Solutions for Sociology in Our Times 7th Edition by Murray

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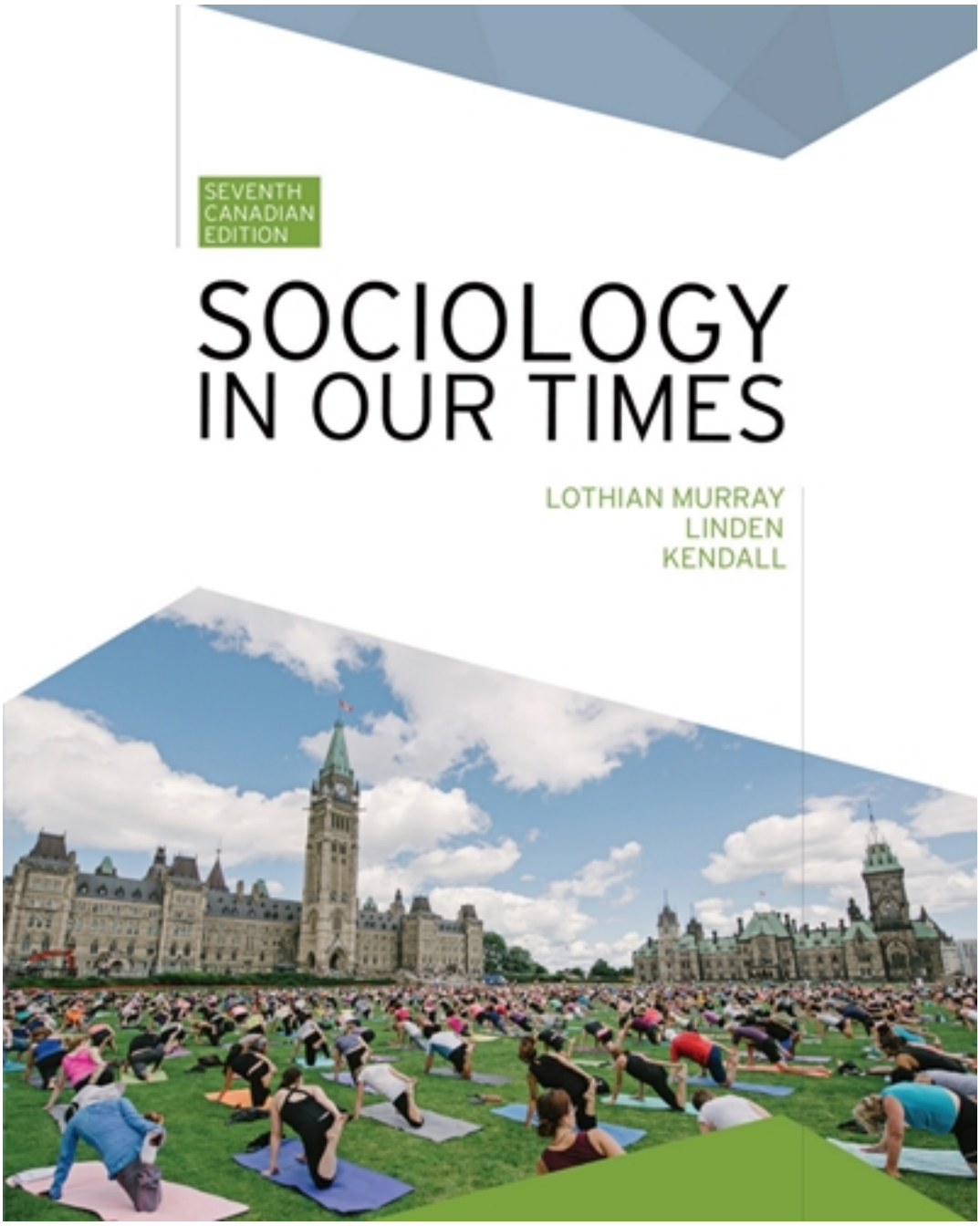

Solutions

Chapter 2 – Sociological Research

1. Learning Objectives: What Should Students Learn? (with Bloom's Taxonomy)

LO-1 **Understand** the relationship between theory and research.
LO-2 Identify and **understand** the main steps in the sociological research process.
LO-3 **Analyze** why it is important to have different methods of conducting social research and to know something about each of these methods.
LO-4 **Remember** how research has contributed to our understanding of altruism.
LO-5 **Understand** why a code of ethics for sociological research is necessary.

