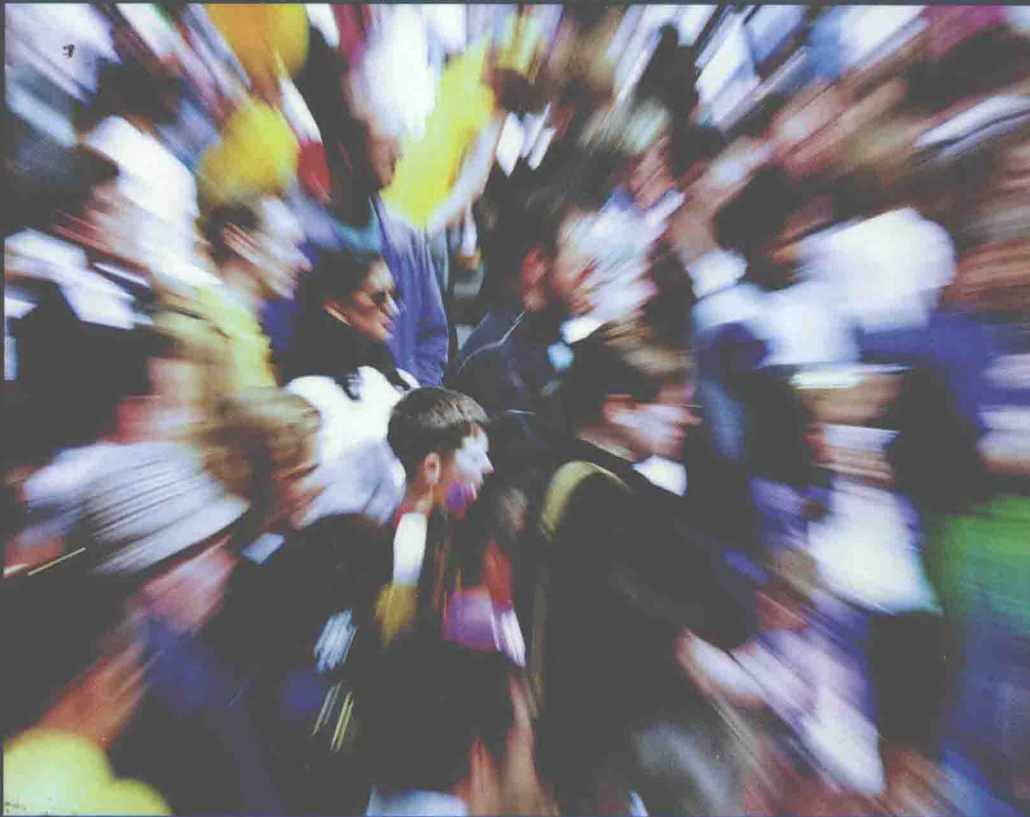


T H E B A S I C S O F

# Social Research

S E C O N D  
E D I T I O N



Earl Babbie

# THE BASICS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

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Second Edition

**Earl Babbie**

Chapman University

**WADSWORTH**



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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 05 04 03 02

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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**  
Babbie, Earl R.

The basics of social research / Earl Babbie.—2nd ed.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.  
ISBN 0-534-51904-0

1. Social sciences—Research. 2. Social sciences—Methodology. I. Title.

H62.B18 2002  
301'.07'2—dc21

**Text Designer:** Lois Stanfield  
**Copy Editor:** Molly D. Roth  
**Illustrator:** Lotus Art  
**Cover Designer:** Ross Carron  
**Cover Image:** The Image Bank/Chris Close  
**Compositor:** G&S Typesetters, Inc.  
**Text and Cover Printer:** Von Hoffmann Press, Inc.

**Wadsworth/Thomson Learning**  
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## Accompanying This Textbook

**Study Guide for *The Basics of Social Research***, Second Edition, by Theodore C. Wagenaar and Earl Babbie

This practical book of activities is designed to help reinforce and extend your understanding of the material in *The Basics of Social Research*, Second Edition. Each chapter contains objectives, a summary, key terms, multiple-choice review questions, discussion questions, and exercises that engage you in actual research and involve the analysis of data from the 1973 through 1998 General Social Surveys.

