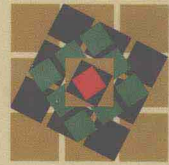# THE PRACTICE OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

EIGHTH EDITION

EARL BABBIE
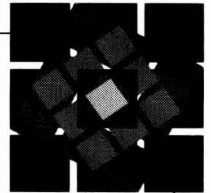
THE PRACTICE OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

EIGHTH EDITION

EARL BABBIE

Chapman University

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Writing is my joy, sociology my passion. I delight in putting words together in a way that makes people learn or laugh or both. Sociology shows up as a set of words, also. 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 runs deep.

I ventured into the outer world by way of Harvard, the USMC, U.C. Berkeley, and twelve 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.
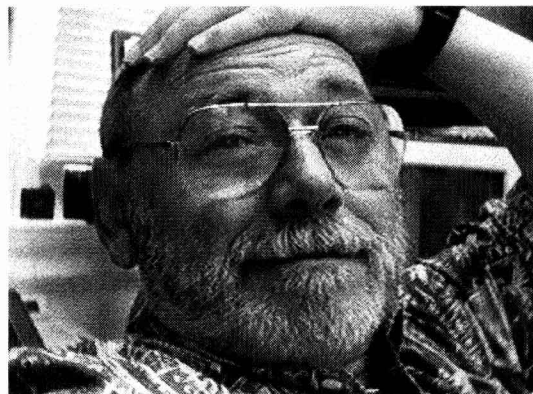
At last, I have matured enough to rediscover and appreciate my roots in Vermont each summer. Rather than a return to the past, it feels more like the next turn in a widening spiral. I can't wait to see what's around the next bend.

Dedication

Sheila Babbie

ACCOMPANYING THIS TEXTBOOK—

Practicing Social Research: Guided Activities to Accompany The Practice of Social Research, Eighth 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 Practice of Social Research. For each chapter this study guide 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 1993 General Social Surveys.
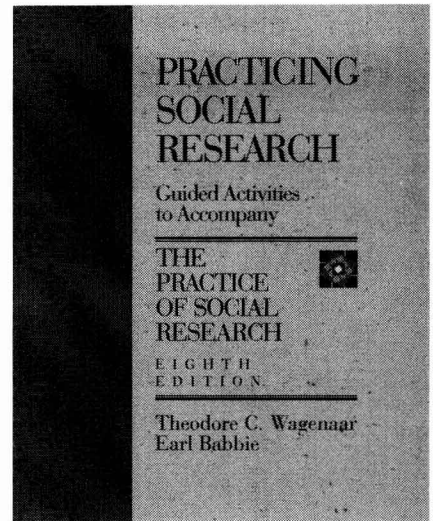
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RESEARCH METHODS FOR SOCIAL WORK (with Allen Rubin), Third Edition

THE SOCIOLOGICAL SPIRIT: Critical Essays in a Critical Science, Second Edition

APPLE LOGO FOR TEACHERS

RESEARCH METHODS FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND CRIMINOLOGY, Second Edition (with Michael Maxfield)

Preface

In 1968, I began teaching social research methods for the first time, at the University of Hawaii. The course focused specifically on survey research methods, and I had only six students in the class that first semester. It was my first real teaching experience, and the small class size didn't keep me from planting myself behind a desk on a platform down front, while the students scattered themselves around the large lecture hall.

As the semester progressed, I became more relaxed as a teacher, came to like and appreciate my students, and eventually moved out from behind the platform at the head of the lecture hall. Before long, my students and I began meeting in my office, where I could grab and loan books from my own library as their relevance occurred to me during class meetings. (By the way, if any of those first six students are reading this, would you please return my books?)

The problem that continued to nag at me in the course, however, was the lack of a good textbook on survey research. Books I considered seemed to fall into one of two groups. Some books presented the theoretical logic of research methods in such abstract terms that I didn't think students would be able to apply any of the general principles to the practical, real world of "doing" research. The other books were just the opposite. Often termed "cookbooks," they presented detailed, step-by-step instructions on how to conduct a survey. Unfortunately, this approach only prepared students to conduct surveys very much like the one described by the authors. Neither the abstract nor the "cookbook" approach seemed truly useful to students or to their instructors.

One day I found myself jotting down the table of contents for the ideal research methods textbook. It was organized around three principles: theoretical principles on which scientific research was based.

1. Understanding the *theoretical* principles on which scientific research was based.
2. Seeing how those principles were reflected in the established techniques for *doing* research.
3. Being prepared to make appropriate *compromises* whenever field conditions didn't permit the routine application of established techniques.