2. Key Concepts: How Does This Chapter Connect to the World of Sociology?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

How do sociologists determine what to study? Where do they get their data? These questions are part of the nature and process of doing research. There are five ways of knowing the world: (1) personal experience; (2) tradition; (3) authority; (4) religion, (5) science. While all five ways provide insight, only the last way also provides sociologists with a process to objectively resolve differences in their understanding of the social and physical world. Employing the empirical approach, sociologists conduct research to gain a more accurate understanding of society. Their data, collected directly, systematically, and publicly, provides a factual and objective counterpoint to commonsense knowledge and questionable sources of information. Further, the data itself, and the hypotheses (tentative statements of the relationship between variables) it engenders, are both subject to verification and review.

Empirical studies fall into one of two categories: *descriptive studies* attempt to describe social reality or provide facts about some group, practice, or event; *explanatory studies* attempt to explain relationships and to provide information on why certain events do or do not occur. In either category, theory and research form a continuous cycle, which encompasses both a deductive approach (begin with a theory then test it) and an inductive approach (begin with data whose analysis then generates theory). The conventional research model focuses on quantitative research. The goal is scientific objectivity and its focus is on data that can be measured numerically (often statistically). There are six steps: (1) select and define the research problem; (2) review previous research; (3) formulate the hypothesis; (4) develop the research design; (5) collect and analyze the data; (6) draw conclusions and report the findings.

Alternatively, sociologists may employ the qualitative research model, and use interpretive description rather than statistics (numbers) to analyze relationships. Researchers here (1) engage in problem formulation to clarify the research question, as well as the concerns and interests of the researchers; (2) collect and analyze data to assess the validity of the starting proposition; (3) report the results. While these two models frequently show a preference for collecting their

data—qualitative leaning toward field research, quantitative toward experiment, survey, and secondary analysis—many sociologists use multiple methods (triangulation) in order to gain a wider scope of data and incorporate multiple points of view. It is this last point which feminist researchers like Margrit Eichler feel is only partially realized. Identifying several gender limitations in research, including androcentricity, sexist language or concepts, and male bias, feminist research redresses the balance by being woman centred. While agreeing that there is no one method that can be termed the feminist methodology, feminist researchers favour qualitative methods and in-depth interviews.

In all research, the use of human subjects to study behaviour is subject to the standards of the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association. This association stipulates that no harm be done to subjects; that all subjects be volunteers; that consent be informed; and that researchers maintain subject anonymity and confidentiality. Research ethics is a difficult and often ambiguous topic, and there are frequently disagreements between researchers as to what constitutes ethical research behaviour. Two cases in point: Laud Humphreys who used public arenas to study homosexuality without informing his subjects that they were being studied; and Russel Ogden whose research into euthanasia and assisted suicide, both crimes in Canada, caught him between a rock (the confidentiality promised to research subjects) and a hard place (the law).

KEY TERMS

- **Altruism:** Behaviour intended to help others and done without any expectation of personal benefit (p. 29).
- **Analysis:** The process through which data are organized so that comparisons can be made and conclusions drawn (p. 34).
- **Big data:** Very large datasets that can be accessed in digital form and that can be linked with other large datasets (p. 47).
- **Complete observation:** Research in which the investigator systematically observes a social process, but does not take part in it (p. 42).
- **Control group:** Subjects in an experiment who are not exposed to the independent variable, but later are compared to subjects in the experimental group (p. 36).
- **Deductive approach:** Research in which the investigator begins with a theory and then collects information and data to test the theory (p. 32).
- **Dependent variable:** A variable that is assumed to depend on or be caused by one or more other (independent) variables (p. 33).
- **Descriptive study:** Research that attempts to describe social reality or provide facts about some group, practice, or event (p. 31).
- **Experiment:** A test conducted under controlled conditions in which an investigator tests a hypothesis by manipulating an independent variable and examining its impact on a dependent variable (p. 35).
- **Experimental group:** Subjects in an experiment who are exposed to the independent variable (p. 36).