***SPSS Companion for Research Methods***, Second Edition, by Robert Griffith Turner, Jr.

This concise, user-friendly guide introduces students to basic navigation in the *SPSS Student Version 10.0 CD-ROM*, and features data analysis exercises correlated chapter-by-chapter with *The Basics of Social Research*, Second Edition that include how to enter data; create, save, and retrieve files; produce and interpret data summaries; and more.

***Experiencing Social Research: Using MicroCase® Explorer*** by David Ayers

Providing MicroCase-centered illustrations, summaries, and computerized exercises keyed to *The Basics of Social Research*, Second Edition, this workbook provides students with the opportunity to apply key methodological concepts and skills as they collect, build, and analyze data files that feature real sociological data.

To order a copy of these texts, contact your bookstore.

**Also by Earl Babbie and available from Wadsworth**

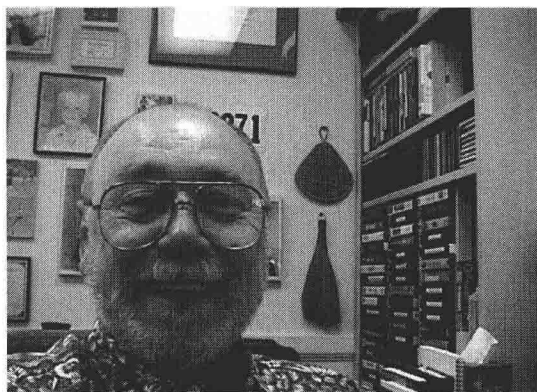
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***Survey Research Methods***, Second Edition

***Research Methods for Social Work*** (with Allen Rubin), Third Edition

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## A Note from the Author

**W**riting is my joy, sociology my passion. I delight in putting words together in a way that makes people learn or laugh or both. Sociology is one way I can do just that. It represents our last, best hope for planet-training our race and finding ways for us to live together. I feel a special excitement at being present when sociology, at last, comes into focus as an idea whose time has come.

I grew up in small-town Vermont and New Hampshire. When I announced I wanted to be an auto-body mechanic, like my dad, my teacher

told me I should go to college instead. When Malcolm X announced he wanted to be a lawyer, his teacher told him a colored boy should be something more like a carpenter. The difference in our experiences says something powerful about the idea of a level playing field. The inequalities among ethnic groups run deep.

I ventured into the outer world by way of Harvard, the USMC, U.C. Berkeley, and 12 years teaching at the University of Hawaii. Along the way, I married Sheila two months after our first date, and we created Aaron three years after that: two of my wisest acts. I resigned from teaching in 1980 and wrote full-time for seven years, until the call of the classroom became too loud to ignore. For me, teaching is like playing jazz. Even if you perform the same number over and over, it never comes out the same twice, and you don't know exactly what it'll sound like until you hear it. Teaching is like writing with your voice.

At last, I have matured enough to rediscover and appreciate my roots in Vermont each summer. Rather than a return to the past, it feels more like the next turn in a widening spiral. I can't wait to see what's around the next bend.

# PREFACE

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**T**he book in your hands has been about three decades in the making. It began in the classroom, when I was asked to teach a seminar in survey research beginning in 1968. Frustrated with the lack of good textbooks on the topic, I began fantasizing something I called "A Survey Research Cookbook and Other Fables," which was published in 1973 with a more sober title: *Survey Research Methods*.

The book was an immediate success, except there were few courses limited to survey research. A number of instructors around the country asked if the same guy could write a more general methods book, and *The Practice of Social Research* appeared two years later, in 1975. The latter book has become a fixture in social research instruction, with the 9th edition published in 2001. The official Chinese edition was published in Beijing in 2000.

