally stable. There were spurts in the rates during times of political turmoil, which occurred in several European countries around 1848. This observation led him to hypothesize that suicide might have something to do with "breaches in social equilibrium." Put differently, social stability and integration seemed to be a protection against suicide.

This general hypothesis was substantiated and specified through Durkheim's analysis of a different set of data. The different countries of Europe had radically different suicide rates. The rate in Saxony, for example, was about ten times that of Italy, and the relative ranking of various countries persisted over time. As Durkheim considered other differences among the various countries, he eventually noticed a striking pattern: Predominantly Protestant countries had consistently higher suicide rates than Catholic ones did. The predominantly Protestant countries had 190 suicides per million population; mixed Protestant-Catholic countries, 96; and predominantly Catholic countries, 58 (Durkheim [1897] 1951: 152).

Although suicide rates thus seemed to be related to religion, Durkheim reasoned that some other factor, such as level of economic and cultural development, might explain the observed differences among countries. If religion had a genuine effect on suicide, then the religious difference would have to be found *within* given countries as well. To test this idea, Durkheim first noted that the German state of Bavaria had both the most Catholics and the lowest suicide rates in that country, whereas heavily Protestant Prussia had a much higher suicide rate. Not content to stop there, however, Durkheim examined the provinces composing each of those states.

Table 10-2 shows what he found. As you can see, in both Bavaria and Prussia, provinces with the highest proportion of Protestants also had the highest suicide rates. Increasingly, Durkheim became confident that religion played a significant role in the matter of suicide.

Returning eventually to a more general theoretical level, Durkheim combined the religious findings with the earlier observation about increased suicide rates during times of political turmoil. As we've seen, Durkheim suggested that many suicides are a product of *anomie,* that is, "normlessness," or a general sense of social instability and disintegration. During times of political strife, people may feel that the old ways of society are collapsing. They become demoralized and depressed, and suicide is one answer to the severe discomfort. Seen from the other direction, social integration and solidarity—reflected in personal feelings of being part of a coherent, enduring social whole—offer protection against depression and suicide. That was where the religious difference fit in. Catholicism, as a far more structured and integrated religious system, gave people a greater sense of coherence and stability than did the more loosely structured Protestantism.

TABLE 10-2

Suicide Rates in Various German Provinces, Arranged in Terms of Religious Affiliation

Religious Character of Province	Suicides per Million Inhabitants
Bavarian Provinces (1867–1875)*	
Less than 50% Catholic	
Rhenish Palatinate	167
Central Franconia	207
Upper Franconia	204
Average	**192**
50% to 90% Catholic	
Lower Franconia	157
Swabia	118
Average	**135**
More than 90% Catholic	
Upper Palatinate	64
Upper Bavaria	114
Lower Bavaria	19
Average	**75**
Prussian Provinces (1883–1890)	
More than 90% Protestant	
Saxony	309.4
Schleswig	312.9
Pomerania	171.5
Average	**264.6**
68% to 89% Protestant	
Hanover	212.3
Hesse	200.3
Brandenburg and Berlin	296.3
East Prussia	171.3
Average	**220.0**
40% to 50% Protestant	
West Prussia	123.9
Silesia	260.2
Westphalia	107.5
Average	**163.6**
28% to 32% Protestant	
Posen	96.4
Rhineland	100.3
Hohenzollern	90.1
Average	**95.6**

*Note: The population below 15 years has been omitted.

Source: Adapted from Emile Durkheim, *Suicide* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, [1897] 1951), 153.

From these theories, Durkheim created the concept of *anomic suicide.* More importantly, as you may know, he added the concept of *anomie* to the lexicon of the social sciences.

This account of Durkheim's classic study is greatly simplified, of course. Anyone studying social research would profit from studying the original. For our purposes, Durkheim's approach provides a good illustration of the possibilities for research contained in the masses of data regularly gathered and reported by government agencies and other organizations.

The Consequences of Globalization

The notion of "globalization" has become increasingly controversial in the United States and around the world, with reactions ranging from scholarly debates to violent confrontations in the streets. One point of view sees the spread of U.S.-style capitalism to developing countries as economic salvation for those countries. A very different point of view sees globalization as essentially neocolonial exploitation, in which multinational conglomerates exploit the resources and people of poor countries. And, of course, there are numerous variations on these contradictory views.

Jeffrey Kentor (2001) wanted to bring data to bear on the question of how globalization affects the developing countries that host the process. To that end, he used data available from the World Bank's "World Development Indicators." (You can learn more about these data at the link on your Sociology CourseMate at www.cengagebrain.com.) Noting past variations in the way globalization was measured, Kentor used the amount of foreign investment in a country's economy as a percentage of that country's whole economy. He reasoned that dependence on foreign investments was more important than the amount of the investment.

In his analysis of 88 countries with a per capita gross domestic product (the total goods and services produced in a country) of less than $10,000, Kentor found that dependence on foreign investment tended to increase income inequality among the citizens of a country. The greater the degree

of dependence, the greater the income inequality. Kentor reasoned that globalization produced well-paid elites who, by working with the foreign corporations, maintained a status well above that of the average citizen. But because the profits derived from the foreign investments tended to be returned to the investors' countries rather than enriching the poor countries, the great majority of the population in the latter reaped little or no economic benefit.

Income inequality, in turn, was found to increase birth rates and, hence, population growth, in a process too complex to summarize here. Population growth, of course, brings a wide range of problems to countries already too poor to provide for the basic needs of their people.

This research example, along with our brief look at Durkheim's studies, should broaden your understanding of the kinds of social phenomena that we can study through data already collected and compiled by others.

