

# 1

## What Is Research?



### CHAPTER 1 FOCUS QUESTIONS

- Why does the author say that we all do research all the time?
- What is the difference between scholarly and everyday research?
- What role does cultural studies play in research?
- What did Nietzsche say about the role of interpretation?
- What is the difference between diachronic and synchronic research?
- What role do binary oppositions play in the way the mind works?
- What's the difference between "dry" and "wet" Japanese?
- How does qualitative research differ from quantitative research?
- What are the levels of communication?

There is a look that comes over the faces of some of my students when they hear the word *research*. Their eyes glaze over, and their faces take on a pained expression as if they had a migraine or a bad stomachache.

They see the required course on research as some kind of an ordeal they must survive before being allowed to take the courses they want and live a normal life.

### ❖ WE ALL DO RESEARCH, ALL THE TIME

Yet curiously, many students in my internship courses, when they describe what they do in their internships—that is, when they are out there in the “real world”—talk about looking for information and data, finding material on this or that subject, getting names and addresses—in other words, **research**. It turns out that research is one of the most valuable courses students take, as far as practical use is concerned, but there’s something about the term *research* that generates lumps in throats and expressions of pain.

What is research? Literally it means “to search for, to find” and comes from the Latin *re* (again) and from *cercier* (to search). In French, the term *chercher* means “seek.” In the most general sense, research means looking for information about something.

Like one of Molière’s characters, Monsieur Jourdain, who didn’t realize he was always speaking prose, most of us do what could be called “research” all the time—even though we may not think of what we are doing as research. For example, when people decide to buy a computer, they generally try to get some information about the brand and models of the computers they are thinking of buying. They may look in computer magazines, they may check in *Consumer Reports*, and they may ask their friends who have computers about the particular kind of computer they have. This is research.

Let me offer another example. In one of my classes, during a break, several of my students were discussing a professor. “What’s he like?” asked one student. “Oh, he’s easy,” someone said. “He gives you a preliminary exam, and then in the real exam, he always asks one of the questions in the preliminary exam. I’d take him.” This was information of value to the student who was thinking of taking a course with that professor. This is research.

So we are always doing research, even though we don’t think of what we are doing as such. We do this research because we have choices to make about matters such as what we want to buy, what we want to take at college (and with whom we want to take the courses), and where we want to live. Even when we have limited budgets, generally speaking, we still have choices to make.

## A SHORT THEATRICAL PIECE ON RESEARCH

<b>Grand Inquisitor:</b>	<i>Who is John Q. Public?</i>
<b>Arthur:</b>	Nobody! It's just a name we use for the ordinary American.
<b>Grand Inquisitor:</b>	<i>Why is his middle initial Q?</i>
<b>Arthur:</b>	That's an interesting question. You can find out if you do a bit of research.
<b>Grand Inquisitor:</b>	<i>Is John Q. Public related to Joe Sixpack?</i>
<b>Arthur:</b>	Some people think they're both the same person. You can find out if you do some research.
<b>Grand Inquisitor:</b>	<i>Why do people do research?</i>
<b>Arthur:</b>	To find the answer to questions that interest them or problems they want to solve, like what does the <i>Q</i> in John Q. Public stand for... or should I attend college, and if so, which college, and what should I major in? Or should I get married to X? Or what kind of car should I get?
<b>Grand Inquisitor:</b>	<i>When do people do research?</i>
<b>Arthur:</b>	All the time.
<b>Grand Inquisitor:</b>	<i>How do you do research?</i>
<b>Arthur:</b>	That's the \$64,000 question.

### ❖ SCHOLARLY RESEARCH IS DIFFERENT FROM EVERYDAY RESEARCH

A number of differences between everyday research and scholarly research need to be considered. Scholarly research is, generally speaking, more systematic, more objective, more careful, and more concerned about correctness and truthfulness than everyday research. Notice that I've not said anything about data and numbers and statistics. That's because a great deal of research doesn't involve such matters.

Think, for example, of what historians do. There are, of course, some quantitative historians who do use statistics, but for the most part, historians read documents (e.g., speeches, letters, diaries, news reports) and, on the basis of their reading, try to describe what happened and why it happened; they focus on economic, political, and social considerations. Because there's no way to be certain about why things happened (and in some cases even what happened), there are lots of controversies in history, and different historians offer conflicting explanations of, say, the significance of the American Revolution or the causes of the Civil War in the United States.