Over the life of *Practice*, successive revisions have been based in large part on suggestions, comments, requests, and (let's tell the truth) corrections from my colleagues around the country and, increasingly, around the world. In the most recent years, there has been a growing request for a shorter book with a more *applied* orientation.

From the beginning, social scientists have been interested in both pure and applied research. Some have primarily justified their efforts in terms of "knowledge for knowledge's sake," while others have focused on how their research could affect the quality of people's lives at a practical level. Over time, the emphasis on these two orientations has shifted back and forth.

Early U.S. sociologists such as Lester Ward and Jane Addams were strongly committed to social re-

form and saw their social scientific training as preparation for making life better for those around them.

Whereas the third quarter of the 20th century saw a greater emphasis on quantitative, pure research, the century ended with a renaissance of concern for applied sociological research (sometimes called *sociological practice*) and also a renewed interest in qualitative research. *The Basics of Social Research* was first published in 1999 in support of these trends. The second edition aims to increase and improve that support.

The book can also be seen as a response to changes in teaching methods and in student demographics. In addition to the emphasis on applied research, some alternative teaching formats have called for a shorter book, and student economics have argued for a paperback book. While standard methods courses have continued using *The Practice of Social Research*, I've been delighted to see that *Basics* seems to have satisfied a substantial market as well. The fine-tuning in this second edition is intended to help *Basics* serve this group even better than before.

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## CHANGES IN THE SECOND EDITION

The first prominent change to the book can be found in Chapter 3. The first edition devoted this chapter to a discussion of causation. However, a number of instructors asked that research ethics be moved out of the appendixes into a more prominent position, and I've responded by putting it in Chapter 3. The discussions of causation have been



moved to Chapter 4, in a new section on “The Logic of Nomothetic Causation,” following the introductory discussion of explanation as a purpose of research.

Other prominent changes in this edition of the book concern qualitative research methods. As such, Chapter 10 has been radically revised in order to present some of the major paradigms used in qualitative research. Further, I’ve added a chapter on qualitative data analysis (Chapter 13). Although I integrate qualitative and quantitative methods through the book, the methods of data analysis differ enough to merit separate treatment. For example, the computer programs available for the two approaches differ, and I’ve offered some illustrations of two popular programs: HyperResearch and NVivo. (Primers on several qualitative and quantitative programs can be found on the Web site for this book.)

Throughout the book, I have used a set of icons to draw students’ attention to passages that relate to the use of various computer programs, including SPSS, MicroCase, InfoTrac, and the World Wide Web. My intention is to further integrate those resources into the book.



As in any book revision, extensive attention has been given to updating examples, reference material, statistical data, and research techniques (e.g., online surveys) as well as improving pedagogical methods. Many of these changes reflect suggestions by my fellow instructors. I’ve also added some specific features that I hope will assist both students and instructors.

For example, each chapter now begins with “An Opening Quandary” to pique the reader’s interest. I’ve tried to identify a puzzle or seeming paradox related to each chapter. It is my intention that reading the chapter will clarify the quandary, with the concluding “A Quandary Revisited” ensuring that.

In view of the emphasis on applied social research, I’ve added several boxes called “Applying the Results” to point to how a particular logical discussion or research procedure has applications in the day-to-day world, often outside the research arena. For example, I point out how the issues of

conceptualization and operationalization apply directly to the balloting confusion in Florida (and elsewhere) during the 2000 presidential election.

## THE eBABBIE RESOURCE CENTER

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Recent years have seen remarkable technological developments that impinge on both doing and teaching social research. Key among these is the World Wide Web. The first edition of this book had an appendix on “Research in Cyberspace,” introducing students to the Web and listing a number of relevant resources. In this edition, I have moved that appendix to the Web itself. There are two reasons for this. First, the list of resources can be rapidly and repeatedly updated, without waiting three years for a revised textbook. Second, resource listings on the Web can be hotlinked, so students can access relevant Web sites with a click of the mouse rather than having to type in long and complex URLs.