The next day, I received an unexpected letter from the sociology editor at Wadsworth Publishing Company, asking if I would be interested in writing a textbook on survey research methods. Enclosing a table of contents by return mail, I said I would, and I was soon at work on my first textbook.

Survey Research Methods was published in 1973. My editors and I immediately discovered some good news, some bad news, and some additional good news. The first good news was that all survey research instructors seemed to love the book, and it seemed as though our book was being used in virtually every survey research course in the country. The bad news was that there weren't all that many survey research courses.

The final good news, however, was that many instructors who taught more general social research courses—covering survey research alongside other research methods—were inclined to use our book and supplement it with other books dealing with field research, experiments, and so on. While adjusting to our specialized book,

however, many instructors suggested that Wadsworth have "that same guy" write a more general social research text.

By this time, Steve Rutter was the sociology editor at Wadsworth, and he and I began working together to design a general social research textbook that would serve the needs of students and instructors. Although it's probably polite for an author to speak of having a partnership with an editor, the partnership Steve and I forged was as real and solid as any profound friendship I've had in life. He's like a brother to me.

One of Steve's particular jobs in the partnership was to sample the needs, opinions, and practices of instructors around the country. The Preface of the first edition of *The Practice of Social Research* (1975) acknowledged the assistance of a dozen social research instructors from California to Florida. The resulting book, then, was a collaboration in a very real sense, even though only my name was on the cover and I was ultimately responsible for it.

The Practice of Social Research was an immediate success. It was initially written for sociology courses, but subsequent editions have been increasingly used in fields such as political science, social work, marketing research, and so forth. Moreover, it is being used by teachers and researchers in numerous countries around the world, including China and Russia.

I've laid out this lengthy history of the book for a couple of reasons. First, when I was a student, I suppose I thought of textbooks the same way I thought about government buildings: They were just *there*. I never really thought about them being written by human beings. I certainly never thought about textbooks *evolving:* being updated, getting better, having errors corrected. As a student, I would have been horrified by the thought that any of my textbooks might contain mistakes!

Second, pointing out the evolution of the book sets the stage for a preview of the changes that have gone into this eighth edition. As with previous revisions, changes have been prompted by several factors. For example, because social research technology and practices are continu-

ally changing, the book must be updated to remain current and useful. In my own teaching, I frequently find improved ways to present standard materials. Colleagues also frequently share their ideas for ways to teach specific topics. Some of these appear as boxed inserts in the book. Both students and instructors often suggest that various topics be reorganized, expanded, clarified, shrunk, or—gasp—deleted.

■ THE <u>EIGHTH</u> EDITION

In a previous edition of this book, I said, "Revising a textbook such as this is a humbling experience. No matter how good it seems to be, there is no end of ideas about how it could be improved." That observation still holds true. When we asked instructors what could be improved, they thought of things once more, and I have considered all their suggestions, have followed many of them, and have chosen to "think some more" about others. I also receive a lot of comments and suggestions from students who've been assigned the book; many of the changes come from them.

The most noticeable change in this edition has to do with the presentation of qualitative and quantitative orientations in social science. When I first wrote this book, quantitative methods dominated social research, having eclipsed the historical and field methods so popular in earlier decades. While quantitative methods are still widely and powerfully used throughout the social sciences, there has been a resurgent interest in qualitative methods. I believe this edition reflects the current balance of interest and use.

My chief intention in this regard is to have students feel comfortable with and inclined to use both approaches. Though practicing social scientists tend to identify themselves as primarily qualitative or quantitative in orientation, I would like students to see these different approaches to inquiry as two parts of a seamless whole. I have taken this approach in the Holographic Overview and have talked about this issue theoretically in

Chapters 1 and 2. Both approaches are represented throughout the rest of the book.

Chapter 1 has been extensively revised. I have reorganized and expanded the discussion of "reality" and have trimmed the discussion of errors in ordinary human reasoning. (Some, I think, were more interesting to me than they were useful to students.) I've also added a section, "Some Dialectics of Social Science," in which I introduce and relate (1) idiographic and nomothetic explanations, (2) inductive and deductive theory, and (3) qualitative and quantitative data. Finally, I've added an introduction to social research ethics, although the extensive treatment of it is still presented in Chapter 18.

Chapter 2 treats the issue of objectivity/subjectivity in more depth and less positivistically than in earlier editions. In the same vein, Chapter 3 provides a more evenhanded treatment of idiographic and nomothetic models of explanation.

In Chapters 4 to 7, I have included more qualitative examples to illustrate the fundamentals of study design. My preference is to show how both qualitative and quantitative methods are fundamental to social research inquiry, rather than create a qualitative ghetto.