- **Explanatory study:** Research that attempts to explain relationships and to provide information on why certain events do or do not occur (p. 31).
- **Field research:** The study of social life in its natural setting: observing and interviewing people where they live, work, and play (p. 42).
- **Hypotheses:** Tentative statements of the relationship between two or more concepts or variables (p. 30).
- **Independent variable:** A variable that is presumed to cause or determine a dependent variable (p. 33).
- **Inductive approach:** Research in which the investigator collects information or data (facts or evidence) and then generates theories from the analysis of that data (p. 32).
- **Interpretive sociology:** An approach to sociology that examines the meanings that people give to aspects of their social lives (p. 45).
- **Interview:** A research method using a data collection encounter in which an interviewer asks the respondent questions and records the answers (p. 40).
- **Objective:** Free from distorted subjective (personal or emotional) bias (p. 31).
- **Operational definition:** An explanation of an abstract concept in terms of observable features that are specific enough to measure the variable (p. 34)
- **Participant observation:** A research method in which researchers collect systematic observations while being part of the activities of the group they are studying (p. 43).
- **Population:** In a research study, those persons about whom we want to be able to draw conclusions (p. 40).
- **Questionnaire:** A research instrument containing a series of items to which subjects respond (p. 40).
- **Reactivity:** The tendency of experiment participants to change their behaviour in response to the presence of the researcher or to the fact that they know they are being studied (p. 39).
- **Reliability:** In sociological research, the extent to which a study or research instrument yields consistent results (p. 34).
- **Replication:** In sociological research, the repetition of the investigation in substantially the same way that it originally was conducted (p. 34).
- **Representative sample:** A selection where the sample has the essential characteristics of the total population (p. 40).
- **Research methods:** Specific strategies or techniques for conducting research (p. 35).
- **Sample:** The people who are selected from the population to be studied (p. 40).
- **Secondary analysis:** A research method in which researchers use existing material and analyze data that originally was collected by others (p. 46).
- **Simple random sample:** A selection in which everyone in the target population has an equal chance of being chosen (p. 40).
- **Survey:** A research method in which a number of respondents are asked identical questions through a systematic questionnaire or interview (p. 40).
- **Triangulation:** Using several different research methods, data sources, investigators, and/or theoretical perspectives in the same study (p. 49).

- **Unstructured interview:** A research method involving an extended, open-ended interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee (p. 44).
- **Validity:** In sociological research, the extent to which a study or research instrument accurately measures what it is supposed to measure (p. 34).
- **Variable:** In sociological research, any concept with measurable traits or characteristics that can change or vary from one person, time, situation, or society to another (p. 33).

CHAPTER QUIZ ANSWERS

BOX 2.1 SOCIOLOGY AND EVERYDAY LIFE

How Much Do You Know About Altruism?

1. False Durkheim and other sociologists have shown that even in complex, large-scale societies such as ours, altruism has a significant role to play in maintaining the social order (Titmuss, 1971).

2. True Studies of the rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust, freedom riders working for racial integration in the American South in the 1960s, and blood donors have shown that many of those acting with altruism had parents with similar commitments.

3. True In his participant observation study of a volunteer work crew following a severe tornado, Louis Zurcher (1968) found that helping other victims acted as a form of catharsis for the men on the crew. Thus, helping others can benefit both the helper and the community.

4. False In most cases, there is no obligation to help those in distress (see Box 2.2).

5. True In experimental situations, subjects who were the only witnesses to an emergency felt they had to intervene because nobody else knew of the victim's distress. Those in larger groups showed concern for the victim but were also concerned about making fools of themselves by overreacting. Therefore, they often waited to see whether others would respond before deciding what, if anything, they would do.

Sources:

Titmuss, Richard. 1971. *The Gift Relationship: From Human Blood to Social Policy*. New York: Vintage Books.

Zurcher, Louis. 1968. "Social-Psychological Functions of Ephemeral Roles: A Disaster Work Crew." *Human Organization* 27, No. 4 (Winter): 281–297.

3. Student Motivation: Why Should Students Care?

- Sociological research and knowledge is often not thought of as scientific. Some students may be inclined to dismiss the issues and information that are presented in class and the text as 'biased' or 'opinion,' or to rely on their own personal experience as 'the way things are.' This chapter establishes that sociological data, which inform sociological theories and explanations, are rigorously collected and analyzed.
- Material in this chapter is also present in other chapters in discussions about specific research.
- This chapter is fundamental to be able to 'do' sociology. It lays the foundation for being able to do primary and secondary sociological research.
- If students are assigned any type of primary research for the course, this chapter is essential for students to understand how to (and how not to) do that research.
- For students who decide to continue on in sociology, they will be taking more sociological methods/courses, and this chapter lays the foundations.

