Chapter 15

Research Methods in the Real World

Applying What You've Learned

The examples of sociological research provided throughout this text come from a variety of positions on the basic-public-applied continuum presented in Chapter 1 "Introduction". Some examples came from scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles, others from public-interest magazines, and others from applied settings. Nevertheless, students sometimes walk away from a research course wondering how any of what they've learned applies to their lives today and to their future plans. In this, the final chapter, we explore that question. We'll consider the variety of locations where research might crop up in your "real-world" life. For some, research might be a career. For others, perhaps research will provide a means to become engaged in social change efforts. For all of us, I hope that public sociology will present itself from time to time, perhaps in our reading, our web surfing, our television viewing, or our conversations with others. At the end of this chapter, we'll remind ourselves of some of the answers to the "why should I care" question that we addressed at the beginning of this text. I hope that by now you have your own ideas about how you might answer that question but I'll nevertheless remind you of the answers that we've already covered and provide a few others that perhaps hadn't occurred to you.

Figure 15.1

In this chapter, we'll revisit the ever-important "why should I care?" question.

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15.1 Doing Research for a Living

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the areas outside of academia where sociologists are most commonly employed.
2. Define *evaluation research* and provide an example of it.
3. Describe the work of a market researcher.
4. Describe what sociologists working in policy and other government research do.

There are a variety of employers who hire social researchers. These include, but are not necessarily limited to, market research firms, corporations, public relations and communications firms, academic institutions, think tanks and other private research firms, public research firms and policy groups, and all levels of government. Some businesses hire social researchers to assist with personnel selection, many universities hire social researchers for their research institutes,For example, see University of Washington's Social Development Research Group (http://www.sdrg.org/), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Carolina Population Center (http://www.cpc.unc.edu/), Penn State's Survey Research Center (http://www.ssri.psu.edu/survey), University of Nebraska's Public Policy Center (http://ppc.unl.edu/), and University of Minnesota's Immigration History Research Center (http://www.ihrc.umn.edu/), to name just a few. and other firms such as Gallup (http://www.gallup.com/home.aspx) and Nielsen (http://www.nielsen.com/us/en.html) hire social researchers to examine societal trends. The areas where sociologists holding undergraduate degrees in research are most likely to find employment as researchers are in evaluation research, market research, and government research. Each of these represents a particular use of research rather than a research method per se. Evaluation, market, and government researchers may use any of the data collection or analysis strategies we described in Chapter 8 "Survey Research: A Quantitative Technique" and Chapter 12 "Other Methods of Data Collection and Analysis", but their purpose and aims may differ. We'll explore each of these different uses of social scientific research methods in the following.

Evaluation Research

As you may recall from the definition provided in Chapter 1 "Introduction", evaluation research is research that is conducted to assess the effects of specific programs or policies. Evaluation research is often used when some form of social intervention is planned, such as welfare reform or school curriculum change. It

might be used to assess the extent to which intervention is necessary by attempting to define and diagnose social problems, and it might also be used to understand whether applied interventions have had their intended consequences. Let's consider a couple of specific examples of evaluation research to better understand how and when it is employed.

In Chapter 1 "Introduction", I mentioned my experience conducting evaluation research with a transitional housing program. Among other services, workers at the transitional housing locations counseled residents on finding and maintaining employment. One purpose of the evaluation research therefore was to determine whether residents felt they were able to transition successfully back into their communities after a period of institutionalization by obtaining employment that could sustain a life outside of the transitional housing site. This **outcomes assessment**[1] was conducted in order to determine whether the jobs counseling provided by the transitional housing employees produced the desired goal of preparing residents for finding and maintaining employment.

My first experience with evaluation research occurred during my senior year of college. That year, I conducted an internship at a hospital development office. My main task as an intern was to help the office assess how effective it had been in the preceding years in meeting its goal of raising local awareness of and support for the hospital. Using interview research methodology, I collected data from hospital employees and board members as well as members of the local community to learn about what people knew about the hospital, its development office, and the hospital's services and needs. This project culminated in written report and a final presentation to several members of the hospital board in which I and the development office director outlined several recommendations for future development office activities based on the feedback provided by the people I had interviewed.