### ❖ CULTURAL STUDIES AND RESEARCH

Or take **cultural studies**, a rather amorphous multidisciplinary field that investigates everything from elite fiction to comics, television, films, music, and everyday life. Scholars who write in these fields usually base their analyses on the concepts, ideas, and theories of philosophers, psychologists, social scientists, linguists, and others with a more theoretical bent. Many cultural studies scholars base their analyses on concepts taken from thinkers such as Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, and the French scholar Jean Baudrillard.

In their book, *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works*, editors Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner explain how cultural studies approaches help us better understand the role of popular culture and the media and other forms of communication. They discuss the role that the media and culture play in socializing people to accept the rules, conventions, and codes found in their cultures and the ways that they indoctrinate people into political and socio-economic systems. Pop culture, the media, and advertising, among other things, play an important role in providing role models, gender models, and lifestyle models for people to imitate. The narratives found in pop culture or mass-mediated culture help shape the sensibilities of those exposed to these narratives, as they are found in texts such as jokes, commercials, comic books, films, television shows, and popular fiction.

Durham and Kellner write (2001) the following:

With media and culture playing such important roles in contemporary life, it is obvious that we must come to understand our cultural

environment if we want control over our lives. Yet there are many approaches to the study of media, culture, and society in separate disciplines and academic fields. . . . We would advocate the usefulness of a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of media, culture, and society, yet we do not believe that any one theory or method is adequate to engage the richness, complexity, variety, and novelty displayed in contemporary constellations of rapidly proliferating cultural forms and new media. (p. 1)

It is because of the complexity of studying media, communication, and culture that I offer chapters on research methodologies that can be combined, in many cases, to offer more complete and more interesting analyses of the topics investigated than single-disciplinary approaches.

Because interpretations of these theorists differ and the applications of their ideas vary, we find considerable controversy in cultural studies and in other humanistic disciplines. But we also find controversy in the social sciences, such as economics, sociology, and political science, where a great deal of the research involves numbers. Economics is generally considered the most rigorous of the social sciences as far as gathering hard data is concerned, but we discover that given the same data, economists often differ on how they interpret these data.



Nietzsche

## ❖ NIETZSCHE ON INTERPRETATION

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche believed that everything boils down to interpretation. As he wrote in his *Will to Power* (1987),

Against positivism, which halts at phenomena—There are only *facts*.—I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact “in itself”: perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing.

“Everything is subjective,” you say; but even this is interpretation invented and projected behind what there is.—Finally, is it necessary to posit an interpreter behind the interpretation? Even this is invention, hypothesis. . . . In so far as the word “knowledge” has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is *interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings. (p. 481)

Nietzsche suggested we cannot know facts, only perspectives. There is, he said, “no limit to the ways the world can be interpreted.” He focused on what he called “perspectivism,” a notion that informs much postmodern theory—a topic to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8. Nietzsche may have overestimated the importance of interpretation, but it is correct to say that, in the final analysis, after social scientists have collected their data, they have to interpret it, and sometimes there is more than one way to interpret this data.

Everyday Research	Scholarly Research
Intuitive	Theory based
Common sense	Structured
Casual	Systematic
Spur of the moment	Planned
Selective (often)	Objective
Magical thinking	Scientific thinking
Flawed thinking at times	Logical to the extent possible
Focus is personal decisions	Focus is knowledge about reality

As the preceding table shows, there is a considerable difference between what I've described as everyday research and scholarly research. In our everyday research, we are often very casual in our methods, and sometimes, when we want to convince ourselves that something we want to do should be done, we are very selective as well. That is, we neglect information that might convince us that a course of action we want to take is wrong. This is known as "selective inattention," which can be understood to mean ignoring information that wouldn't support your research or your wishes.

Sometimes our everyday research is tied to "magical thinking," which can be defined as believing that "wishing makes it so" or, for example, that we can, through force of will, cause something to happen. Like becoming a movie star.

Our everyday research generally involves personal matters—things we might want to do or products we might want to purchase. In many cases, we make our decisions based on advertising or something else that has an emotional appeal, which colors our decisions. We want to do something and look for information to support our desire. So the research we do, on the personal level, at times is not a matter of seeking truth but of finding support and justification.

Scientific thinking is the opposite; it seeks truth and accepts information that runs counter to one's wishes and desires. It is logical and bases its conclusions on rigorous thinking and honesty. Of course, people trying to be scientific and systematic and honest sometimes make mistakes, too, but the emphasis is on honesty, accepting the results one finds, and careful and logical reasoning. Much everyday research exists to justify prior decisions, whereas scientific research is disinterested and honest, accepting what it finds and not stacking the deck to get a desired result.