4. Barriers to Learning: What Are Common Student Misconceptions and Stumbling Blocks?

- Research methods are often difficult for students to understand and find interesting.
- Students may have difficulty understanding why different methods would be used in particular studies and why one would use one method over another.
- Students may have difficulty understanding how qualitative methodologies are valid, especially if their education has been influenced by a positivist view of knowledge production. Additionally, students may see statistical evidence as fact and not be inclined (or know how) to interrogate how statistical data can be problematic.
- Some students may be inclined to dismiss the issues and information that are presented in class and the text as 'biased' or 'opinion.'
- Students may have problems keeping theory and hypothesis straight.
    - Try this: Highlight the first three letters of each word, and then use a current event or a headline from a pop newspaper like the *Star* or *National Enquirer* to illustrate: hypothesis (is a hype statement, only superficially supported, i.e., "…I think X celebrity checked into that hospital for drug treatment"), versus theory (which says "the reason X checked in was …."; research backs up the statement). In short, hypothesis = I think, theory = I know (the reason is).

5. ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

What Can I Do In Class?

I. First 10 minutes:

1. **Think/pair/share**
   Students are asked to individually think for a moment about a question posed by the instructor and record short answers. Students then pair up with someone sitting near them and share/discuss their answers. Finally, the instructor randomly asks a few students to give 30-second summaries of their thoughts, and then opens the question to general discussion.

   Question: How do we know about our social world?

   From this discussion, the lecture can address the problems with many of the ways of knowing and address the sociological methods.

II. Other activities

2. **Have students do research and/or data analysis.**

   Learning objective:
   - Give students experience with hands-on research.

   Time required and location: Dependent on what research method(s) students will be doing.

   Research methods that would work well for this activity are interviewing, surveys, secondary data analysis, and observations.

   Process:
   Interviews/Surveys/Questionnaires: Have students individually or in pairs write several questions related to a topic that you provide (i.e., first-year student experiences) or that they develop themselves. Once the questions are developed, have students conduct the research in the specified form (i.e., have them interview each other and record the answers). Students could then be required to analyze the data and present written reports.

   Secondary data analysis: Provide students with some form of secondary data (see Chapter 11 for a detailed magazine project that could easily be adapted for this chapter).

   Observations: Send students out onto campus with detailed and repeated instructions not to speak to anyone outside of the class. Give a time limit (20–30 minutes depending on the size of the campus and location of the classroom), and tell them to observe people in one location.

   Processing points: What was difficult about this activity? Did they feel constrained by their method? What did it allow them to learn about? What did it not let them learn about?

3. **Debate* whether Humphreys and/or Ogden acted ethically.**

   *This resource is helpful for tips on structuring debates:
   http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson304b.shtml

   This website features a compilation of resources for debates, including debate rules, topics for debate in the classroom, fun debate strategies, and lesson plans that can incorporate debate into learning.

   Learning objective:
   - Have students recognize how ethics is a difficult and often ambiguous topic, and that there are disagreements among researchers concerning ethical issues.

   Group size: Depending on the class size, the group sizes will vary. With a small class, the class can be divided into halves or quarters. Larger classes will require more groups.

   Process: Half of the groups will be required to argue that the Humphreys/Ogden studies were ethical, and half that they were not. This question may be framed in terms of the public good of research (the necessity of some level of deception, or the potential of causing the participants some level of distress) versus the need to have strong protections for research subjects, even if that means some research is impossible to do.

   Once the groups have had some time to discuss their positions, come back together as a class and have the groups present their main points. If there are more than one group in the class, you can have each group present one point.

4. **Connection between theory and research**

   Take a research problem other than altruism and ask students to develop a research plan. To help make the connection between theory and research, assign a perspective along with the method. Or, for example, ask students to consider how the hypothesis generated by a conflict theorist may differ from that of a functionalist or symbolic interactionist.

   Learning objectives:
   - Understand the various research methods and when they are appropriate and not appropriate to use.
   - Understand the relationship between theory and research.
   - Relate new material to prior learning (Chapter One).