Being able to apply what I'd learned in my research methods class to a real-world problem and solutions was an invaluable experience. Not only that, while gaining this experience I was able to contribute to the well-being of my community by helping a needed local resource (the hospital) find ways improve its relationship with the community. Perhaps you could look for similar opportunities in your community. Of course, this specific example isn't one of "doing research for a living," as suggested by this section's title, but it certainly gave me an experience worth noting on my resume and got me in the door of several potential employers for interviews when I began looking for jobs.

1. The act of judging whether a desired goal has been achieved.

There are many other instances of applied evaluation research conducted by social scientists who are employed by firms for their skills as researchers. Just google the

phrase *evaluation research firm* and you'll find scores of examples. Different firms may specialize in different areas of research. For example, Hoffman Clark & Associates, a California-based firm, specializes in public health and K–12 education assessment (http://www.hoffmanclark.org/index.php). Arizona firm LeCroy & Milligan Associates Inc. conducts evaluation research in the areas of criminal justice and health and human services (http://www.lecroymilligan.com/index.html). In Colorado, Outcomes Inc. focuses on children and families (http://www.outcomescolorado.com/home). Wilder Research, based in Minnesota, conducts evaluation research designed to help strengthen families and their communities (http://www.wilder.org/research.0.html). Massachusetts firm Social Science Research & Evaluation Inc. specializes in, among other areas, evaluation research on highway safety and transportation (http://www.ssre.org/index.html). Finally, Inventivo Design LLC in Colorado tailors its evaluation research services to corporations wishing to assess whether their investments "meet the goals of management and deliver on objectives" (http://www.inventivodesign.com). As you can see from this very limited sampling of evaluation research firms, employment as an evaluation researcher could take you to just about any area of the country and involve work with any number of industries and sectors.

Market Research

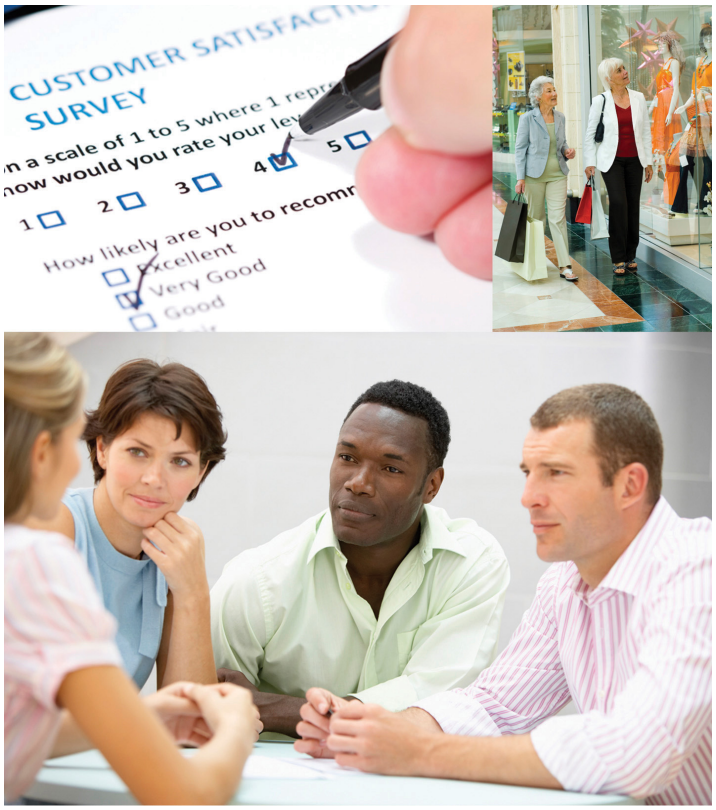
Market research is another way that you might engage in social scientific research to make a living. Just as with evaluation research, market research is not a particular research method per se. Instead, it is a particular way of utilizing research methodology for a particular purpose. **Market research**[2] is research that is conducted for the purpose of guiding businesses and other organizations as they make decisions about how best to sell, improve, or promote a product or service. This sort of research might involve gathering data from and about one's core market and customers, about competitors, or about an industry more generally. Market research occurs in a variety of settings and institutions. Some firms specialize in market research specifically and are hired by others who wish to learn more about how to best promote or sell a product or service. Market research might also be conducted in-house, perhaps by large businesses that sell products or by nonprofits that wish to better understand how best to meet the needs of their clientele or promote their services.

