The social sciences have incorporated many of the research techniques of the natural and physical sciences and have developed some research methods of their own as well. Remember, the primary aim of the social sciences is to study human beings and their interactions in society and with the environment. Social scientists seek to help us understand the events that happen around us and to communicate that understanding to others. Systematic inquiry is essential in the social sciences. Because researchers must communicate the social knowledge they acquire through their research, they need a clear written form for transmitting their insights. As in the natural and physical sciences, researchers in the social sciences employ a version of the scientific method. The following steps (discussed in detail in later paragraphs) are generally utilized in the researching of a social scientific question:

1. Choosing the research problem and stating the hypothesis
2. Formulating the research design and method of gathering data
3. Gathering the data
4. Analyzing the data
5. Interpreting the results of the data analysis in order to test the hypothesis

**Step 1—Problem and Hypothesis**

Obviously, the first step must be preceded by extensive study and preparation in the discipline under investigation. To choose a research problem that is significant, fresh, and researchable, the social scientist must have an intimate knowledge of the field of study. Often, researchers choose a problem based on the prior research of other social scientists, or they seek to test their hypotheses against actual social reality. It is crucial for researchers to keep abreast of the current research in their fields by reading professional journals, attending national meetings of professional societies, and maintaining contacts with other researchers doing similar studies. Research problems are not formulated in a vacuum. The first two inquiry steps discussed in Chapter 1, preparation and incubation, precede the actual formulation of a hypothesis.

Once a significant research problem has been chosen, a working hypothesis can be formulated. That is, the researcher sets forth a proposition (hypothesis) that may explain the occurrence of the phenomenon observed. For example, an education researcher interested in the writing processes of children might hypothesize that the type of learning environment could influence children’s willingness to write.
Step 2—Research Design

The researcher must decide how to test the hypothesis developed in step 1. To do this, he or she needs to determine which concepts or events being studied are constant and which are variable. Variables are phenomena that change or differ. Temperature, for example, is a scientific variable that differs by degrees. Thus, the variable “temperature” contains the idea of more or less heat, and this variable influences the physical world. Similarly, the social variable “religion” may be expressed differently: Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, and so on. Just as temperature influences physical nature, a social variable such as religion influences human nature. Public opinion polls have revealed that Protestants and Catholics differ predictably in their preference for political parties. Thus, the variable “religion” influences social behavior. In the example of education research mentioned on the previous page, the variable is “learning environment,” which refers to the structure and atmosphere of the classroom.

Once the variables have been identified, the researcher must decide how best to measure them. The methods used by social scientists include experiments, surveys and questionnaires, interviews and case studies, and observations. These methods are discussed in detail on pages 261–271.

Step 3—Gathering the Data

The researcher gathers data (both quantitative and qualitative) based on the research design chosen as most appropriate for testing the hypothesis. Social science researchers pay close attention to matters of accurate sampling and the accurate recording of data. Table 8-1 taken from FBI Crime Reports, illustrates the kind of data often used by social scientists.