Units of Analysis

The unit of analysis involved in the analysis of existing statistics is often not the individual. Durkheim, for example, was required to work with political-geographic units: countries, regions, states, and cities. The same situation would probably appear if you were to undertake a study of crime rates, accident rates, or disease. By their nature, most existing statistics are aggregated: They describe groups.

The aggregate nature of existing statistics can present a problem, though not an insurmountable one. As we saw, for example, Durkheim wanted to determine whether Protestants or Catholics were more likely to commit suicide. The difficulty was that none of the records available to him indicated the religion of those people who committed suicide. Ultimately, then, it was not possible for him to say whether Protestants committed suicide more often than Catholics did, though he inferred as much. Because Protestant countries, regions, and states had higher suicide rates than did Catholic countries, regions, and states, he drew the obvious conclusion.

There's danger in drawing this kind of conclusion, however. It's always possible that patterns of behavior at a group level do not reflect corresponding patterns on an individual level. Such errors are due to an ecological fallacy, which was discussed in Chapter 4. In the case of Durkheim's study, it was altogether possible, for example, that it was Catholics who committed suicide in the predominantly Protestant areas. Perhaps Catholics in predominantly Protestant areas were so badly persecuted that they were led into despair and suicide. In that case it would be possible for Protestant countries to have high suicide rates without any Protestants committing suicide.

Durkheim avoided the danger of the ecological fallacy in two ways. First, his general conclusions were based as much on rigorous theoretical deductions as on the empirical facts. The correspondence between theory and fact made a counterexplanation, such as the one I just made up, less likely. Second, by extensively retesting his conclusions in a variety of ways, Durkheim further strengthened the likelihood that they were correct. Suicide rates were higher in Protestant countries than in Catholic ones; higher in Protestant regions of Catholic countries than in Catholic regions of Protestant countries; and so forth. The replication of findings added to the weight of evidence in support of his conclusions.

Problems of Validity

Whenever we base research on an analysis of data that already exist, we're obviously limited to what exists. Often, the existing data do not cover exactly what we're interested in, and our measurements may not be altogether valid representations of the variables and concepts we want to make conclusions about.

Two characteristics of science are used to handle the problem of validity in analysis of existing statistics: *logical reasoning* and *replication*. Durkheim's strategy provides an example of logical reasoning. Although he could not determine the religion of people who committed suicide, he reasoned that most of the suicides in a predominantly Protestant region would be Protestants.

Replication can be a general solution to problems of validity in social research. Recall the earlier

to mention a few sources and point you in the direction of finding others relevant to your research interest. (See the links on your Sociology Course-Mate at www.cengagebrain.com for more on these sources.)

Undoubtedly, the single most valuable book you can buy is the annual *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, published by the United States Department of Commerce. Unquestionably the best source of data about the United States, it includes statistics on the individual states and (less extensively) cities, as well as on the nation as a whole. Where else can you find the number of work stoppages in the country year by year, the residential property taxes of major cities, the number of water-pollution discharges reported around the country, the number of business proprietorships in the nation, and hundreds of other such handy bits of information? To make things even better, Hoover's Business Press offers the same book in soft cover for less cost. This commercial version, entitled *The American Almanac*, shouldn't be confused with other almanacs that are less reliable and less useful for social science research. Better yet, you can buy the *Statistical Abstract* on a CD-ROM, making the search for and transfer of data quite easy. Best of all, you can download the *Statistical Abstract* from the web for free (your tax dollars at work for you).

Federal agencies—the Departments of Labor, Agriculture, Transportation, and so forth—publish numerous data series. To find out what's available, go to your library, find the government documents section, and spend a few hours browsing through the shelves. You can also visit the U.S. Government Printing Office website and look around.

As you can see, the web serves as a great resource for finding existing statistics. Here are just a few organizations you can access online, through the links on your Sociology CourseMate at www .cengagebrain.com:

- Bureau of the Census
- Bureau of Labor Statistics
- Bureau of Transportation Statistics
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Central Intelligence Agency
- Department of Education

- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- The World Bank

If you find none of these interesting, you should turn to the vast listing of data sources provided, by topic, at the University of Michigan's website "Statistical Resources on the Web."

Suppose you were interested in the issue of income discrimination by sex. You could examine this rather easily through the *Statistical Abstract* data. The following table, for example, provides a look at sex, education, and income (adapted from U.S. Bureau of the Census 2008: Table 681, p. 449):

Average Earnings of Year-Round, Full-Time Workers, 2006

	Men	Women	Ratio of Women/ Men Earnings
All workers	57,791	41,518	0.72
Less than 9th grade	26,789	20,499	0.77
9th–12th grades	31,434	23,351	0.74
H.S. graduates	42,466	29,410	0.69
Some college	48,431	35,916	0.74
Associate degree	51,485	40,463	0.79
Bachelor's or more	88,843	59,052	0.66

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2009. *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. Table 681, p. 449. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. You can also access this table online at http://www.census.gov/prod/2008pubs/09statab/income.pdf.

As we've seen before, a graphic presentation can sometimes communicate data more easily than tables of numbers. You could enter the above incomes into a spreadsheet program and have it create a graphic display as shown Figure 10-4.

These data point to a persistent difference between the incomes of men and women, even when both groups have achieved the same levels of education. Other variables could explain the differences, however; we'll return to this issue in Chapter 14.