Market researchers assess how best to sell, improve, or promote a product by gathering data about that product's consumers. Understanding consumers' preferences, tastes, attitudes, and behaviors can help point an organization in the right direction in its effort to reach and appeal to consumers. There are many ways to do this. You could observe customers in a store to watch which displays draw them in and which they ignore. You could administer a survey to assess consumers' satisfaction with a good or service. You could conduct covert observations by being

2. Research that is conducted for the purpose of guiding businesses and other organizations as they make decisions about how best to sell, improve, or promote a product or service.

a secret shopper or dining someplace as though you, the researcher, are a real customer. You could conduct focus groups with consumers. As you already know from reading this text, social scientific research is an excellent way to gauge people's preferences, tastes, attitudes, and behaviors. Each of these market research methods requires knowledge and skills in collecting data from human subjects—the very thing that sociological researchers do.

Figure 15.2



Administering satisfaction surveys, observing shoppers, and conducting focus groups are all methods that market researchers use to collect data about consumer behavior.

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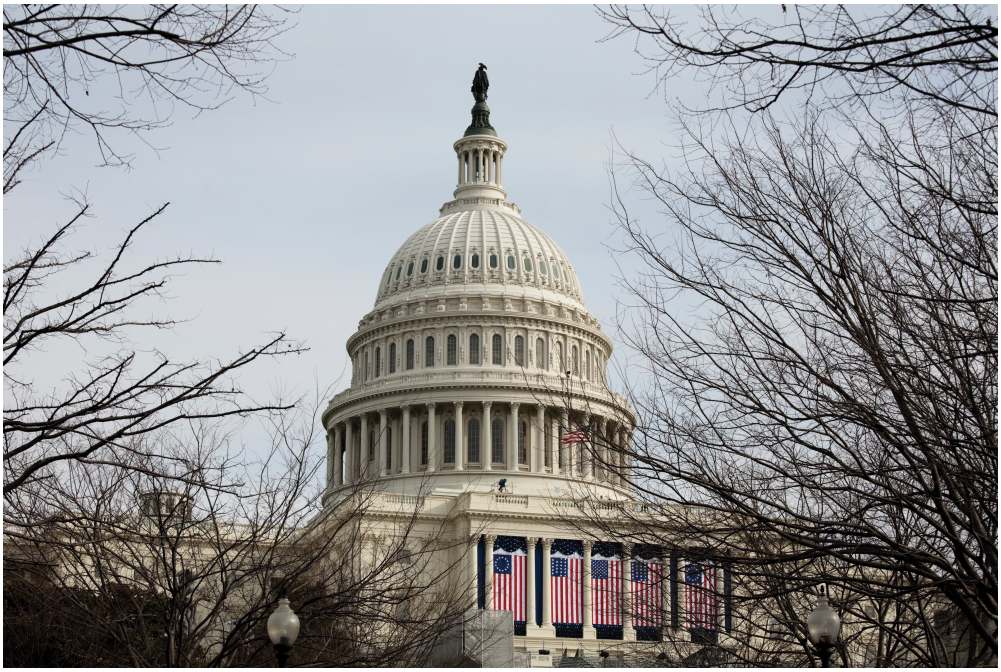
In the preceding section I identified just a small sampling of the many evaluation research firms that exist throughout the United States. There are also many firms that exist for the sole purpose of carrying out market research, all of which hire individuals who have a background in or knowledge about social scientific research methodology. Market research firms specialize in all kinds of areas. For example, Arbitron Inc. focuses on media, gathering data about radio audiences around the

globe (http://www.arbitron.com/home/content.stm). From Maine, Market Decisions conducts market research on "a wide variety of topics from public policy to branding to feasibility" (http://www.marketdecisions.com/index.php). Nielsen, a company many are familiar with, conducts media research of all kinds (http://www.nielsen.com/us/en.html) but is perhaps best known for its ratings of television programming in the United States (http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/top10s/television.html). Specializing in the area of information technology, Gartner collects data to help its clients make IT-related decisions (http://www.gartner.com/technology/home.jsp). These are just a few of the many potential market research employers that seek individuals with research skills.