Web links are only a small part of The eBabbie Resource Center, found at:

<http://sociology.wadsworth.com/>

In addition, you will find:

- Primers for the use of:
  - SPSS 10.0
  - MicroCase
  - NVivo
  - HyperResearch
- A statistics primer
- Online instructional materials
- Guides for budgeting research projects
- Flash Cards
- InfoTrac Exercises
- Student Practice Quizzes
- And more continuously evolving social resource aids!

## INSTRUCTOR RESOURCES

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### Instructor’s Manual with Test Bank

Margaret Jendrek has prepared another excellent instructor’s manual to help instructors write exam-

inations. In addition to the usual multiple-choice, true-false, and essay questions, the manual provides resources for planning lectures and gives suggested answers for some of the student problems in the study guide. Also included is a listing of print, film, and Internet resources for instructors, an appendix of the General Social Survey data, as well as a concise user guide for *InfoTrac College Edition* and tips for using *WebTutor*. Although students may not appreciate examinations as a general principle, I know that they benefit from the clarity Marty brings to that task.

### ExamView for Windows and Macintosh

*ExamView* allows instructors to create, deliver, and customize tests and study guides (both print and online) in minutes with this easy-to-use assessment and tutorial system. *ExamView* offers both a Quick Test Wizard and an Online Test Wizard that guide you step by step through the process of creating tests. You can build tests of up to 250 questions using up to 12 question types from the *Instructor's Manual with Test Bank*, and with *ExamView's* complete word processing capabilities, you can enter an unlimited number of new questions or edit existing questions.

### Readings in Social Research

by Diane Kholos Wysocki

The concepts and methodologies of social research come to life as students read the compelling articles in this unique collection. Wysocki includes an interdisciplinary range of social science readings that focus on important methods and concepts typically covered in the social research course. This reader is specifically designed to accompany the Babbie social research texts.

## STUDENT RESOURCES

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### Study Guide

The student study guide accompanying this text is modeled after the study guide that Ted Wagenaar

and I prepared for *The Practice of Social Research*. The study guide continues to be a mainstay in my own teaching. Students tell me they use it heavily as a review of the text, and I count the exercises as half their grade in the course. I specify a certain number of points for each exercise depending on how hard it is and how much I want them to do it, and give a deadline for each exercise, typically right after we've covered the materials in class. Most exercises rate between 5 and 25 points.

Finally, I specify the total number of points that will rate an A on the exercises, the range of points representing a B, and so forth. From there on, it's up to the students. They can do whichever exercises they want and as many as they want, as long as they complete each by its deadline. Every exercise they submit gets them some fraction of the maximum points assigned to it. Though I end up with a fair amount of grading during the course, my experience is that those who do the exercises also do better on exams and papers. The study guide contains exercises for students who have access to SPSS, as well as plenty for those who don't.

### SPSS Student Version 10.0 CD-ROM

This new CD-ROM includes SPSS software and preloaded data files to provide students with all the tools they need to use SPSS software at their own computers for a fraction of the cost of the commercial version. This SPSS student version features the same functionality as the SPSS commercial version with very few limitations. The first two preloaded GSS data files include 2500 cases and 62 variables (500 cases for each of these years: 1978, 1983, 1988, 1993, and 1998). The third and fourth files include 1500 cases (approximately 300 cases per year) and contain 50 variables.

### SPSS Companion for Research Methods

by Robert Griffith Turner

This booklet is a great partner to the text and to the SPSS Student Version 10.0 CD-ROM. This concise, user-friendly guide is correlated chapter by chapter with the text and CD-ROM to help students learn basic navigation in SPSS. It includes chapter-



specific exercises as well as information on how to enter data; create, save, and retrieve files; produce and interpret data summaries; and much more.

## **GSS Data Disk**

Over the years, we have sought to provide up-to-date computer support for students and instructors. Because there are now many excellent programs for analyzing data, we have provided data to be used with them. With this edition, we have updated the data disk to include the most recent data. The first two files have 2500 cases and 62 variables from the General Social Survey, 500 cases for each of these years: 1978, 1983, 1988, 1993, 1998. The last two files have 1500 cases (approximately 300 cases per year) and include 50 variables. This data set has been used for many of the examples in the textbook as well as for select exercises in the student study guide.