   Group size: The class can be divided into groups. Each group can be assigned a different research method from which they are to create their research plan.

   Process: Have students discuss their method and theory for several minutes. After their group discussion, students can then (as a group) identify the advantages and disadvantages of each approach.

   As groups, or as a larger class, invite students to reflect on the way that the different perspectives would change the ways they researched and analyzed their research topic.

Variations: This could be done as a take-home or term assignment.

5. **Examples of research**

   Provide students with a good foundation for understanding sociological research by discussing your own research or that of a colleague (or have a colleague come in to discuss their research), which shows how theory gives meaning to research and research helps support theory. (If possible, give students a copy of the research paper or journal article.) Ask students to analyze the research in regard to the following:

   a. What was the purpose of the research?
   b. How were the data gathered?
   c. What were the findings and/or conclusions of the research?
   d. What references are cited in the end of the paper or article?
   e. Why is scholarly research often published in academic journals?

6. Assessment tools: How Will I Know That My Students Have Learned the Learning Objectives?

1. One-minute papers:

   Before the end of the lecture, students may be asked to take a minute to write short answers to questions such as the following:

   - What was the most important thing you learned during this class?
   - What important unanswered questions do you have?
   - What was the *muddiest* point covered today?

Students can then take a minute to compare their questions and answers with a classmate. Instructors can invite questions/responses from the large group, or collect the one-minute papers for subsequent use.

This can also be done in tutorials if you have tutorial groups. The teaching assistants can compile the answers, which can be addressed at the beginning of the next class.

2. Ask students to write down the answers to questions based on an important learning objective.

3. Create an online survey to assess teaching and learning (i.e., a short multiple-choice quiz about the key points of the material. These quizzes could be used informally or assessed formally as part of students' course grade). A good and free resource is toofast.ca.

4. In the last 5 minutes of class, have students write down the following:

   - The relationship between theory and method, and/or
   - One research method, the key features of that method, and what type of study they would use that method for.

7. REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING: HOW CAN I ASSESS MY OWN "PERFORMANCE"?

1. One-minute papers can also be used in this section to review students' grasp of the material.

2. Checklist for self-assessment:

- ❑ What worked? What didn't?
- ❑ Were students engaged? Were they focused or did they go off on tangents?
- ❑ Was I able to maintain their attention?
    - If not, at what point did they stop paying attention?
- ❑ Did my assessments suggest that they understood the key concepts?
- ❑ How can I gather student feedback?
- ❑ Did students have enough time to engage in discussion on the topic?
    - If not, why not?
    - Would it be beneficial for some of the content to be moved online to allow for classroom discussion with students?
    - What material, if any, do you feel should be removed or minimized to provide more time for student participation and discussion?
- ❑ Are there things students struggled with that I should review next class?

3. Ask students to provide feedback regarding their thoughts on the class. Were there any moments that particularly struck a chord with them?

- Students can create a brief list in point form regarding what concepts had been discussed during class; you may provide a few minutes at the end of class to summarize the lecture and respond to students' questions on the topic.

4. Things to consider before teaching this chapter again:

- Which elements worked best? Why?
- What changes could I make to help facilitate student participation and understanding of the topic?

5. Create an online survey to assess teaching and learning. A good and free resource is toofast.ca.

8. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. Insight Media's list of videos on demand
   http://www.insight-media-digital.com/index.php?option=com_virtuemart&page=shop.browse&category_id=5&Itemid=5&vmcchk=1

   Insight Media is an American company that provides teaching resources both domestically and internationally. This website lists available videos on such topics as Research Design and Research Ethics.

2. 1997. *How Numbers Lie: Media Truth or Fiction*, Learning Seed.
   https://www.academicvideostore.com/video/how-numbers-lie-media-truth-or-fiction

   While numbers may be useful in expressing the results of a study, they can also be manipulated to support a particular point of view. This video allows students to view statistics critically to differentiate between facts and numbers twisted to prop up an agenda.

3. Statistics Canada: Canada's Statistical Agency
   http://www.statcan.gc.ca/

   Search for research papers, studies, and technical papers from Statistics Canada here: http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/researchers-chercheurs/index.action?lang=eng&start=1&end=25&search=&sort=0&themeId=0&date=&series=&author=&themeState=-1&dateState=-1&seriesState=-1&authorState=-1&showAll=false&univ=7&MMI

   Categories available to help refine your search include Date, Author and Studies, and Subject, and you can also distinguish between technical papers and research papers.