Policy and Other Government Research

Finally, many social science researchers do policy and other government-related kinds of work. In fact, the federal government is one of the largest employers of applied social science researchers. Government and policy research could be in any number of areas. For example, nonpartisan private firms such as Child Trends (http://www.childtrends.org/index.cfm) conduct research that is specifically intended to be useful for policymakers. In the case of Child Trends, researchers aim to improve the lives of children by "conducting high-quality research and sharing it with the people and institutions whose decisions and actions affect children" (http://www.childtrends.org/_catdisp_page.cfm?LID=124). Other private firms, such as Belden Russonello & Stewart, conduct research aimed at helping create social change, including projects on biodiversity, education, and energy use (http://www.brspoll.com/index.htm).

Figure 15.3



The federal government is one of the largest employers of applied social science researchers.

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As for government work, *Contexts* magazine recently published an article featuring four sociological researchers to whom President Obama's administration has turned, "relying on their unique understanding of American society to apply the most relevant research to policy-making" (2010, p. 14).Working for the G-man. (2010, Fall). *Contexts, 9,* 14–15. Those researchers include James P. Lynch, Bureau of Justice Statistics Director; John Laub, Director of the National Institute of Justice; Robert M. Groves, US Census Bureau Director; and David Harris, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Services Policy in the US Department of Health and Human Services.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Sociologists are employed in many arenas. Some of the most common include evaluation research, market research, and policy and other government research.

EXERCISE

1. If you're interested in hearing more from sociologists who do research, or sociology more generally, for a living, check out *Contexts*' article on "embedded sociologists" (Nyseth, Shannon, Heise, & McElrath, 2011)Nyseth, H., Shannon, S., Heise, K., & McElrath, S. M. (2011). Embedded sociologists. *Contexts, 10,* 44–50. who work in fields as diverse as epidemiology to housing rights to human resources. The article can be found online at http://contexts.org/articles/spring-2011/embedded-sociologists/.

15.2 Doing Research for a Cause

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define and provide at least one example of action research.
2. Define *stakeholders*.

Some sociologists engage in research for reasons in addition to or aside from career motivations. These individuals might conduct some form of action research. While action research may be conducted as part of a person's paid employment, as described in Section 15.1 "Doing Research for a Living", you might also conduct action research as a volunteer working for a cause that you find worthy. If you've discovered that you have an interest in sociological research but would rather not pursue a career in research, perhaps some volunteer involvement in action is for you.

Action research[3], sometimes referred to as participatory action research, is defined as research that is conducted for the purpose of creating some form of social change. When conducting action research, scholars collaborate with community **stakeholders**[4] at all stages of the research process with the aim of producing results that will be usable in the community and by scientists. On the continuum of basic to applied research, action research is very far on the applied end of the spectrum. Sociologists who engage in this form of research never just go it alone; instead, they collaborate with the people who are affected by the research. Kristin Esterberg puts it quite eloquently when she says, "At heart, all action researchers are concerned that research not simply contribute to knowledge but also lead to positive changes in people's lives" (2002, p. 137).Esterberg, K. G. (2002). *Qualitative methods in social research*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill. Action research was first developed in the 1960s and 1970s (Freire, 1970)Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York, NY: Herder and Herder. for the purpose of empowering individuals in underdeveloped nations (Reason, 1994).Reason, P. (1994). *Participation in human inquiry*. London, UK: Sage. Since then, action research has become increasingly popular among scholars who wish for their work to have tangible outcomes that benefit the groups that they study.

3. Research that is conducted for the purpose of creating some form of social change.

4. The groups or individuals for whom research is of direct benefit or concern.

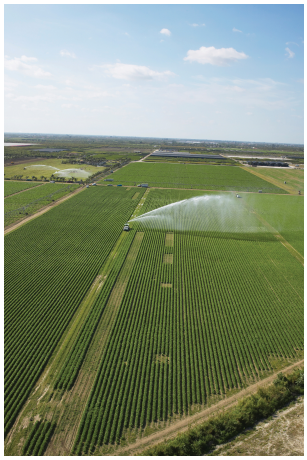
There are many excellent examples of action research. Some of these focus solely on arriving at useful outcomes for the communities upon which and with whom research is conducted. Other action research projects result in some new knowledge that has a practical application and purpose *in addition to* the creation of knowledge

for basic scientific purposes. A search using the key term *action research* in Sociological Abstracts will yield a number of examples of the latter type.