## **A Simple Guide to SPSS for Windows, Versions 8.0, 9.0 & 10.0**

by Lee A. Kirkpatrick and Brooke C. Feeney

Perfect for first-time users of SPSS, this concise, straightforward book teaches students what they need to know to perform such procedures as stem-and-leaf displays, *t*-tests, multiple regressions, scatterplots, and other basics.

## **MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES**

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### **Thomson Learning WebTutor™ 2.0**

*WebTutor* is a content-rich, Internet-based teaching and learning tool correlated chapter by chapter to the text. This incredible online resource gives instructors and students a virtual environment rich with study, course-management, and communication tools. Instructors can provide virtual office

hours, post syllabi, set up threaded discussions, and track student progress. *WebTutor's* content can be customized in a number of ways, from uploading images and other resources to adding Web links and creating practice materials. For students, *WebTutor* offers real-time access to many study tools, including flashcards (with audio), the *Newbury House* dictionary, practice quizzes, online tutorials, and Web links—all correlated to the text. *WebTutor* is available on both WebCT and Blackboard platforms.

### **InfoTrac College Edition**

To supplement the readings listed at the end of each chapter, students will be able to access *InfoTrac College Edition*, an online library of full-text magazine and journal articles. To use the resource, students should locate *The Basics of Social Research*, Second Edition at the Wadsworth Sociology Web site (<http://sociology.wadsworth.com/>) and check the *InfoTrac College Edition* readings recommended for each chapter of the book. I have placed the recommendations on the Web site rather than in the book, since the readings available will be constantly changing and the recommended readings updated regularly. *The Basics of Social Research*, Second Edition Web site also contains several other useful resources, including online study quizzes for each chapter, links to sociology-related newsgroups on the Web, and lessons on surfing the Internet.

### **The Practice of Social Research Video**

A lecture-launching video featuring myself includes six ten-minute segments introducing traditionally challenging concepts—operationalization, sampling, experimental design, formulation of theory, ethics, percentages/indexes, and variables.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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**I**t would be impossible to acknowledge adequately all the people who have influenced this book. My earlier methods text, *Survey Research Methods*, was dedicated to Samuel Stouffer, Paul Lazarsfeld, and Charles Glock. I again acknowledge my debt to them.

I also repeat my thanks to those colleagues acknowledged for their comments during the writing of the first, second, and third editions of *Survey Research Methods*. The present book still reflects their contributions.

Many other colleagues helped me revise *The Basics of Social Research* and its predecessors. I particularly want to thank the instructors who reviewed the manuscript of this edition and made helpful suggestions:

Jeffrey A. Burr, University of Massachusetts–  
Boston

Douglas Forbes, University of Wisconsin–  
Marshfield

Albert Hunter, Northwestern University

Ross Koppel, University of Pennsylvania

Susan E. Marshall, University of Texas at  
Austin

William G. Staples, University of Kansas

Stephen F. Steele, Anne Arundel Community  
College

Yvonne Vissing, Salem State College

Over the years, I have become more and more impressed by the important role played by editors in books like this. Since 1973, I've worked with six sociology editors at Wadsworth, which has in-

volved the kinds of adjustments you might need to make in six successive marriages. Happily, this edition of the book has greatly profited from my partnership with Lin Marshall. While Lin offers a publishing veteran's experience to the project, she also brings an enthusiasm for new technologies and pedagogies and creates exciting ways to take advantage of them.

In my experience, copy editors are the invisible heroes of publishing, and it has been my good fortune and pleasure to have worked with one of the very best, Molly Roth, for several years and books. Among her many gifts, Molly has the uncanny ability to hear what I am trying to say and find ways to help others hear it.