World statistics are available through the United Nations. Its *Demographic Yearbook* presents annual vital statistics (births, deaths, and other data relevant to population) for the individual nations of the world. Other publications report a variety of

discussion of the interchangeability of indicators (Chapter 6). Crying in sad movies isn't necessarily a valid measure of compassion; nor is putting little birds back in their nests nor giving money to charity. None of these things, taken alone, would prove that one group (women, say) was more compassionate than another (men). But if women appeared more compassionate than men by all these measures, that would create a weight of evidence in support of the conclusion. In the analysis of existing statistics, a little ingenuity and reasoning can usually turn up several independent tests of a given hypothesis. If all the tests seem to confirm the hypothesis, then the weight of evidence supports the validity of the measure.

Problems of Reliability

The analysis of existing statistics depends heavily on the quality of the statistics themselves: Do they accurately report what they claim to report? This can be a substantial problem sometimes, because the weighty tables of government statistics, for example, are sometimes grossly inaccurate.

Consider research into crime. Because a great deal of this research depends on official crime statistics, this body of data has come under critical evaluation. The results have not been too encouraging. As an illustration, suppose you were interested in tracing long-term trends in marijuana use in the United States. Official statistics on the numbers of people arrested for selling or possessing marijuana would seem to be a reasonable measure of use, right? Not necessarily.

To begin, you face a hefty problem of validity. Before the passage of the Marihuana Tax Act in 1937, "grass" was legal in the United States, so arrest records would not give you a valid measure of use. But even if you limited your inquiry to the times after 1937, you would still have problems of reliability that stem from the nature of law enforcement and crime recording.

Law enforcement, for example, is subject to various pressures. A public outcry against marijuana, led perhaps by a vocal citizens' group, often results in a police crackdown on drug trafficking—especially during an election or budget year. A

sensational story in the press can have a similar effect. In addition, the volume of other business facing the police can affect marijuana arrests.

In tracing the pattern of drug arrests in Chicago between 1942 and 1970, Lois DeFleur (1975) demonstrates that the official records present a far less accurate history of drug use than of police practices and political pressure on police. On a different level of analysis, Donald Black (1970) and others have analyzed the factors influencing whether an offender is actually arrested by police or let off with a warning. Ultimately, official crime statistics are influenced by whether specific offenders are well or poorly dressed, whether they are polite or abusive to police officers, and so forth. When we consider unreported crimes, sometimes estimated to be as much as ten times the number of crimes known to police, the reliability of crime statistics gets even shakier.

These comments concern crime statistics at a local level. Often it's useful to analyze national crime statistics, such as those reported in the FBI's annual *Uniform Crime Reports.* Additional problems are introduced at the national level. For example, different local jurisdictions define crimes differently. Also, participation in the FBI program is voluntary, so the data are incomplete.

Finally, the process of record keeping affects the data available to researchers. Whenever a law-enforcement unit improves its record-keeping system—computerizes it, for example—the apparent crime rates increase dramatically. This can happen even if the number of crimes committed, reported, and investigated does not increase.

Researchers' first protection against the problems of reliability in the analysis of existing statistics is knowing that the problem may exist. Investigating the nature of the data collection and tabulation may enable you to assess the nature and degree of unreliability so that you can judge its potential impact on your research interest. If you also use logical reasoning and replication, you can usually cope with the problem.

Sources of Existing Statistics

It would take a whole book just to list the sources of data available for analysis. In this section, I want

be limited to tables of numbers. There are graphic resources available as well, such as the *Social Explorer* (see the link on your Sociology CourseMate at www.cengagebrain.com). A wide range of data about the United States can be represented on a map of congressional districts or census tracts. You can examine aspects of population, religion, economy, and many other variables. For example, you can easily find the geographic concentrations of unmarried partners: male/female, male/male, and female/female.

You can do similar kinds of map-based examinations through the Census Bureau by clicking on "Maps" at their website (see the link on your Sociology CourseMate at www.cengagebrain.com). Once you've displayed a variable such as multiracial marriages state-by-state, you can click on a particular state and get a detailed graph of the racial marriages in that state.

Let's move now from an inherently quantitative method to one that is typically qualitative: comparative and historical research.

Comparative and Historical Research

Comparative and historical research differs substantially from the methods discussed so far, though it overlaps somewhat with field research, content analysis, and the analysis of existing statistics. It involves the use of historical methods by sociologists, political scientists, and other social scientists to examine societies (or other social units) over time and in comparison with one another.

The discussion of longitudinal research designs in Chapter 4 notwithstanding, our examination of research methods so far has focused primarily on studies anchored in one point in time and in one locale, whether a small group or a nation. Although accurately portraying the main thrust

of contemporary social science research, this focus conceals the fact that social scientists are also interested in tracing the development of social forms over time and comparing those developmental processes across cultures. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (2003: 4) suggest that current comparative and historical researchers "focus on a wide range of topics, but they are united by a commitment to providing historically grounded explanations of large-scale and substantively important outcomes." Thus, you find comparative and historical studies dealing with the topics social class, capitalism, religion, revolution, and the like.

After describing some major instances of comparative and historical research, past and present, this section discusses some of the key elements of this method.

Examples of Comparative and Historical Research

Auguste Comte, who coined the term *sociologie,* saw that new discipline as the final stage in a historical development of ideas. With his broadest brush, he painted an evolutionary picture that took humans from a reliance on religion to metaphysics to science. With a finer brush, he portrayed science as evolving from the development of biology and the other natural sciences to the development of psychology and, finally, to the development of scientific sociology.