One example of action research can be seen in Fred Piercy and colleagues' (Piercy, Franz, Donaldson, & Richard, 2011)Piercy, F. P., Franz, N., Donaldson, J. L., & Richard, R. F. (2011). Consistency and change in participatory action research: Reflections on a focus group study about how farmers learn. *The Qualitative Report, 16,* 820–829. work with farmers in Virginia, Tennessee, and Louisiana. Together with farmers in these states, the researchers conducted focus groups to understand how farmers learn new information about farming. Ultimately, the aim of this study was to "develop more meaningful ways to communicate information to farmers about sustainable agriculture." This improved communication, the researchers and farmers believed, would benefit not just researchers interested in the topic but also farmers and their communities. Farmers and researchers were both involved in all aspects of the research, from designing the project and determining focus group questions to conducting the focus groups and finally to analyzing data and disseminating findings.

Many additional examples of action research can be found at Loyola University Chicago's Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL; http://www.luc.edu/curl/index.shtml). At the center, researchers seek "to promote equality and to improve people's lives in communities throughout the Chicago metropolitan region." For example, in 2006 researchers at CURL embarked on a project to assess the impact on small, local retailers of new Walmart stores entering urban areas (Jones, 2008).Jones, S. M. (2008, May 13). Cities may mute effect of Wal-Mart. *Chicago Tribune*. The study found that, while the effect of Walmart on local retailers seems to have a larger impact in rural areas, Chicago-area local retailers did not experience as dramatic an impact. Nevertheless a "small but statistically significant relationship" was found between Walmart's arrival in the city and local retailers' closing their doors. This and other research conducted by CURL aims to raise awareness about and promote positive social change around issues affecting the lives of people in the Chicago area. CURL meets this aim by collaborating with members of the community to shape a research agenda, collect and analyze data, and disseminate results.

Figure 15.4



Action researchers are interested in social change. For example, Fred Piercy and colleagues conducted research with farmers to understand how best to educate farmers about sustainable agriculture.

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Perhaps one of the most unique and rewarding aspects of engaging in action research is that it is often interdisciplinary. Action research projects might bring together researchers from any number of disciplines, from the social sciences, such as sociology, political science, and psychology; to an assortment of physical and natural sciences, such as biology and chemistry; to engineering, philosophy, and history (to name just a few). One recent example of this kind of interdisciplinary action research can be seen in the University of Maine's Sustainability Solutions Initiative (SSI) (http://www.umaine.edu/sustainabilitysolutions/index.htm). This initiative unites researchers from across campus together with local community members to "connect knowledge with action in ways that promote strong economies, vibrant communities, and healthy ecosystems in and beyond Maine." The knowledge-action connection is essential to SSI's mission, and the collaboration between community stakeholders and researchers is crucial to maintaining that connection. SSI is a relatively new effort; stay tuned to the SSI website to follow how this collaborative action research initiative develops.

Anyone interested in social change can benefit from having some understanding of social scientific research methods. The knowledge you've gained from your methods course can be put to good use even if you don't have an interest in pursuing a career in research. As a member of a community, perhaps you will find that the opportunity to engage in action research presents itself to you one day. And your background in research methodology will no doubt assist you and your collaborators in your effort to make life better for yourself and those who share your interests, circumstances, or geographic region.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Action research is conducted by researchers who wish to create some form of social change.
- Action research is often conducted by teams of interdisciplinary researchers.

EXERCISE

1. If you're interested in learning more about action research, or perhaps reading some specific examples of action research, check out the journal *Gateways*. It is a free, electronic, peer-reviewed scholarly journal focused on community-engaged research. Here's the link: http://www.luc.edu/curl/uts/index.html.

15.3 Public Sociology

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Identify and describe at least two examples of public sociology.