This edition of the book introduces you to a young sociologist you'll see and hear more of in the future: Sandrine Zerbib. Currently completing her doctorate at the University of California, Irvine, Sandrine is a first-rate methodologist and scholar, working both the qualitative and quantitative sides of the street. She is particularly sensitive to feminist perspectives, and her experiences as a woman add a new dimension to the sociomethodological concerns we share. Sandrine's efforts are most apparent in Chapters 10 and 13, but she has made contributions throughout the book. I look forward to a continuation of our partnership.

I have dedicated this book to my granddaughter, Evelyn Fay Babbie, born during the revision of the book and perfect in every regard. I hope that she will grow up in a world in which discrimination against women will finally seem a sadly quaint memory from a less enlightened past.

# PROLOGUE

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## The Importance of Social Research

**I**n many ways, the twentieth century hasn't been one of our better periods. Except for the relatively carefree twenties, we've moved from World War I to the Great Depression to World War II to the Cold War and its threat of thermonuclear holocaust to the tragedy of Vietnam. The thawing of the Cold War and the opening of Eastern Europe was a welcome relief, though it has in many ways heightened concern over the environmental destruction of our planet. And the thawing of the Cold War has hardly meant an end to war in general, as residents of Bosnia, Rwanda, and many other nations can attest. Americans now worry more than ever about the possibility of terrorism at home.

A case could be made that these are not the best of times. Many sage observers have written about the insecurity and malaise that characterize this century. All the same, the twentieth century has generated countless individual efforts and social movements aimed at creating humane social affairs, and most of those have arisen on college campuses. Perhaps you find these kinds of concerns and commitments in yourself.

As you look at the flow of events in the world, you can see the broad range of choices available if you want to make a significant contribution to future generations. Environmental problems are many and varied. Prejudice and discrimination are with us still. Millions die of hunger, and wars large and small circle the globe. There is, in short, no end to the ways you could demonstrate to yourself that your life matters, that you make a difference.

Given all the things you could choose from—things that really *matter*—why should you spend your time learning social research methods? I want

to address this question at the start, because I'm going to suggest that you devote some of your time to such things as social theory, sampling, interviewing, experiments, computers, and so forth—things that can seem pretty distant from solving the world's pressing problems. Social science, though, is not only relevant to the major problems I've just listed—it also holds answers to them.

Many of the *big* problems we've faced and still face in this century have arisen out of our increasing technological abilities. The threat of nuclear terrorism is an example. Not unreasonably, we have tended to look to technology and technologists for solutions to those problems. Unfortunately, every technological solution so far has turned out to create new problems. At the beginning of this century, for example, many people worried about the danger of horse manure piling up in city streets. The invention of the automobile averted that problem. Now, no one worries about manure in the streets; we worry instead about a new and deadlier kind of pollutant in the air we breathe.

Similarly, in years past, we attempted to avoid nuclear attack by building better bombs and missiles of our own—so that no enemy would dare attack. But that only prompted our potential enemies to build ever bigger and more powerful weapons. Now, although the United States and Russia are exhibiting far less nuclear belligerence, similar contests elsewhere in the world could escalate. There is no technological end in sight for the insane nuclear weapons race.

The simple fact is that technology alone will never save us. It will never make the world work. You and I are the only ones who can do that. *The*

*only real solutions lie in the ways we organize and run our social affairs.* This becomes evident when you consider all the social problems that persist today despite the clear presence of viable, technological solutions.

Overpopulation, for example, is a pressing problem in the world today. The number of people currently living on earth severely taxes our planet's life support systems, and this number rapidly increases year after year. If you study the matter you'll find that we already possess all the technological developments needed to stem population growth. It is technologically possible and feasible for us to stop population growth on the planet at whatever limit we want. Yet, overpopulation worsens each year.

Clearly, the solution to overpopulation is social. The causes of population growth lie in the forms, values, and customs that make up organized social life, and that is where the solutions are hidden. Those causes include beliefs about what it takes to be a "real woman" or a "real man," the perceived importance of perpetuating a family name, cultural tradition, and so forth. Ultimately, only social science can save us from overpopulation.

