Chapter 3

Sex Research

Doing It
Issues in Sex Research

- **Sampling** - identifying the appropriate population of people to be studied.
  - **Random sample** - each member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample.
  - **Probability sampling** - each member of the population has a known probability of being included in the sample.
Issues in Sex Research

- **Problem of refusal (or nonresponse)** - people refuse to participate.
- **Volunteer bias** may occur when the researcher studies people who agree to be in the research.
Reliability of Self-Reports of Sexual Behavior

• **Purposeful distortion** - intentionally giving self-reports that are distortions of reality.

• **Memory** - it is difficult to remember facts accurately.

• **Difficulties with estimates** - it is difficult to estimate time, especially when engaged in an absorbing activity.
Evidence on the Reliability of Self-Reports

- **Test-retest reliability** - a series of questions is repeated to measure the reliability of responses.

- Obtaining independent reports from two different people who share sexual activity is another method of assessing reliability.
Interviews Versus Questionnaires

• Face-to-face or phone interview
  – Interviewer can establish rapport with respondent and vary sequence of questions depending on person’s response.
  – Can be administered to people who cannot read or write.
Interviews Versus Questionnaires

- Written questionnaire
  - Much less costly
  - Respondents may be more honest because they are more anonymous.
Interviews Versus Questionnaires

• Computer-assisted self-interview method (CASI)
  – Offers privacy of written questions while accommodating poor readers.
  – Can be programmed to vary sequences of questions just as a human interviewer does.
Self-Reports Versus Direct Observations

• Direct observations are accurate; no purposeful distortion or inaccurate memory can occur.

• Problems: expensive, time-consuming, & sexual behavior in the laboratory might be inhibited.
Web-Based Surveys

• Surveys administered on Web sites:
  – Can recruit much larger samples.
  – Can locate stigmatized minorities such as gays and lesbians, sadomasochists, and those involved in bondage and discipline.
  – May be problematic because environment cannot be controlled.
Extraneous Factors

• Gender, race, or age of the interviewer may influence the outcome of sex research.
  – Male and female respondents prefer a female interviewer.

• Wording of questionnaires influence sex research.
Ethical Issues

• Informed consent
  – Participants have a right to be told, before they participate, what the purpose of the research is and what they will asked to do.
  – They may not be forced to participate or continue.
  – People may not be coerced to be in a study.
Ethical Issues

• Protection from harm
  – Investigators should minimize the amount of physical and psychological stress to people in their research.
  – Anonymity of response is important to ensure that participants will not suffer afterward for their participation.
Ethical Issues

• Justice
  – Risks of participation and benefits of results should be distributed fairly across groups in society.
  – Researchers have obligation to conduct their work in a way that benefits as wide a range of persons as possible.
A Cost-Benefit Approach

• Will the benefits that result from the research be greater than the cost?
  – Will participants benefit in some way from participating?
  – Will society in general benefit from the knowledge resulting from the study?
The Major Sex Surveys

- The Kinsey Report - done during 1940’s. We need more recent research for accurate information about sexuality.

- The National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLS) - best sex survey of the general population of the United States that we have today.
The Major Sex Surveys

- Sexual Behavior in France and Britain - data collected in 1991 & 1992 to better deal with the AIDS crisis.
- 1997 Survey of African American and Hispanic Youth focused on respondents’ networks of sexual relationships.
- Magazine surveys are biased because no one magazine reaches a random sample and response rate is unknown.
Studies of Special Populations

• 1996 - British sociologist Tony Coxon’s Project Sigma studied sexual behavior of gay men in the AIDS era.

• 1981 - Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith conducted a major survey of homosexuals and heterosexuals to determine what factors determine people’s sexual orientation.
Media Content Analysis

• Content analysis refers to a set of procedures used to make valid inferences about text.
  – Define the population
  – Create a coding scheme
  – **Intercoder reliability** is a measure used to demonstrate reliability of data.
Laboratory Studies Using Direct Observations of Sexual Behavior

- Masters & Johnson: The Physiology of Sexual Response - [video]
  - Sampling was participants from general population who engaged in sexual behavior in the laboratory.
  - Data collection techniques included practice sessions in laboratory setting.
  - Paid attention to ethical considerations.
Participant-Observer Studies

• In the **participant-observer technique** the scientist becomes part of the community to be studied and makes observations from inside the community.

• Humphreys: *The Tearoom Trade* (1970) was controversial due to no informed consent or explanations to subjects.

• Brothel: Mustang Ranch and Its Women (2001) – Alexa Albert got permission to live in a Nevada brothel where she conducted in-depth interviews and observed activity first hand.
Participant-Observer Studies

• Researcher Charles Moser observed sadomasochistic interactions in semipublic settings.
  – Parties are typically highly scripted.
  – Moser did not report that he obtained informed consent.
Experimental Sex Research

- In an **experiment** one factor must be manipulated while all other factors are held constant.

- **Experimental Design**
  - **Independent variable** is manipulated.
  - **Dependent variable** is measured.
Some Statistical Concepts

• The **mean** is the average of the scores of all the people.
• It is interesting to know how much **variability** there is from one respondent to the next.
• Don’t confuse average with normal.
Some Statistical Concepts

• Incidence Versus Frequency
  – **Incidence** - percentage of people giving a particular response.
  – **Frequency** - how often a person does something.

• Correlation - number that measures the relationship between two variables.
Frequency of Intercourse, Married Couples

(a) Number of people in the sample reporting that frequency of intercourse, times per week.

(b) Number of people in the sample reporting that frequency of intercourse, times per week.
Cumulative-Incidence Curve, Masturbation

Percentage of total population

Age

Males

Females