4. Seydlitz, Ruth, Laska, Shirley, Spain, Daphne, Triche, Elizabeth W., and Bishop, Karen L., 1993. "Development and Social Problems: The Impact of Offshore Oil Industry on Suicide and Homicide Rates." *Rural Sociology* 58 (Spring, 1993): 93–111.

   This article is an example of research using secondary data pertaining to anomic suicide. The authors conclude that "higher levels of and rapid changes in development are associated with higher homicide and suicide rates, especially in communities that are more involved in resource extraction" (in the form of offshore oil and gas extraction). They also suggest that their findings support hypotheses based on social disorganization and relative deprivation theories.

5. Gamson, Joshua. 1994. *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

   Students are often intrigued with Joshua Gamson's (1994) study of celebrity. You can use Gamson's Appendix, Theoretical and Methodological Notes to provide students with an insider's perspective on research (i.e., assessment, content analysis, interview techniques) and on the value of triangulation.

   a. For example, Gamson (1994:197) notes: "My work has been a source of humour among my friends for quite some time. When they catch me watching a talk show or fluffy entertainment news or reading a celebrity magazine they make comments that seem to me at once affectionately disdainful and envious. 'Doing research again, huh' they say, or, 'You really ought to stop working once in a while.'"

   b. After pointing out some of the problems encountered in studying celebrity, Gamson (1994:203) states that he did not wed himself to one research technique and allowed himself opportunities to fill in and check out conclusions derived from the variety of methods. He sees his work as a continual doubling back and forth between theory and data.

   c. Gamson's interview and discussion schedules give students an insider's view of questions researchers may ask. For example, here are a few of Gamson's questions for celebrities, journalists, and publicists:
      - What do you do? How long have you been doing this? What did you do before?
      - Why do you think some people become celebrities while others don't? To what degree is it something about them? Do celebrities have something special about them? To what degree can anyone, regardless of talent, be made famous? How do you explain the people on Hollywood Squares or ZsaZsa Gabor, or Angelyne?
      - Many people describe celebrity as an industry. Do you think that's an accurate way to talk about it? If so, how would you describe the celebrity industry? What do you think the characterization of it as an industry misses, if anything?
      - How do you do what you do? What do you do day to day that gets or tries to get [other people/yourself] more recognition? Or what do you do day to day that makes use of celebrities? (Gamson, 1994:206).

   d. Gamson's questions for audiences, fans, and celebrity watchers include the following:
      - (Start with introductions and celebrity encounter experience or favourite celebrity.)
      - Would you want to meet a famous person? If you could meet any famous person, who would it be? Why would you want to meet them? What would you want to ask them? When you read about them or hear about them, what is it that you want to find out? What kind of stuff tends to bore you and what tends to grab you?
      - Do you think of these people as like you or different from you?

- Do you just read about your favourites or will you read about pretty much anybody?
- Do you think all celebrities deserve to be famous? If just some of them do, how do you tell the difference between the ones that deserve it and the ones that don't?
- How do you think people got to where they are? Why are they famous? How much do other people have to do with it? **(**Gamson, 1994:206–207).

6. The code of ethics that applies to all Canadian universities can be accessed at http://pre.ethics.gc.ca

7. The Sociological Cinema - Methods in Context videos
   http://www.thesociologicalcinema.com/4/post/2012/02/methods-in-context-videos.html

   Notable social researchers such as Ashley Mears and Jooyoung Lee are included in this series of videos illustrating their methods used in their studies. There are also questions for students provided to enable discussion after viewing.

8. Journal: *Sociological Methods & Research*

   Qualitative research and methodology from across the social sciences are presented, including in the areas of economics, political science sociology, and anthropology. Empirically based articles are provided from a number of perspectives.

9. The *real* process of science
   http://undsci.berkeley.edu/article/howscienceworks_02

   The non-linear process of scientific research is illustrated in this online resource. The website could be shown during a lecture or viewed by students outside of class.

10. Applying Research Methods
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFybnL7Baas

    Sociologist Stephen Steele provides a brief lecture on the application of research methods. Among the topics discussed by Steele are: the importance of objectivity in social research, the various research methods available, and how quantitative and qualitative research methods differ.