A great many later social scientists have also turned their attention to broad historical processes. Several have examined the historical progression of social forms from the simple to the complex, from rural-agrarian to urban-industrial societies. The U.S. anthropologist Lewis Morgan, for example, saw a progression from "savagery" to "barbarism" to "civilization" (1870). Robert Redfield, another anthropologist, wrote more recently of a shift from "folk society" to "urban society" (1941). Emile Durkheim saw social evolution largely as a process of ever-greater division of labor ([1893] 1964). In a more specific analysis, Karl Marx examined economic systems progressing historically from primitive to feudal to capitalistic forms ([1867] 1967). All history, he wrote in this context, was

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comparative and historical research The examination of societies (or other social units) over time and in comparison with one another.
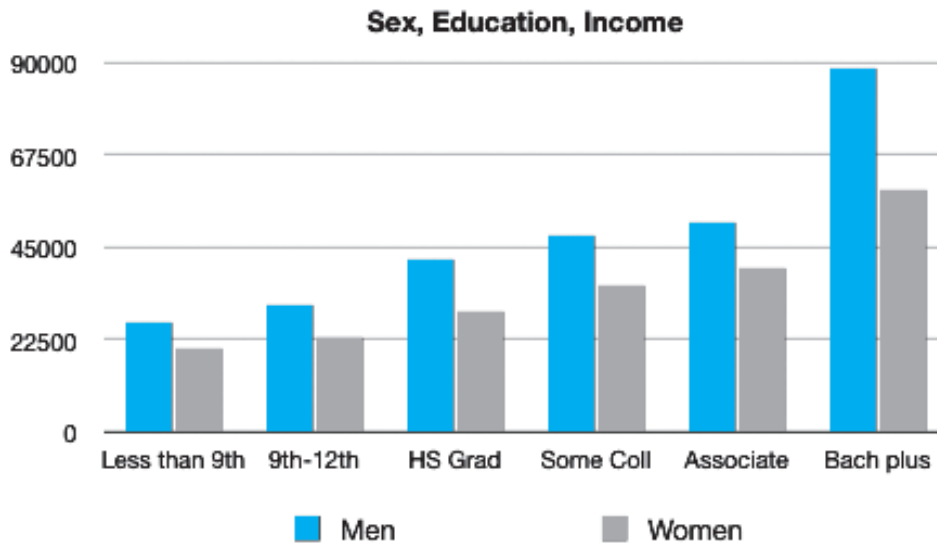
FIGURE 10-4

Graphic Display of Sex, Education, and Income Created from Spreadsheet Data

other kinds of data. Again, utilizing the resources at your library on the web may be the best introduction to what's available.

The amount of data provided by nongovernment agencies is as staggering as the amount your taxes buy. Chambers of commerce often publish data reports on businesses, as do private consumer groups. Common Cause covers politics and government. The Gallup Organization publishes reference volumes on public opinion as tapped by Gallup Polls since 1935.

Organizations such as the Population Reference Bureau publish a variety of demographic data, U.S. and international, that a secondary analyst could use. Their *World Population Data Sheet* and *Population Bulletin* are resources heavily used by social scientists. Social indicator data can be found in the journal *SINET: A Quarterly Review of Social Reports and Research on Social Indicators, Social Trends, and the Quality of Life*.

A new guide to Population Action International's mapping website shows how climate change and population dynamics will change the world over time. High rates of population growth and climate-change consequences overlap in many countries. Interactive maps illustrate how

climate-change impacts, demographic trends, and the need for contraception are likely to affect countries' abilities to adapt to the effects of climate change.

The maps identify 33 population and climate-change hotspots—countries that are experiencing rapid population growth, low resilience to climate change, and high projected declines in agricultural production. Many hotspots are currently experiencing water stress or scarcity, a condition that will worsen with continued rapid population growth. And in many countries, a high proportion of women lack access to reproductive health services and contraceptives. Investments in family-planning programs in these hotspots could improve health and well-being, slow population growth, and reduce vulnerability to climate-change impacts.

The newly updated interactive mapping website can be viewed at www.populationaction.org/climatemap.

The sources I've listed represent only a tiny fraction of the thousands that are available. With so much data already collected, the lack of funds to support expensive data collection is no reason for not doing good and useful social research. Moreover, as we've seen, this research method need not

a history of class struggle—the "haves" struggling to maintain their advantages and the "have-nots" struggling for a better lot in life. Looking beyond capitalism, Marx saw the development of socialism and finally communism.

Not all historical studies in the social sciences have had this evolutionary flavor, however. Some social science readings of the historical record, in fact, point to grand cycles rather than to linear progressions. No scholar better represents this view than Pitirim A. Sorokin. A participant in the Russian Revolution of 1917, Sorokin served as secretary to Prime Minister Kerensky. Both Kerensky and Sorokin fell from favor, however, and Sorokin began his second career—as a U.S. sociologist.

Whereas Comte read history as a progression from religion to science, Sorokin (1937–1940) suggested that societies alternate cyclically between two points of view, which he called "ideational" and "sensate." Sorokin's sensate point of view defined reality in terms of sense experiences. The ideational, by contrast, placed a greater emphasis on spiritual and religious factors. Sorokin's reading of the historical record further indicated that the passage between the ideational and sensate was through a third point of view, which he called the "idealistic." This third view combined elements of the sensate and ideational in an integrated, rational view of the world.

These examples indicate some of the topics comparative and historical researchers have examined. To get a better sense of what comparative and historical research entails, let's look at a few examples in somewhat more detail.

Weber and the Role of Ideas

In his analysis of economic history, Karl Marx put forward a view of economic determinism. That is, he postulated that economic factors determined the nature of all other aspects of society. For example, Marx's analysis showed that a function of European churches was to justify and support the capitalist status quo—religion was a tool of the powerful in maintaining their dominance over the powerless. "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature," Marx wrote in a famous passage, "the

sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people" (Bottomore and Rubel [1843] 1956: 27).