Step 4—Analyzing the Data

Researchers analyze their data quantitatively (using numbers) to discern its relationship to the hypothesis. Depending on the research method used, the researcher relies to a greater or lesser degree on statistical analyses of the data. Often, researchers code their data to make it suitable for computer processing. Computers can quickly and accurately process data and correlate variables. As an example of data analysis, students in a political science class were asked to analyze the crime statistics data in Table 8-1. First, the students were asked to compare the data for two states, in this case Alaska and Arizona, to see whether the differences were statistically significant. Then they were asked to explain or interpret their results.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Crime Index Total</th>
<th>Violent Crime</th>
<th>Property Crime</th>
<th>Murder and Non-Negligent Manslaughter</th>
<th>Forcible Rape</th>
<th>Robbery</th>
<th>Aggravated Assault</th>
<th>Burglary</th>
<th>Larceny-Theft</th>
<th>Motor Vehicle Theft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALASKA</td>
<td>231,039</td>
<td>13,746</td>
<td>1,025</td>
<td>12,721</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>2,113</td>
<td>9,491</td>
<td>1,117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan Statistical Area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area actually reporting</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>8,100</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>7,510</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>1,081</td>
<td>5,581</td>
<td>848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Cities</td>
<td>168,591</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Area actually reporting</td>
<td>87.4%</td>
<td>9,267</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>8,592</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>1,237</td>
<td>6,385</td>
<td>970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated totals</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>125,370</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Area actually reporting</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>5,219</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>4,528</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>1,743</td>
<td>2,319</td>
<td>466</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Total</td>
<td>525,000</td>
<td>28,232</td>
<td>2,391</td>
<td>25,841</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>1,613</td>
<td>5,093</td>
<td>18,195</td>
<td>2,553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate per 100,000 inhabitants</td>
<td>5,377.5</td>
<td>455.4</td>
<td>4,922.1</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>307.2</td>
<td>970.1</td>
<td>3,465.7</td>
<td>486.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARIZONA</td>
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<td>20,742</td>
<td>222,663</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>1,396</td>
<td>4,687</td>
<td>14,406</td>
<td>55,059</td>
<td>153,296</td>
<td>14,308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>187,312</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>1,208</td>
<td>4,262</td>
<td>11,550</td>
<td>46,196</td>
<td>128,869</td>
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<tr>
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<td>100.0%</td>
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<td>28,015</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>1,764</td>
<td>6,145</td>
<td>20,379</td>
<td>1,491</td>
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<td>Other Cities</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area actually reporting</td>
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<td>28,498</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>141</td>
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<td>1,794</td>
<td>6,251</td>
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<td>1,517</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area actually reporting</td>
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<td>1,103</td>
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<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estimated totals</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1,062</td>
<td>2,612</td>
<td>3,697</td>
<td>544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Total</td>
<td>3,386,000</td>
<td>243,405</td>
<td>20,742</td>
<td>222,663</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>1,396</td>
<td>4,687</td>
<td>14,406</td>
<td>55,059</td>
<td>153,296</td>
<td>14,308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate per 100,000 inhabitants</td>
<td>7,188.6</td>
<td>612.6</td>
<td>6,576.0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>138.4</td>
<td>425.5</td>
<td>1,626.1</td>
<td>4,527.3</td>
<td>422.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 5—Interpreting the Results

The relationship among variables suggested by the hypothesis is tested at this stage in the research, often through statistical measures. In the social sciences, a hypothesis can never be proved or disproved "beyond the shadow of a doubt." However, researchers can statistically calculate the probability that the hypothesis is wrong, and thus can strongly suggest the truth or validity of the hypothesis. In other words, a social scientist may be able to either reject or fail to reject a hypothesis based on a careful marshaling of the evidence. For example, in comparing the crime reports for Alaska and Arizona, the students noticed that the rates per 100,000 population differed in potentially interesting ways: Arizona had more property crimes (burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft) than Alaska did and more violent crimes (murder, rape, robbery, assault). But Alaska topped Arizona in individual crimes—murders, rapes, and vehicle thefts. The students needed first to find out whether these perceived differences were significant, using statistical tests. If so, they then could interpret their results by positing plausible explanations (hypotheses) to explore and test further. The students, for example, hypothesized that the high number of rapes in Alaska could be related to the scarcity of women. This hypothesis could be tested, perhaps by comparisons with other states with similar demographics.

Social Science Research Designs

The research designs most commonly used in social science research are the following:

1. Experiments
2. Surveys and questionnaires
3. Interviews and case studies
4. Observations

The paragraphs that follow describe these research designs. Each design has both advantages and disadvantages. Researchers must keep the relative merits in mind as they design a research project. 

Experiments

The social scientific experiment is a highly controlled method of determining a direct link between two variables—for example, between overcrowding and riots. The researcher must have control over the research environment so that no external variables can affect the
outcome. Unlike experiments in the sciences, in social scientific research it is often difficult to control the research environment totally. A researcher who is interested in the causes of riots should not attempt to create a riot in the laboratory for study. However, social science researchers can study laboratory animals and posit hypotheses about human behavior based on their experimental results. For example, to test the hypothesis that overcrowding can cause riots, some researchers studied populations of rats and varied the population density to test their hypothesis. They found that for the rat populations, overcrowding did indeed cause antisocial behavior. From this result, the researchers hypothesized that people may be subject to a similar phenomenon—that is, overcrowded cities may contribute to antisocial behavior. Although experimental research is the best means of definitively establishing causal links (variable A causes variable B; overcrowded living conditions cause antisocial behavior), experiments may be limited in applicability. In the case of the above experiment, people may or may not behave as rats do.