Or consider the problem of hunger on the planet. Some 13 to 15 million people die as a consequence of hunger each year. That amounts to 28 people a minute, every minute of every day, with 21 of them children. We all agree that this condition is deplorable; all would prefer it otherwise. But we tolerate this level of starvation in the belief that it is currently inevitable. We hope that perhaps one day someone will invent a method of producing food that will defeat starvation once and for all.

When we actually study the issue of starvation in the world, however, we can learn some astounding facts. First, the earth currently produces *more than enough food* to feed everyone. Moreover, this level of production does not even take into account farm programs that pay farmers not to plant and produce all the food they could.

Second, there are carefully planned and tested methods for ending starvation. In fact, since World War II, more than 30 countries have actually faced and ended their own problems of starvation. Some did it through food distribution programs. Others

focused on land reform. Some collectivized; others developed agribusiness. Many applied the advances of the Green Revolution. Taken together, these proven solutions make it possible to eliminate starvation totally.

Why then haven't we ended hunger altogether on the planet? The answer, again, lies in the organization and operation of our social life. New developments in food production will not end starvation any more than earlier ones have. People will continue to starve until we can *command* our social affairs rather than be enslaved by them.

Possibly, the problems of overpopulation and hunger seem distant to you, occurring somewhere "over there," on the other side of the globe. To save space, I'll simply remind you of the conclusion, increasingly reached, that there is no "over there" anymore: There is only "over here" in today's world. And regardless of how you view world problems, there is undeniably no end to the social problems in your own back yard—possibly even in your front yard: crime, inflation, unemployment, homelessness, cheating in government and business, child abuse, prejudice and discrimination, pollution, drug abuse, increased taxes, and reduced public services.

We can't solve our social problems until we understand how they come about and how they persist. Social science research offers a way to examine and understand the operation of human social affairs. It provides points of view and technical procedures that uncover things that would otherwise escape our awareness. Often, as the cliché goes, things are not what they seem; social science research can make that clear. One example illustrates this fact.

Poverty is a persistent problem in the United States, and none of its intended solutions is more controversial than *welfare*. Although the program is intended to give the poor a helping hand while they reestablish their financial viability, many complain that it has the opposite effect.

Part of the public image of welfare in action was crystallized by Susan Sheehan (1976) in her book, *A Welfare Mother*, which describes the situation of a three-generation welfare family, suggesting that the welfare system trapped the poor rather than liber-

ating them. Martin Anderson (1978:56) agreed with Sheehan's assessment and charged that the welfare system had established a caste system in America, "perhaps as much as one-tenth of this nation—a caste of people almost totally dependent on the state, with little hope or prospect of breaking free. Perhaps we should call them the Dependent Americans."

George Gilder (1990) has spoken for many who believe the poor are poor mainly because they refuse to work, saying the welfare system saps their incentive to take care of themselves. Ralph Segalman and David Marsland (1989) support the view that welfare has become an intergenerational way of life for the poor in welfare systems around the world. Children raised in welfare families, they assert, will likely live their adult lives on welfare.

This conflict between the intent of welfare as a temporary aid (as so understood by most of the public) and welfare as a permanent right (as understood by the welfare bureaucracy and welfare state planners) has serious implications. The welfare state nations, by and large, have given up on the concept of client rehabilitation for self-sufficiency, an intent originally supported by most welfare state proponents. What was to have been a temporary condition has become a permanent cost on the welfare state. As a result, welfare discourages productivity and self-sufficiency and establishes a new mode of approved behaviour in the society—one of acceptance of dependency as the norm.

(Segalman and Marsland 1989:6–7)

These negative views of the effects of the welfare system are widely shared by the general public, even among those basically sympathetic to the aims of the program. Greg Duncan at the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center points out that census data would seem to confirm the impression that a hard core of the poor have become trapped in their poverty. Speaking of the percentage of the population living in poverty at any given time, he says,

Year-to-year changes in these fractions are typically less than 1 percent, and the Census survey's other measures show little change in the

characteristic of the poor from one year to the next. They have shown repeatedly that the individuals who are poor are more likely to be in families headed by a woman, by someone with low education, and by blacks.