Max Weber, a German sociologist, disagreed. Without denying that economic factors could and did affect other aspects of society, Weber argued that economic determinism did not explain everything. Indeed, Weber said, economic forms could come from noneconomic ideas. In his research in the sociology of religion, Weber examined the extent to which religious institutions were the source of social behavior rather than mere reflections of economic conditions. His most noted statement of this side of the issue is found in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* ([1905] 1958). Here's a brief overview of Weber's thesis.

John Calvin (1509–1564), a French theologian, was an important figure in the Protestant reformation of Christianity. Calvin taught that the ultimate salvation or damnation of every individual had already been decided by God; this idea is called *predestination*. Calvin also suggested that God communicated his decisions to people by making them either successful or unsuccessful during their earthly existence. God gave each person an earthly "calling"—an occupation or profession—and manifested their success or failure through that medium. Ironically, this point of view led Calvin's followers to seek proof of their coming salvation by working hard, saving their money, and generally striving for economic success.

In Weber's analysis, Calvinism provided an important stimulus for the development of capitalism. Rather than "wasting" their money on worldly comforts, the Calvinists reinvested it in their economic enterprises, thus providing the capital necessary for the development of capitalism. In arriving at this interpretation of the origins of capitalism, Weber researched the official doctrines of the early Protestant churches, studied the preaching of Calvin and other church leaders, and examined other relevant historical documents.

In three other studies, Weber conducted detailed historical analyses of Judaism ([1934] 1952) and the religions of China ([1934] 1951) and India ([1934] 1958). Among other things, Weber wanted to know why capitalism had not

developed in the ancient societies of China, India, and Israel. In none of the three religions did he find any teaching that would have supported the accumulation and reinvestment of capital—strengthening his conclusion about the role of Protestantism in that regard.

Fair Trade Coffee

If you buy coffee at a grocery store or coffeehouse, you may have noticed that some of of the packages are labeled "Fair Trade." As you might know, the Fair Trade certification reflects an international, social/ecological/economic movement formed to support farmers and laborers in developing countries. The Fair Trade movement seeks equity in international trade, and aims to ensure that these workers receive a higher price for the products they grow and export. In a free-market economy, it is common that growers of products like coffee, chocolate, and bananas actually receive very little of the money that you, a consumer in a developed country, might pay for it. In practice, Fair Trade reflects economic reorganization. It may include local farmer co-ops working with international nonprofit organizations, such as the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, to cut out the "middlemen" to deliver more money as well as price stability to those doing the work. Fair Trade practices are also focused on improving environmental standards and sustainability practices.

Daniel Jaffee (2007) came in contact with that movement in 2003 while attending a meeting of the World Trade Organization in Mexico. A group for the delegates staged a demonstration on behalf of Fair Trade and walked out of the WTO meeting to move into a smaller conference of their own. Jaffee followed them and began his extended study of Fair Trade economics.

> Over two years, I lived, worked, and talked with these farmers, as well as with their neighbors who know a very different coffee market—the conventional market represented by local coyotes, middlemen who often pay them less than it costs to produce their coffee in the first place.
>
> *(2007: xiv)*

Jaffee's research involved participant observation, as his description indicated, but also the collection and analysis of quantitative data about production, prices, income, and the like. In part, he was interested in placing the new movement within the larger context of world coffee production and marketing. (Fair Trade presents roughly 1 percent of the total.)

He was also interested in the evolution of the movement over time, as Fair Trade became better known and more popular. He examined the development of the organizations involved and looked at the adjustments required when large distributors such as Starbucks began offering Fair Trade coffee as an option for its customers. Whereas we have seen that some research methods offer a snapshot of social life at one point in time, Jaffee's analysis offers a motion picture of an ongoing social process.

Here are a few briefer examples to illustrate some of the topics interesting to comparative and historical scholars today.

- *The Rise of Christianity:* Rodney Stark (1997) lays out his research question in the book's subtitle: *How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries.* For many people, the answer to this puzzle is a matter of faith in the miraculous destiny of Christianity. Without debunking Christian faith, Stark looks for a scientific explanation, undertaking an analysis of existing historical records that sketch out the population growth of Christianity during its early centuries. He notes, among other things, that the early growth rate of Christianity, rather than being unaccountably rapid, was very similar to the contemporary growth of Mormonism. He then goes on to examine elements in early Christian practice that gave it growth advantages over the predominant paganism of the Roman Empire. For example, the early Christian churches were friendlier to women than paganism was, and much of the early growth occurred among women—who often converted their husbands later on. And in an era of deadly plagues, the early Christians were more willing to care for stricken friends and family members, which not only enhanced the survival of Christians but

also made it a more attractive conversion prospect. At every turn in the analysis, Stark makes rough calculations of the demographic impact of cultural factors. This study is an illustration of how social research methods can shed light on nonscientific realms such as faith and religion.

- *Policing World Society:* Mathieu Deflem (2002) set out to learn how contemporary systems of international cooperation among police agencies came about. All of us have heard movie and TV references to the international police organization, Interpol. Deflem went back to the middle of the nineteenth century and traced its development through World War II. In part, his analysis examines the strains between the bureaucratic integration of police agencies in their home governments and the need for independence from those governments.