**Surveys and Questionnaires**

Ideally, we would study an entire population to gain insights into its society; finding out how all Americans intend to vote in an upcoming election would accurately predict the outcome. However, polling an entire population is seldom feasible, so pollsters sample small segments of the entire population at random. The most frequently used sampling technique is random-digit-dialing on the telephone. Researchers have refined sampling techniques to the point that polls can be quite accurate. Thus, CBS News can announce the outcome of a presidential election hours before the returns are in for much of the country.

One particular kind of survey is the questionnaire, a form that asks for responses to a set of questions. Large numbers of people can be polled for their opinions by means of questionnaires, either over the telephone, through the mail, or in person. The advent of computers has radically changed the survey business: it is now possible to survey large populations, code their responses and enter them into a computer database, and obtain immediate analyses of the data.

**The Hypothesis.** As with most other research in both the sciences and the social sciences, the first, and perhaps most important, step in survey research is the articulation of a hypothesis. “Developing the hypothesis provides the key ingredient to structure all subsequent parts of the project: the questionnaire, the sample, the coding, the tabulation forms, and the final report itself.” A questionnaire is not given simply to gather random facts; rather, it is a problem-solving tool. The researcher poses a hypothesis in an attempt to shed light on a particu-
lar research problem. The questionnaire works to either support or counter the hypothesis. For example, a study of the relationship between the elderly and the police might begin when researchers observed a problem, namely, that the elderly do not see the police in a positive light and therefore hesitate to call on them in an emergency situation. The researcher might then hypothesize that the real problem lies in the elderly population’s erroneous perceptions of the police. A questionnaire could be designed to elicit their perceptions and to try to understand the origins of their distrust. In fact, when a study like this was conducted in a major metropolitan area, researchers discovered that an elderly person’s distrust of the police was in direct proportion to the number of hours of television the person watched, in particular TV crime shows.

**Question Design.** The survey researcher must design each question on a questionnaire carefully to ensure that it is clear, direct, and understandable to the target population. Questions should be pretested so that initial responses can be reviewed and the questions revised to eliminate any ambiguity prior to their use in the actual study. Researchers should also design questionnaires that are reliable (measure the same thing each time) and valid (measure what they claim to measure). In addition, the population sampled should represent the larger group being studied.

Two basic kinds of questions are used on questionnaires: open-ended questions and closed questions. The open-ended questions may require an interviewer, since research has shown that self-administered open questionnaires tend to yield less usable data. Fowler says that “generally speaking, if one is going to have a self-administered questionnaire, one must reconcile oneself to closed questions, that is, questions that can be answered by simply checking a box or circling the proper response from a set provided by the researcher.” On the other hand, Labaw says that open questions have gotten a lot of undeserved bad press in the survey business. She says they “provide absolutely indispensable insight into how respondents interpret complex but apparently single-issue questions” and, in general, recommends the strategic use of both closed and open-ended questions. She also states that “the most basic principle of question wording, and one very often ignored or simply unseen, is that only one concept or issue or meaning should be included in a question.”

The questionnaire below was designed by a student to discover the attitude of foreign students toward Utah State University and the education they were receiving. He hypothesized, based on his own experiences as a foreign student, that their responses would be generally very favorable. The student researcher polled sixty foreign students, representing a variety of nationalities, during several visits to the li-
brary. He found that, in general, foreign students were satisfied with university administrative policies but less satisfied with interpersonal relationships with their teachers and classmates.

**Questionnaire**
1. What is your nationality?
2. How long have you been a student at USU?
3. What is your native language?
4. Do you feel classes at USU are designed with consideration of the needs of foreign students?  yes  no
5. Do you feel your instructors are unbiased toward you and your nationality during class?  yes  no
6. Do you feel you have received an undeserved grade from an instructor due to a bias against foreign students?  yes  no
7. Do you feel any language difficulties (limited vocabulary, accent, etc.) cause communication barriers between you and your instructors?  yes  no
8. Do you feel accepted as an equal by your American classmates?  yes  no
9. Do you feel USU’s administrative policies regarding foreign students are fair and unbiased?  yes  no
10. Do you feel USU provides an equal opportunity for a sound education for its foreign students?  yes  no

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**
1. Based on the previous discussion of questionnaire design, how would you rate this student’s questionnaire?
2. Do the questions asked match the hypothesis?
3. Are there any ambiguous words or phrases that could be misunderstood?
4. Do you see any way this questionnaire could be made better?