In Chapter 1 "Introduction", we discussed public sociology and its place on the continuum of applied-basic research. One of the most delightful consequences of the trend toward public sociology is that the discipline has become more visible and more accessible to much broader audiences than perhaps ever before. But even with the increased accessibility of sociological research, you'll find that having a basic understanding of how sociologists conduct research, which you've gained from this text, is beneficial. In this section, we'll take a look at a few recent examples of public sociology and examine how your background in sociological research methods can help you read, make sense of, discuss, and even share the findings you come across.

In recent months, I've been interviewed by a journalist writing for a website run by Dr. Mehmet Oz of *The Dr. Oz Show* (http://www.youbeauty.com) and another writing for a website dedicated to any and every thing having to do with "video games and geek culture" (http://www.unwinnable.com). Inspired by the fall 2011 television programming lineup in the United States—in particular two new shows, including one featuring Playboy Bunnies and the other focused on the experiences of early PanAm flight attendants—the youbeauty.com interview focused on how expressions of gender, workplace norms, and harassment have changed in the past few decades.You can read the final article at http://www.youbeauty.com/relationships/the-secret-to-success-good-grooming. Interestingly, while the single quote attributed to me is accurate, the context within which I made the remark is not provided. One important caution for sociologists who choose to participate in press interviews is that your perspective may not always be represented in a way that you'd choose. In the other interview, conducted for an article on how heroism has changed since September 11, 2001 (Bannen, 2011),Bannen, B. (2011, July 19). Superheroes in a post-9/11 society. *Unwinnable*. Retrieved from http://www.unwinnable.com/2011/07/29/superheroes-in-a-post-911-society/ I was asked questions about patterns of social change. In both cases I was "doing" public sociology, drawing from my own background and knowledge about the sociological perspective on human behavior to help make sense of recent and current trends in society.

Many other sociologists engage in public sociology as well. Professor Pepper Schwartz, whose name you might recall from Chapter 4 "Beginning a Research Project", is perhaps one of the most recognized public sociologists. In Chapter 4 "Beginning a Research Project", I mentioned Schwartz's role as the relationship expert for the dating website PerfectMatch.com. Schwartz is also the sex and relationship expert for the American Association for Retired Persons, for whom she writes a regular column offering advice to those aged 50 and up. Her participation with these venues enables Schwartz to provide relevant sociological understanding, perspective, and knowledge to broad audiences.

Another example of public sociology can be seen in Professor Nikki Jones's work. Jones, an urban ethnographer who studies adolescent girls' violence, has found that the "mean girl" phenomenon represented in so much of our popular culture and so many news stories today is far more hype than reality (Chesney-Lind & Jones, 2010; Jones, 2009).Jones, N. (2009). *Between good and ghetto: African American girls and inner-city violence*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers; Chesney-Lind, M., & Jones, N. (Eds.). (2010). *Fighting for girls: New perspectives on gender and violence*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press. In an effort to promote a better understanding of this and other matters of public interest upon which sociological and other scholarly evidence can and should be brought to bear, Jones collaborates with two other editors to maintain the website *The Public Intellectual* (http://thepublicintellectual.org). The site publishes work by academics and other researchers who write pieces intended to debunk "common knowledge" on matters of public concern, analyze social policies and problems, and examine cultural trends.

Finally, Professors Lisa Wade and Gwen Sharp provide another excellent example of public sociology on their website *Sociological Images* (http://thesocietypages.org/socimages). The site provides sociological observations and commentary on images of all kinds, from advertisements to charts and graphs, and from around the globe. Their aim is to "encourage all kinds of people to exercise and develop their sociological imagination by presenting brief sociological discussions of compelling and timely imagery that spans the breadth of sociological inquiry." The images Wade and Sharp display on the site are chosen for their ability to illustrate sociological ideas in a way that is both compelling and accessible to sociological and nonsociological audiences alike. Peruse their site and as you'll see from the comments noted underneath each of the discussion/image posts that the *Sociological Images* audience runs the gamut in

Figure 15.5

background, ideology, and perspective. In other words, the site accomplishes the exact aim of public sociology: to engage the public.

Professor Nikki Jones engages in public sociology to debunk myths about supposed "mean girls."