- *Organizing America:* Charles Perrow (2002) wanted to understand the roots of the uniquely American form of capitalism. Compared with European nations, the United States has shown less interest in providing for the needs of average citizens and has granted greater power to gigantic corporations. Perrow feels the die was pretty much cast by the end of the nineteenth century, resting primarily on Supreme Court decisions in favor of corporations and the experiences of the textile and railroad industries.

- *Diminished Democracy:* Theda Skocpol (2003) turns her attention to something that fascinated Alexis de Tocqueville in his 1840 *Democracy in America:* the grassroots commitment to democracy, which appeared in all aspects of American community life. It almost seemed as though democratic decision making was genetic in the new world, but what happened? Skocpol's analysis of contemporary U.S. culture suggests a "diminished democracy" that cannot be easily explained by the ideologies of either the right or the left.

These examples of comparative and historical research should give you some sense of the potential power of the method. Let's turn now to an examination of the sources and techniques used in this method.

Sources of Comparative and Historical Data

As we saw in the case of existing statistics, there is no end of data available for analysis in historical research. To begin, historians may have already reported on whatever it is you want to examine, and their analyses can give you an initial grounding in the subject, a jumping-off point for more in-depth research.

Most likely you'll ultimately want to go beyond others' conclusions and examine some "raw data" to draw your own conclusions. These data vary, of course, according to the topic under study. When W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki (1918) studied the adjustment process for Polish peasants coming to the United States early in this century, they examined letters written by the immigrants to their families in Poland. (They obtained the letters through newspaper advertisements.) Other researchers have analyzed old diaries. Such personal documents only scratch the surface, however. In discussing procedures for studying the history of family life, Ellen Rothman points to the following sources:

> In addition to personal sources, there are public records which are also revealing of family history. Newspapers are especially rich in evidence on the educational, legal, and recreational aspects of family life in the past as seen from a local point of view. Magazines reflect more general patterns of family life; students often find them interesting to explore for data on perceptions and expectations of mainstream family values. Magazines offer several different kinds of sources at once: visual materials (illustrations and advertisements), commentary (editorial and advice columns), and fiction. Popular periodicals are particularly rich in the last two. Advice on many questions of concern to families—from the proper way to discipline children to the economics of wallpaper—fills magazine columns from the early nineteenth century to the present. Stories that suggest common experiences or perceptions of family life appear with the same continuity.
>
> *(1981: 53)*

Organizations generally document themselves, so if you're studying the development of some organization you should examine its official documents: charters, policy statements, speeches by leaders, and so on. Once, when I was studying the rise of a contemporary Japanese religious group—Sokagakkai—I discovered not only weekly newspapers and magazines published by the group but also a published collection of all the speeches given by the original leaders. With these sources, I could trace changes in recruitment patterns over time. At the outset, followers were enjoined to enroll all the world. Later, the emphasis shifted specifically to Japan. Once a sizable Japanese membership had been established, an emphasis on enrolling all the world returned (Babbie 1966).

Often, official government documents provide the data needed for analysis. To better appreciate the history of race relations in the United States, A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr. (1978) examined 200 years of laws and court cases involving race. Himself the first African American appointed a federal judge, Higginbotham found that, rather than protecting African Americans, the law embodied bigotry and oppression. In the earliest court cases, there was considerable ambiguity over whether African Americans were indentured servants or, in fact, slaves. Later court cases and laws clarified the matter—holding African Americans to be something less than human.

The sources of data for historical analysis are too extensive to cover even in outline here, though the examples we've looked at should suggest some ideas. Whatever resources you use, however, a couple of cautions are in order.

As we saw in the case of existing statistics, you can't trust the accuracy of records—official or unofficial, primary or secondary. Your protection lies in replication: In the case of historical research, that means corroboration. If several sources point to the same set of "facts," your confidence in them might reasonably increase.

At the same time, you need always be wary of bias in your data sources. If all your data on the development of a political movement are taken from the movement itself, you're unlikely to gain a well-rounded view of it. The diaries of well-to-do gentry

of the Middle Ages may not give you an accurate view of life in general during those times. Where possible, obtain data from a variety of sources representing different points of view.

As Ron Aminzade and Barbara Laslett indicate in the Tips and Tools feature "Reading and Evaluating Documents," there is an art to knowing how to regard such documents and what to make of them.

Incidentally, the critical review that Aminzade and Laslett urge for the reading of historical documents is useful in many areas of your life besides the pursuit of comparative and historical research. Consider applying some of their questions to presidential press conferences, advertising, or (gasp) college textbooks. None of these offers a direct view of reality; all have human authors and human subjects.

Analytic Techniques

The analysis of comparative and historical data is another large subject that I can't cover exhaustively here. Moreover, because comparative and historical research is usually a qualitative method, there are no easily listed steps to follow in the analysis of historical data. Nevertheless, a few comments are in order.

Max Weber used the German term *verstehen*—"understanding"—in reference to an essential quality of social research. He meant that the researcher must be able to take on, mentally, the circumstances, views, and feelings of those being studied, so that the researcher can interpret their actions appropriately. Certainly this concept applies to comparative and historical research. The researcher's imaginative understanding is what breathes life and meaning into the evidence being analyzed.

The comparative and historical researcher must find patterns among the voluminous details describing the subject matter of study. Often this takes the form of what Weber called *ideal types:* conceptual models composed of the essential characteristics of social phenomena. Thus, for example, Weber himself did considerable research on bureaucracy. Having observed numerous actual bureaucracies, Weber ([1925] 1946) detailed those qualities essential to bureaucracies in general: jurisdictional areas, hierarchically structured authority, written files,

Tips and Tools

Reading and Evaluating Documents

Ron Aminzade and Barbara Laslett

University of Minnesota

The purpose of the following comments is to give you some sense of the kind of interpretive work historians do and the critical approach they take toward their sources. It should help you to appreciate some of the skills historians develop in their efforts to reconstruct the past from residues, to assess the evidentiary status of different types of documents, and to determine the range of permissible inferences and interpretations. Here are some of the questions historians ask about documents:

1. Who composed the documents? Why were they written? Why have they survived all these years? What methods were used to acquire the information contained in the documents?