**Interviews**

Interviews are another type of survey. Their advantages over questionnaires include flexibility (the questioner can interact with the respondent), response rate (the questioner immediately knows the respondent’s answer), and access to nonverbal behavior (the questioner can gather nonverbal as well as verbal clues). Interviews have other advantages as well, but the disadvantages are also great. Primarily, the time and expense of interviews makes them difficult to conduct. Con-
sequently, fewer responses can be gathered. In addition, the interview is actually a complex interaction between individuals; thus, interview results can hinge on the characteristics of the individuals involved. If a respondent is put off by the interviewer, for example, his or her interview answers may be affected. Nevertheless, interviewing is an important research method in the social sciences that yields high-quality data.

When designing interviews, keep the following in mind:

1. Be certain that the questions are written down and asked exactly as worded.
2. Be certain that you probe any unclear or incomplete answer.
3. Be certain that inadequate or brief answers are not probed in a directive way that may bias the results.

The interview that follows was conducted by a student who was interested in the relationship between emotions and the onset of asthma attacks in asthmatic children. Prior to the interview, she obtained the subject’s permission to tape-record for later data analysis.

Interview with Dr. John W. Carlisle, September 10, 1998
(Pediatrician with extensive experience treating asthmatic children)

1. Do emotions cause asthma? Dr. Carlisle feels that the misconception “emotions cause asthma” is easily explained by the fact that stressful emotional situations frequently trigger asthma attacks. People who may have already been prone to asthma may experience their first attack in an emotionally stressful situation. In actuality, asthma is a physical disease that can be irritated by emotional stress or trauma.

2. What emotional or psychological effects on your asthmatic patients have you observed? Dr. Carlisle targeted several detrimental effects of asthma on children’s emotional and psychological well-being. Older children (8–12 years) feel “defective” in some way because they are different from their peers (they often have to take medicine or other precautions to prevent an attack). Older children may rebel against parents who expect them to take on the extra responsibility for controlling their own disease. Younger children tend to regress, become very frightened, and cling to parents because they are not yet capable of understanding their disease.

3. What suggestions do you have for treating the emotional aspects of asthma? In Dr. Carlisle’s opinion, the best emotional support parents can give childhood asthmatics is to make sure they understand the disease and what is happening to them. At the same time, try to reinforce the fact that there will always be someone there to help them if they need help. This can alleviate a great deal of the anxiety that can aggravate their condition.
Observations

The survey method is important for obtaining a person’s opinion on a particular issue. Observation, on the other hand, is best suited to the collection of nonverbal data. In this method, the observer takes notes on people behaving in customary ways in a particular environment or setting. In this way, the researcher accumulates “field notes,” which are used to analyze trends and discern customary behaviors. The disadvantages of observation include lack of control over the environment, lack of quantifiable data, and small sample size. Also, whenever an observer enters the environment to observe people, the participants’ behavior may no longer be natural.

The goal of social research based on observation and description is a general one: to describe and perhaps evaluate a culture or subculture in as much detail as possible. An example of this type of observational research is sociologist Margaret Mead’s book *Coming of Age in Samoa*. In this book, Mead describes the complex culture of the Samoan island, paying particular attention to customs surrounding the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

The following excerpt from a report written for a speech communications course illustrates an observation and description of a particular cultural setting—the country-and-Western singles bar. The researcher was observing particular nonverbal behaviors exhibited by the patrons of the bar. As you read the report, notice the descriptions and categorizations of the participants in this subculture.

Red Raider Romances
by Lee Guyette

The following study was conducted at the Red Raider Club in Lubbock, Texas. The study is a brief survey of the nonverbal communication displayed in this particular club. The following observations were made by me not only in the recent few days, but also over a 7-month period in which I worked as a cocktail waitress there. I made my observations from the standpoint of a nonpatron/waitress and from the patron/female customer. The Red Raider Club is a Country and Western club that
caters primarily to a crowd of people between the ages of 25 and 50. It is for the most part a blue-collar, lower-middle-class crowd.