Evidence that one-eighth of the population was poor in two consecutive years, and that those poor shared similar characteristics, is consistent with an inference of absolutely no turnover in the poverty population. Moreover, the evidence seems to fit the stereotype that those families that are poor are likely to remain poor, and that there is a hard-core population of poor families for whom there is little hope of self-improvement.

(Duncan 1984:2–3)

Duncan continues, however, to warn that such snapshots of the population can conceal changes taking place. Specifically, an unchanging percentage of the population living in poverty does not necessarily mean the *same* families are poor from year to year. Theoretically, it could be a totally different set of families each year.

To determine the real nature of poverty and welfare, the University of Michigan undertook a "Panel Study of Income Dynamics" in which they followed the economic fate of 5,000 families from 1969 to 1978, or ten years, the period supposedly typified by Sheehan's "welfare mother." At the beginning, the researchers found that in 1978, 8.1 percent of these families were receiving some welfare benefits and 3.5 percent depended on welfare for more than half their income. Moreover, these percentages did not differ drastically over the ten-year period. (Duncan 1984:75)

Looking beyond these surface data, however, the researchers found something you might not have expected. During the ten-year period, about one-fourth of the 5,000 families received welfare benefits at least once. However, only 8.7 percent of the families were ever dependent on welfare for more than half their income. *"Only a little over one-half of the individuals living in poverty in one year are found to be poor in the next, and considerably less than one-half of those who experience poverty remain persistently poor over many years"* (Duncan 1984:3; emphasis original).

Only 2 percent of the families received welfare each of the 10 years, and less than 1 percent were continuously dependent on welfare for the 10 years. Table P-1 summarizes these findings.

These data paint a much different picture of poverty than people commonly assume. In a summary of his findings, Duncan says:

While nearly one-quarter of the population received income from welfare sources at least once in the decade, only about 2 percent of all the population could be characterized as dependent upon this income for extended periods of time. Many families receiving welfare benefits at any given time were in the early stages of recovering from an economic crisis caused by the death, departure, or disability of a husband, a recovery that often lifted them out of welfare when they found full-time employment, or remarried, or both. Furthermore, most of the children raised in welfare families did not themselves receive welfare benefits after they left home and formed their own households.

(Duncan 1984:4–5)

Many of the things social scientists study—including all the social problems you’ve just read about—generate deep emotions and firm convictions in most people. This makes effective inquiry into the facts difficult at best; all too often, researchers manage only to confirm their initial prejudices. The special value of social science research methods is that they offer a way to address such issues with logical and observational rigor. They let us all pierce through our personal viewpoints and take a look at the world that lies beyond our

**Table P-1**  
Incidence of Short- and Long-Run Welfare Receipt and Dependence, 1969–78

	Percent of U.S. Population:	
	Receiving Any Welfare Income	Dependent on Welfare for More Than 50% of Family Income
Welfare in 1978	8.1%	3.5%
Welfare in 1 or more years, 1969–78	25.2	8.7
Welfare in 5 or more years, 1969–78	8.3	3.5
Welfare in all 10 years, 1969–78	2.0	0.7
“Persistent welfare” (welfare in 8 or more years), 1969–78	4.4	2.0

Source: Greg J. Duncan, *Years of Poverty, Years of Plenty: The Changing Fortunes of American Workers and Families* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1984), 75.

own perspectives. And it is that “world beyond” that holds the solutions to the social problems we face today.

At a time of increased depression and disillusionment, we are continually tempted to turn away from confronting social problems and retreat into the concerns of our own self-interest. Social science research offers an opportunity to take on those problems and discover the experience of making a difference after all. The choice is yours; I invite you to take on the challenge. Your instructor and I would like to share the excitement of social science with you.



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