I've made several changes in Chapter 8. Following a short history of sampling in social research, the chapter begins with a discussion of nonprobability sampling techniques, with special attention to how they fit into many qualitative research designs. The discussion of snowball sampling has been moved here from the chapter on field research, and I've added comments on the use of deviant cases.

In the discussion of probability sampling, I've shortened and clarified the discussion of probability proportionate to size (PPS) sampling. I've deleted the sections on "Degrees of Precision In Weighting" and "Methods for Weighting," having been persuaded that students can live full and productive lives without being exposed to these topics in their first brush with social research methods.

There are no major structural changes to Chapter 9, although I've revised earlier materials, and I've beefed up the discussion of focus groups with the National Issues Convention in Austin. I have revised Figure 9-5, to clarify the comparisons you might make in analyzing the results of a Solomon Four-Group Design.

Given the general increase in mischief being done in the name of polling, Chapter 10 discusses "push-polls," which feed phony or biased information to respondents, presumably for the purpose of learning the impact of such disinformation. In fact, the chief intent is simply to mislead voters. I've also added a new box ("A Candy Poll") to the chapter, prompted by a communication from an instructor in San Diego. I hope this will demonstrate to students how social science techniques are widely applicable. The chapter also has an expanded discussion of electronic surveys that goes beyond CATI to its cousins. I am grateful here for the work of Bill Nicholls and his colleagues at the census bureau.

Chapter 11 has been substantially restructured and revised. It begins with a glossary of terms commonly associated with qualitative research. I've abbreviated the roles of the observer to "complete participant" and "complete observer," noting there are degrees of variations in between. I'm not sure it's vital for students to know the difference between a "participant-as-observer" and "observer-as-participant." I've tried to enliven the discussion a bit by including Fred Davis's typology of the "Martian" and the "Convert."

Then, I have expanded the discussion with a new section, "Relations to Subjects." This discussion goes beyond technique to consider the objectivity/subjectivity dialectic and ethical issues as well.

The discussion of qualitative interviewing has been expanded and made more rigorous. I've expanded the discussion of qualitative data analysis and the computer programs available for it. I've also added a new illustration of field research—Daniel Wolf's study of outlaw bikers—and the chapter ends with a new section, "Research Ethics in Field Research."

In Chapter 12, I've added qualitative and feminist examples of content analysis, and there

is a new section on "Qualitative Data Analysis." I've also included several Web sites where students can get data for analysis.

Chapter 13 now begins with a report on the Population Communication International's work in Tanzania and elsewhere to fight overpopulation and AIDS through radio soap operas. A recent evaluation of the project offers an excellent example of this research purpose. I've added a new section on qualitative evaluations, and the discussion of ethical issues describes the Tuskegee syphilis experiments.

Every edition of the book calls for an updating of the computer technology. Although this is a chore, it's always exciting to look at the new advances that have become available in the past three years. Chapter 14 now has a short section on getting data into a data analysis program. I've replaced the codebook example (Figure 14-1) with data from the General Social Survey, and I've replaced some of the hypothetical examples with real data from the GSS.

While Chapter 15 is primarily a quantitative chapter, I've added a section on the use of numerical data in qualitative research. Once again I hope this will break down the perceived barrier between the two approaches. Hypothetical examples have been replaced by real ones.

There are no major changes in Chapter 16. You may be pleased to know that Chapter 17 now begins with a different joke. I've also provided new explanations of gamma and lambda and have provided a table by Peter Nardi that helps students pick the right statistic based on the level of measurement of the independent and dependent variables. There's an expanded discussion of the misuses of statistical significance, reporting a study of how they are used by journals.

The main change regarding ethics is that I've put more examples and discussions throughout the book. In Chapter 18, there is more discussion of informed consent and IRBs, and I've included the example of Rik Scarce as an illustration of how researchers protect their subjects. To illustrate the influence of politics on research, I've given an example of legislation introduced to regulate the techniques of survey research.

In Chapter 19, I've changed the language from earlier editions that said the three bases of social research were theory, methods, and statistics, since that's not accurate. Instead, this edition talks of theory, data collection, and data analysis, some of which is statistical and some of which is not. The summaries now have more qualitative research examples.

Appendix A ("Using the Library") has more on electronic storage and retrieval, and Appendix B ("Social Research in Cyberspace") is new. Appendix I ("A Learner's Guide to SPSS") has been rewritten for use with SPSS 7.0.

As with each edition, I've updated technical materials. (I love all the new changes in computer technology, but it always means more revisions to the book.) In this edition, you will find expanded discussions of the Internet, World Wide Web, and other electronic aids to social research. The new Appendix B addresses these topics specifically. Moreover, the publishers and I have developed a Web site for the book, which offers continually updated support for instructors and students. You can find us at http://tposr.wadsworth.com.