Body Types, Shapes, and Sizes

Attractiveness

A majority of the people, both male and female, were only average in appearance. There were a few exceptionally attractive males and females, and they did seem to get preferential treatment; for example, the attractive men were turned down less when they asked a woman to dance, and the attractive women were asked to dance more frequently.

Body Image and Appearance

Many of the individuals were slightly overweight. They did not seem to be very aware of or satisfied with their bodies. Their body concept seemed low. In the more attractive individuals, the reverse was true. The attractive individuals were more aware of their bodies; they noticed what they were doing with their bodies, and they smiled more and seemed in general more comfortable with themselves. I did notice that the less attractive people seemed to worry less about their unsightly bodies as they became intoxicated.

Body Messages

Most of my subjects were definitely endomorphic, and they certainly seemed viscerotonic. Most of the men were slightly overweight. There were women as tall as 6 feet and men as short as 5 feet. Nearly all my subjects were white. Perhaps 2% were Hispanic and there were no
blacks. Many of the men had beards and moustaches, perhaps to indicate masculinity. Most of the women wore their hair either long and curly or short and straight.

**Clothing and Personal Artifacts**

*Function of Dress*

The main function of dress in this club was cultural display more than comfort or modesty. Nearly all of the subjects of both sexes wore jeans. The men wore Wranglers and most of the women wore designer jeans. Chic, Lee, Wrangler, Sergio, and Vanderbilt were the most commonly worn for the women. A few women wore western dresses. I did not see any man not wearing cowboy boots and most of the women also wore cowboy boots. A few women wore high-heeled shoes. All of the women wearing dresses wore heels. Most of the people, both female and male, wearing jeans and boots also had their names on the back of their belts. For the men, it was their last names on the belt; for the women, their first names.

*Communication Components of Dress*

It is difficult to say whether or not these people were intentionally or unintentionally communicating messages through dress. They all seemed to communicate their preference for western dress. They did not wish to communicate, however, that they were from a lower socioeconomic background by wearing western dress. Although this conception has changed in recent years, it still is thought that lower-middle-class people wear western clothes.
Personality Correlates of Dress

It is extremely difficult to assess personality types of a large group just from their clothing styles. However, I did notice that most of the women in dresses were there with dates. I also noticed that women wearing red western blouses danced more frequently. For the most part, both men and women dressed conservatively. The colors were usually solid black, brown, and white for the men, and red, purple, or blue for the women.

Perception of Dress

Most of the people were dressed in the conventional stereotype of western dress. Indeed, it was almost as if there were an unspoken dress code. The young attractive girls, wearing red and purple blouses with ruffles, tight jeans, boots, belts, and wearing their hair long, seemed to be thought the sexiest and most likeable. They were asked to dance more frequently than any others. The young attractive men with beards and moustaches wearing black or white western cut shirts seemed to be the most popular with the women. No one wore very much jewelry of any kind. A few women had small earrings or hair barrettes. Nearly everyone smoked cigarettes continuously. I saw no pipes or cigars.

The Effects of Dress

The main effect I observed was that everyone seemed able to identify with each other and feel a sense of belonging to the group because of their similar style of dress.
The student researcher goes on to describe behaviors observed in the following categories: body movements and gestures; facial expressions and eye behavior; responses to environment; personal space, territory, and crowding; touching behavior; voice characteristics; taste and smell; culture and time.

Discussion

I feel that the nonverbal communication that I have described may be representative of lower-middle-class Americans in Lubbock, Texas. The nonverbal communication described in this report may illustrate lower-middle-class values: the tendency to be slightly overweight in both sexes; the conservative, traditional, western-style dress; the traditional use of male/female regulators and posture; the overcontrol of masculine expressions of emotion and the lack of control in feminine emotional expressions; the environment, with its tacky chairs and dirty carpet; the use of territory by the men; the fact that women have no true territory, personal space, or value (the women are treated as possessions and property and they have only as much value as they are granted by men); the way in which the men have absolute control over when and how they will be touched, but the women have very little to say about when or how the men will touch them; the way the women plead with soft cooing pitch at the end of their voice or remain silent while the men speak loudly and uninterruptedly; the use of substandard speech; the accepted deception on the part of the males; the overwhelming smell of tobacco and liquor and stale urine in the restrooms; the taste of cheap wines, beer, and whisky; the time being measured by the
sets the band plays. All of these things are often associated with lower-middle classes. Women and men may be poorly educated and thus rely on tradition and myth. I felt that the nonverbal communication that I observed was representative of this particular subculture.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the relationship between the observer and those she is observing?