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- One of the positive consequences of public sociology is that the discipline has become more visible and more accessible to much broader audiences than in the past.
- Having a background in sociological research methods can help you read, make sense of, discuss, and share the research findings you encounter.

EXERCISES

1. Check out at least one of the websites mentioned in the preceding section. What do you think of these examples of public sociology? Ask one of your nonsociologist friends to peruse the site. Discuss what you each found compelling. How does your knowledge of sociological research methods shape your understanding of what you've read?
2. Discuss public sociology with a few of your sociology peers. In what areas do you think public sociology can and should play a role?

15.4 Revisiting an Earlier Question: Why Should We Care?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define *transferable skills*.
2. Identify several of the transferable skills you've gained from your understanding of sociological research methods.

I hope that by now I've managed to convince you that developing an understanding of how sociologists conduct research has many benefits. On the chance that I haven't done so, or in case you simply want a refresher, let's spend this final section of the final chapter reviewing some of the reasons you might care about research methods.

Transferable Skills

In Chapter 1 "Introduction", I suggested that one reason to care about research methods is that knowing how to conduct social science research could lead to a variety of job opportunities. The skills and knowledge you've gained from this text will situate you well for a number of research-oriented positions. Moreover, your background in social science research methodology provides you with a number of **transferable skills**[5] that will serve you well in any profession you choose. Transferable skills are the conglomeration of tasks that a person develops proficiency in from one realm that can be applied in another realm. Whether you realize it or not, you have gained a host of transferable skills from taking a course in social scientific research methods. Those skills can assist you in your search for employment in a variety of arenas.

Perhaps the primary transferable skill you've developed by learning how to conduct social scientific research is an ability to solve problems. Not only that, you are now also better equipped to *identify* problems. What do social researchers do if not identify social problems and then seek to gain knowledge aimed at understanding and eradicating those problems? Having the ability to seek out problems and the requisite knowledge and tools to begin to solve those problems is crucial in many areas of employment. The investigative skills you've developed as a result of learning how to conduct social scientific research can be put to use in just about any job where taken-for-granted assumptions are called into question. These might include jobs such as journalism, but work in criminal justice requires investigative

5. The conglomeration of tasks that a person develops proficiency in from one realm that can be applied in another realm.

skills as does just about any position that requires one to solve problems, ask questions, and learn new ways of doing things.

Related to the problem-identification and problem-solving skills that you've developed by learning how to conduct social scientific research is another important ability: a talent for asking good questions. Not only is the ability to ask good questions essential in many areas of employment (and in most areas life as well), but also this skill is linked to another key area that comes up in research methods courses and is appreciated in many realms: **critical thinking**[6]. Thinking critically does not mean that someone sits backs and criticizes every idea or person that comes her way. Critical thinking is a skill that takes practice to develop. It involves the careful evaluation of assumptions, actions, values, and other factors that influence a particular way of being or doing. It requires an ability to identify both weaknesses *and* strengths in taken-for-granted ways of doing things. A person who thinks critically should be able to demonstrate some level of understanding of the varying positions one might take on any given issue, even if he or she does not agree with those positions.

Understanding sociological research methods also means having some understanding of how to analyze, synthesize, and interpret information. And having a well-developed ability to carefully take in, think about, and understand the meaning of new information that you are confronted with will serve you well in all varieties of life circumstance and employment. In addition, the ability to communicate and clearly express oneself, both in writing and orally, is crucial in all professions. As you practice the tasks described throughout this text, you will attain and improve the oral and written communication skills that so many employers value. Finally, related to the ability to communicate effectively is the ability to effectively frame an argument or presentation. Successfully framing an argument requires not only good communication skills but also strength in the area of listening to others.

In sum, the transferable skills you've gained as a result of learning how to conduct social scientific research include the following:

1. Identifying problems
2. Identifying solutions to problems
3. Investigative skills and techniques
4. Asking good questions
5. Framing an argument
6. Listening
7. Critical thinking
8. Analyzing, synthesizing, and interpreting information

6. The careful evaluation of assumptions, actions, values, and other factors that influence a particular decision or way of being or doing.

9. Oral and written communication skills

Table 15.1 "Transferable Skills Featured in This Text" links each of the identified transferable skills to specific chapters in the text.