2. What are some of the biases in the documents and how might you go about checking or correcting them? How inclusive or representative is the sample of individuals, events, and so on, contained in the document? What were the institutional constraints and the general organizational routines under which the document was

prepared? To what extent does the document provide more of an index of institutional activity than of the phenomenon being studied? What is the time lapse between the observation of the events documented and the witnesses' documentation of them? How confidential or public was the document meant to be? What role did etiquette, convention, and custom play in the presentation of the material contained within the document? If you relied solely upon the evidence contained in these documents, how might your vision of the past be distorted? What other kinds of documents might you look at for evidence on the same issues?

3. What are the key categories and concepts used by the writer of the document to organize the information presented? What selectivities or silences result from these categories of thought?

4. What sorts of theoretical issues and debates do these documents cast light on? What kinds of historical and/or sociological questions do they help to answer? What sorts of valid inferences can one make from the information contained in these documents? What sorts of generalizations can one make on the basis of the information contained in these documents?

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and so on. Weber did not merely list those characteristics common to all the actual bureaucracies he observed. Rather, to create a theoretical model of the "perfect" (ideal type) bureaucracy, he needed to understand fully the essentials of bureaucratic operation. Figure 10-5 offers a more recent, graphic portrayal of some positive and negative aspects of bureaucracy as a general social phenomenon.

Often, comparative and historical research is informed by a particular theoretical paradigm. Thus, Marxist scholars may undertake historical analyses of particular situations—such as the history of Latinos and Latinas in the United States—to determine whether they can be understood in terms of the Marxist version of conflict theory. Sometimes, comparative and historical researchers attempt to replicate prior studies in new situations—for example, doing follow-up replications of Weber's studies of religion and economics.

Although comparative and historical research is often regarded as a qualitative rather than quantitative technique, this is by no means necessary.

Historical analysts sometimes use time-series data to monitor changing conditions over time, such as data on population, crime rates, unemployment, infant mortality rates, and so forth. The analysis of such data sometimes requires sophistication, however. For example, Larry Isaac and Larry Griffin (1989) discuss the uses of a variation on regression techniques (see Chapter 16) in determining the meaningful breaking points in historical processes, as well as for specifying the periods within which certain relationships occur among variables. Criticizing the tendency to regard history as a steadily unfolding process, the authors focus their attention on the statistical relationship between unionization and the frequency of strikes, demonstrating that the relationship has shifted importantly over time.

Isaac and Griffin raise several important issues regarding the relationship among theory, research methods, and the "historical facts" they address. Their analysis, once again, warns against the naive assumption that history as documented necessarily coincides with what actually happened.
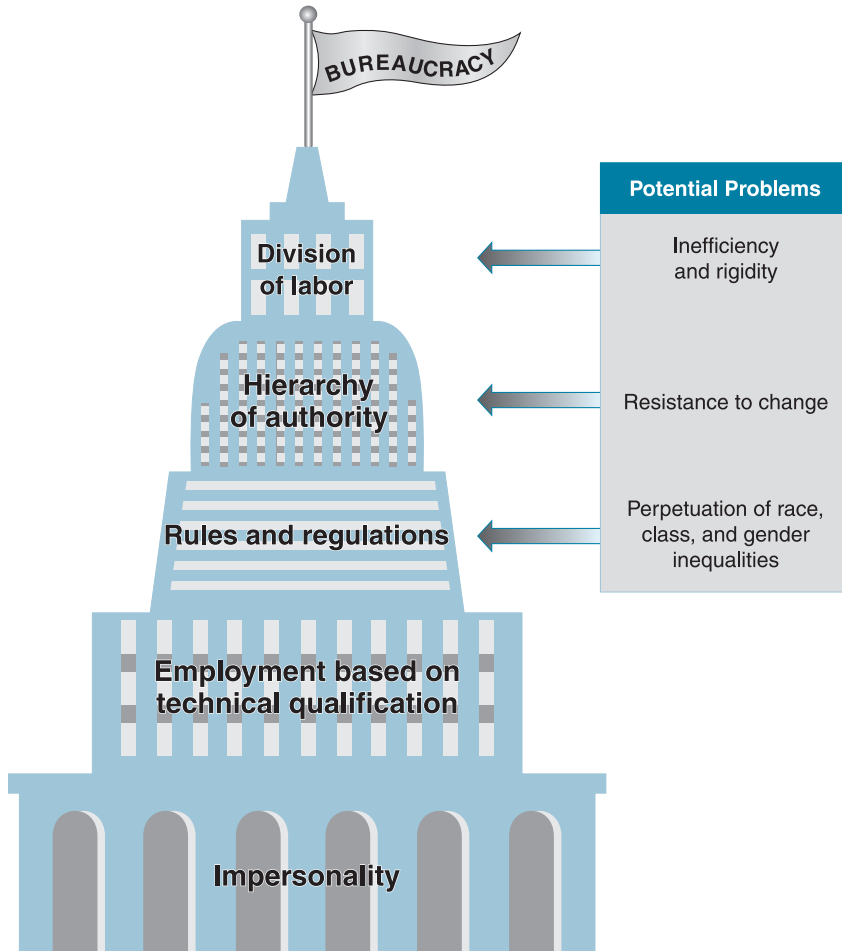
FIGURE 10-5

Some Positive and Negative Aspects of Bureaucracy

Source: Diana Kendall, *Sociology in Our Times*, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, ©2005). Used by permission.