2. Observation research tends to both describe and classify behaviors of individuals in order to predict future behaviors within the setting. List the classifications used by this writer. Do they seem appropriate to the behaviors observed? Why or why not?

3. Does the writer overgeneralize from a small sample; that is, does she jump to conclusions based on insufficient data? Do her conclusions follow logically from her evidence? Why or why not?

4. Is it likely that the observer’s presence changed the dynamics of the situation so that her subjects’ behavior was no longer natural? Why or why not?

5. Do the writer’s personal opinions and biases come through? If so, how?

6. How much can an observer infer about subjects’ thoughts and emotions from observing their behaviors? For example, in the subsection “Communication Components of Dress,” the author states that “they did not wish to communicate, however, that they were from a lower socioeconomic background. . . .” Is this a valid inference or a reflection of a personal bias? Justify your response.

EXERCISES

The exercises below are designed to give you an opportunity to try out some of the primary research techniques frequently used by social scientists. Or, you may wish to adapt these methods to find information pertinent to your own research topic with an eye toward incorporating the primary research data you discover into your larger research paper.
1. To understand observing and reporting, begin by observing the behavior of a particular group or subculture and report on that observation. You may find that an observation report would be a helpful component in a larger research paper project. As in the sample paper above on the country-and-Western singles bar, first choose subjects in a “field” to observe. Some possibilities include customers at a fast-food restaurant, patrons at a theater, participants in a sport, spectators at a rock concert, students in a dorm, customers in a department store elevator, and so on.

Procedure:

A. Identify the field you have chosen to observe. Describe the setting, location, and the time you spent observing. Describe your research method. (Are you an observer or a participant?)

B. Take field notes as you observe the behaviors of the individuals in your chosen group. Look for verbal and nonverbal behaviors.

C. Categorize your field notes into related behaviors and personality types.

D. Speculate on the meaning of the behaviors you observed. What did you learn about the people in your study and how they act? Give possible reasons for why they behaved as they did.

E. Write up your field observations in a report three to five pages long.

2. To understand the processes of interviewing and reporting, conduct an actual interview, either by yourself or with a classmate. You may find that an interview with an expert is a useful component of a larger research paper project.

Procedure:

A. Find someone in your intended major field. Write or phone the person to introduce yourself. Set up an interview, explaining that you want to find out what a person in your chosen career actually does.

B. Prior to the interview, draw up a list of interview topics, including but not limited to the following:
   - education and background
   - job title and general description of the job
   - description of the company or organization
   - years at the job
• prior positions within the same company
• tasks performed in the job
• tools used in the job (for example, computers, books)
• career plans or aspirations
• job satisfaction
• advice for someone just beginning in the field

Use this topic list as a guide in developing your questions. The questions you ask will vary in accordance with your career choice. It is important to think through the questions you intend to ask your informant very carefully. If you want to tape the interview, be certain to ask for permission.

C. Once you have collected your data, analyze and categorize it in a report three to five pages long. Someone reading your report should be able to discern what the career is like for participants.

ORGANIZING AND WRITING THE SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH PAPER

This section of the chapter follows the research process of Lindy Danley as she investigated the problem of electronic waste. Her research paper appears at the end of the chapter.

When thinking through her rhetorical situation for this research paper (purpose, persona, audience, subject matter, tone; see pp. 92–95), Lindy decided that she wanted to be largely informative to a general audience, helping the reader to come to a better understanding of the problems and solutions for e-waste.

Her thesis statement helped her to articulate her intentions in the paper and, at the same time, implied an organizational plan: the problem of e-waste and the possible solutions.

Lindy might have considered other possible organizational plans depending on her intentions as a writer:

Chronological: (“The problem of e-waste has accelerated over the last ten years.”)
Comparison and contrast: (“E-waste differs from other environmental problems.”)
Process (“The process of preventing environmental hazards includes manufacturers.”)
NOTES

11. I am indebted to Professor John Deethardt of the Texas Tech University Speech Communications Department for passing on to me this assignment and student response.