Table 15.1 Transferable Skills Featured in This Text

Transferable skill	Chapters featuring skill (relevant focus within chapter)
Identifying problems	Chapter 2 "Linking Methods With Theory" (inductive and deductive approaches)
	Chapter 4 "Beginning a Research Project" (starting where you are)
Identifying solutions to problems	Chapter 2 "Linking Methods With Theory" (how theories and paradigms shape approach)
	Chapter 5 "Research Design" (research design)
	Chapter 7 "Sampling" (sampling)
Investigative skills and techniques	Chapter 5 "Research Design" (searching for and reviewing the literature)
	Chapter 6 "Defining and Measuring Concepts" and Chapter 7 "Sampling" (measurement and sampling)
	Chapter 8 "Survey Research: A Quantitative Technique" through Chapter 12 "Other Methods of Data Collection and Analysis" (data collection)
	Chapter 14 "Reading and Understanding Social Research" (reading reports of research)
Asking good questions	Chapter 3 "Research Ethics" (ethics)
	Chapter 4 "Beginning a Research Project" (making questions empirical and sociological)
Framing an argument	Chapter 1 "Introduction" (ontology and epistemology)
	Chapter 2 "Linking Methods With Theory" (theories)
	Chapter 5 "Research Design" (hypotheses)
Listening	Chapter 9 "Interviews: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches" (conducting interviews)
	Chapter 10 "Field Research: A Qualitative Technique" (getting into and establishing rapport in field)

Transferable skill	Chapters featuring skill (relevant focus within chapter)
	Chapter 12 "Other Methods of Data Collection and Analysis" (focus groups, ethnomethodology)
	Chapter 14 "Reading and Understanding Social Research" (being responsible consumers of research)
Critical thinking	Chapter 1 "Introduction" (sources of knowledge)
	Chapter 2 "Linking Methods With Theory" (theories)
	Chapter 3 "Research Ethics" (ethics)
	Chapter 14 "Reading and Understanding Social Research" (understanding social research)
Analyzing, synthesizing, and interpreting information	Chapter 5 "Research Design" (reviewing the literature)
	Chapter 8 "Survey Research: A Quantitative Technique" through Chapter 12 "Other Methods of Data Collection and Analysis" (data analysis)
	Chapter 14 "Reading and Understanding Social Research" (reading and understanding social research)
Oral and written communication skills	Chapter 13 "Sharing Your Work" (sharing your work)
	Chapter 1 "Introduction" through Chapter 15 "Research Methods in the Real World" (written and oral exercises throughout)

Understanding Yourself, Your Circumstances, and Your World

Perhaps the most rewarding consequence of understanding social scientific research methods is the ability to gain a better understanding of yourself, your circumstances, and your world. Through the application of social scientific research methods, sociologists have asked—and answered—many of the world's most pressing questions. Certainly those answers are not always complete, nor are they infallible, but the quest for knowledge and understanding is an ongoing process. As social scientists continue the process of asking questions and seeking answers, perhaps you will choose to participate in that quest now that you have gained some knowledge and skill in how to conduct research.

Having thought about what you know and how you know it, as well as what others claim to know and how *they* know it, I hope will provide you with some clarity in an often-murky world. Whether you choose to adopt the particular ways of knowing described in this text as your preferred ways of knowing is totally up to you. I hope that you will find that the knowledge you've gained here is of use, perhaps in terms of your personal life and interests, in your relationships with others, or in your longer-range school or career goals.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Having a background in social science research methodology provides you with a number of transferable skills.
- Having a background in social science research methodology gives you the opportunity to gain greater insight into yourself, your circumstances, and your world.

EXERCISES

1. If you're interested in gaining some more research experience, check out the National Science Foundation's Research for Undergraduates (REU) program. The program provides opportunities for students to conduct research at a host institution along with a small group of undergraduate peers. To learn more about the program and search for current locations hosting REU programs, see the following: http://www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/reu/.
2. Review Table 15.1 "Transferable Skills Featured in This Text". Are there transferable skills listed there that you're not yet convinced you've attained? If so, take another look at the cited chapter(s). Are there transferable skills you feel you've gained that are not listed in the table? If so, what are they and in which chapter(s) are they featured?