Ethics and Unobtrusive Measures

The use of unobtrusive measures avoids many of the ethical issues we've discussed in connection with other data-collection techniques, but if you reflect on the general principles we've discussed, I think you'll see that there are potential risks to guard against.

The general principle of confidentiality may be relevant in some projects, for example. Let's suppose you want to examine an immigrant subculture through a content analysis of letters written back to the old country, as was the case in the Thomas and Znaniecki (1918) study of Polish peasants, mentioned earlier in the chapter. To begin, you should obtain those letters legally and ethically (no getting a government agency to intercept the letters for you), and you need to protect the privacy of the letter writers and recipients.

As with all other research techniques, you're obliged to collect data, analyze them, and report your findings honestly, with the purpose of discovering what is so, rather than attempting to support

a favored hypothesis or personal agenda. While it may be easy to agree with such a principle, you're likely to find it somewhat more difficult to apply when you actually conduct research. Your ethical sensibilities will be more challenged by the vast gray areas than by those of black and white.

MAIN POINTS

Introduction

- Unobtrusive measures are ways of studying social behavior without affecting it in the process.

Content Analysis

- Content analysis is a social research method appropriate for studying human communications through social artifacts. Researchers can use it to study not only communication processes but other aspects of social behavior as well.
- Common units of analysis in content analysis include elements of communications—words, paragraphs, books, and so forth. Standard probability-sampling techniques are sometimes appropriate in content analysis.
- Content analysis involves coding—transforming raw data into categories based on some conceptual scheme. Coding may attend to both manifest and latent content. The determination of latent content requires judgments by the researcher.
- Both quantitative and qualitative techniques are appropriate for interpreting content analysis data.
- The advantages of content analysis include economy, safety, and the ability to study processes occurring over a long time. Its disadvantages are that it is limited to recorded communications and can raise issues of reliability and validity.

Analyzing Existing Statistics

- A variety of government and nongovernment agencies provide aggregate statistical data for studying aspects of social life.
- Problems of validity in the analysis of existing statistics can often be handled through logical reasoning and replication.
- Existing statistics often have problems of reliability, so they must be used with caution.

Comparative and Historical Research

- Social scientists use comparative and historical methods to discover patterns in the histories of different cultures.

- Although often regarded as a qualitative method, comparative and historical research can make use of quantitative techniques.

Ethics and Unobtrusive Measures

- Sometimes even unobtrusive measures can raise the possibility of violating subjects' privacy.
- The general principles of honest observation, analysis, and reporting apply to all research techniques.

KEY TERMS

The following terms are defined in context in the chapter and at the bottom of the page where the term is introduced, as well as in the comprehensive glossary at the back of the book.

coding
comparative and historical research
content analysis

latent content
manifest content
unobtrusive research

PROPOSING SOCIAL RESEARCH: UNOBTRUSIVE RESEARCH

This chapter has provided an overview of three major types of unobtrusive research: content analysis, analyzing existing statistics, and comparative and historical research. While existing statistics represent, by their nature, a quantitative method, the other two can be done with a qualitative and/or quantitative approach. In this exercise, you need to identify which method and orientation you'll use. If you're doing these exercises in order to understand the topics of the book better, you could try your hand at each of these methods.

You need to describe the data you'll use and detail anything special about your access to those data. Whether you're studying newspaper editorials, infant mortality rates, or accounts of political revolutions, you'll likely face potential problems of validity and reliability. Unobtrusive methods involve the use of available data, which often offer approximations of the observations you might ideally like to make. For example, you may need to use drug-arrest rates as an approximation of drug-use rates. You should discuss how you'll deal with any such approximations.

REVIEW QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Outline a content analysis design to determine whether the Republican or the Democratic party is the more supportive of a basic constitutional right such as free speech, freedom of religion, or protection against self-incrimination. Be sure to specify units of analysis and sampling methods. Describe a coding scheme that you could use for the content analysis.

2. Identify an international news story involving a conflict between two nations or cultural groups, such as clashes between Israelis and Palestinians. On the Internet, locate a newspaper report of the event from within each of the countries or cultures involved. Note differences in the way the event is reported. Now, find a report of the event in a newspaper in a third, distant country. (For example, compare reports from the *Jerusalem Post,* the *Palestine Chronicle,* and the *New York Times.*) Does the third report seem to favor one of the two original reports? If so, would you conclude that the third report is biased toward one side or that one of the original reports was simply inaccurate? Explain how and why you reached that conclusion. (You might use *World Press Review* as an alternative source of data; they present contrasting articles on a given story. See the link on your Sociology CourseMate at www.cengagebrain.com.)

3. Using the web, find out how many countries have a higher "expected life expectancy" than the United States does. (You might want to try the Population Reference Bureau at the link on your Sociology CourseMate at www.cengagebrain.com.)

4. Max Weber undertook extensive studies of some of the world's major religions. Create an annotated bibliography of his works in this area.

5. On the web, locate the American Sociological Association's section called "Comparative and Historical Sociology" (check out the link on your Sociology CourseMate at www.cengagebrain.com). Summarize an article in the section's newsletter.

SPSS EXERCISES

See the booklet that accompanies your text for exercises using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). There are exercises offered for each chapter, and you'll also find a detailed primer on using SPSS.

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