As an instructor, I am always searching for new and more effective ways of explaining social research to my own students; many of those new explanations take the form of diagrams. You'll find a number of new graphic illustrations in this edition. Once again, I've sought to replace aging research examples (except for the classics) with more recent ones. I've also dropped some sections that I don't think do much for students any more. There are no major structural changes in this edition, however—no chapters moved, added, or deleted.

As with each new edition, I would appreciate any comments you have about how the book can be improved. Its evolution over the past 23 years has reflected countless inputs from students and faculty, and I am grateful for your partnership in the book.

■ SUPPLEMENTS

Practicing Social Research

The student study guide and workbook Ted Wagenaar and I have prepared 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.

In this edition, Ted and I have once again sorted through the exercises and added new ones we've created in our own teaching or heard about from colleagues. In particular, we have pro-vided exercises for students who have access to SPSS, as well as kept plenty for those who don't.

Data Disk

Over the years, we have sought to provide up-to-date computer—particularly, microcomputer—support for students and instructors. Because there are now many excellent programs for ana-lyzing data, we have provided data to be used with them. Specifically, Jeff Jacques, author of the SPSS appendix, has pulled together a set of data from the National Opinion Research Cen-ter's *General Social Survey,* offering students data from 1,500 respondents around the country in 1973, 1978, 1983, 1988, and 1993. As you'll see, I've used this data set for many of the examples in the textbook.

Instructor's Manual

As with past editions, Margaret Jendrek has pre-pared an excellent instructor's manual to help instructors write examinations. 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. Although students may not appreciate examinations as a general principle, I know that they benefit from the clarity Marty brings to that task.

Acknowledgments

It 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 would like to again acknowledge my debt to them.

I would like to repeat my thanks to those colleagues acknowledged for their comments during the writing of the first, second, and third editions of this book. Though revised, the present book still reflects their contributions. Many other colleagues helped me revise the book. I particularly want to thank the instructors who reviewed the manuscript of this edition and made helpful suggestions: Roland Chilton, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; M. Richard Cramer, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Shaul Gabbay, University of Illinois, Chicago; Marcia Ghidina, University of North Carolina, Asheville; Jeffrey Jacques, Florida A&M University; Wanda Kosinski, Ramapo College, New Jersey; Manfred Kuechler, CUNY Hunter College; Joan Morris, University of Central Florida; Beth Anne Shelton, University of Texas, Arlington; Ron Stewart, SUNY Buffalo; Randy Stoecker, University of Toledo; Theodore Wagenaar, Miami University, Ohio; and Jerome Wolfe, University of Miami.

Over the years, I have become more and more impressed by the important role played by editors in books like this. While an author's name appears on the book's spine, much of its backbone derives from the strength of its editors. Since 1973, I've worked with six sociology editors at Wadsworth, which has involved 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 Eve Howard. While Eve brings a wealth of publishing experience to the project, she also knows the cutting edge of new technologies and pedagogies and how to take advantage of them.

Ted Wagenaar has contributed extensively to this book. Ted and I coauthor the accompanying workbook, *Practicing Social Research,* but that's only the tip of the iceberg. Ted is a cherished colleague, welcomed critic, good friend, and altogether decent human being. I am grateful also for the SPSS appendix prepared by Jeffrey M. Jacques, Florida A&M University.

I would like to thank Winston Moore for the use of his camp on Walton Pond: a perfect place to write about research methods or anything else. Also, my thanks to Kay Orlandi for making us feel so welcome back home in Vermont.

I have dedicated this book to my wife, Sheila, who has contributed greatly to its origin and evolution. Sheila and I first met when she was assigned to assist me on a project I was supervising at U.C. Berkeley's Survey Research Center.* We have worked on numerous research projects during a third of a century of marriage, and I suppose we'll do more in the future. My gratitude to Sheila, however, extends well beyond our research activities. She is a powerful partner in life. Her insight and support take me always to the horizon of my purpose and allow me to look beyond. There's no way to thank her adequately for that.

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*This means Sheila married her boss, no matter what she says today.

Prologue:
The Importance of Social Research

In 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 and 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.

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 and attention to learning about 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, but 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. That problem was averted with the invention of the automobile. 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 orga-*

nize 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 is rapidly increasing 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. Everyone would 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 you study the issue of starvation in the world, however, you learn some astounding facts. First, you learn that 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, you learn that 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 backyard—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 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 cliche 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 liberating 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 own perspective. 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.

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.