I can remember reading about some interesting "everyday" research a copywriter named Martin Solow conducted. He was invited to a gathering at a friend's house and asked his hosts about how they decided which products to purchase. Inevitably they told him they paid no attention to advertising and bought most of their products based on what was recommended in *Consumer Reports*. He describes how he conducts his research in his article "The Case of the Closet Target" (in *Madison Avenue* magazine):

I excuse myself and ask, since it is a large house, for a roadmap to the bathroom. Once in the large bathroom, the door safely locked, I open the medicine cabinet and survey the contents: Colgate toothpaste,

L’Oreal hairspray; Trac II shaving cream and the new Gillette Trac II razor; Ban Roll-on Deodorant (for him, I guess) and Arid Extra-Dry (for her—or maybe vice-versa); Bayer aspirins. . . .

The moral of this story is that we often deceive ourselves and think we are making or have made rational decisions about products we buy when, in reality, we’ve been influenced by the numerous advertisements and commercials to which we’ve been exposed. When people say, “I am aware of advertising but not influenced by it” they are fooling themselves.

### ❖ PROBLEM OF CERTAINTY

Although it is a big generalization, it’s fair to say that we seldom (perhaps never) get certainty from our research. Even when we have statistics, the way we interpret these statistics is open to disagreement. This explains why scholarly disciplines are full of disputes and why scholars seem to spend so much time arguing with other scholars (who disagree with their findings or their methodologies or both).

Just because we can’t be certain of our interpretations of **data** or **texts** (the term used for works of elite and popular art, such as operas, plays, poems, films, television programs, paintings, and comic books), doesn’t mean anything goes and that we can offer interpretations without giving good reasons for these interpretations.

It is our research, I would suggest, that supplies us with the “reasons” we use when we argue about how to interpret a film or a bunch of statistics. It’s best to think of academics as spending their careers trying to prove that their way of looking at whatever portion of the world they look at is correct. They do this by writing articles and books, explaining their ideas and theories and offering support for them. And by offering critiques of scholars with different methodologies and points of view.

Thinking doesn’t make it so. You have to have some kind of **evidence** that a reasonable person can accept. And that evidence comes from research. How good that research is (that is, is it reliable?) and how well the research is used is another matter.

### ❖ DIACHRONIC AND SYNCHRONIC RESEARCH

At the heart of all research is the matter of comparisons. In diachronic or historical studies, we focus on *change over time*, and in



synchronic or comparative studies, we study *change over distance*, to put things in rather simplistic terms. This takes us to de Saussure (1966) and his notion that concepts take their meaning differentially. De Saussure used the term *diachronic* for linguistic study that has a historical focus and the term *synchronic* for linguistic research that is comparative.

As de Saussure writes (1966),

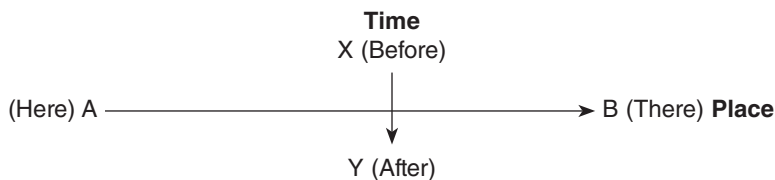
Certainly all sciences would profit by indicating more precisely the co-ordinates along which their subject matter is aligned. Everywhere distinctions should be according to the following illustration, between . . . *the axis of simultaneities* . . . which stands for the relations of coexisting things and from which the intervention of time is excluded; and . . . *the axis of successions* . . . on which only one thing can be considered at a time but upon which are located all the things on the first axis together with their changes. (pp. 79–80)

The axis of simultaneity involves comparison in space, and the axis of successions involves change over time. Those are the two general perspectives on which research tends to locate itself.

In experimental research, the comparison is between a *control* group, to whom nothing is done, and an *experimental* group, to whom something is done. The thing that is done to the experimental group is called an *independent variable*. Then, the two groups are measured to see whether the experimental group was affected by the independent variable.

For example, a study of the impact of televised violence on people would have two groups of people: the experimental group is exposed to televised violence (the independent variable), and the control group is not exposed to televised violence. Then both are tested to see whether the televised violence has had a significant effect.

The following diagram shows the historical and comparative orientations. The horizontal axis is comparative (differences between one place and another), and the vertical axis is historical (change over time).



So we usually find that comparisons are at the heart of most research, just as they are at the heart of thinking and communicating, if de Saussure was correct. The A to B axis is comparative at a given moment in time (for example, the way people do things in the United States and the way people do things in some other country), and the X to Y axis is comparative historically, at an earlier time and at a later time (for example, the way we did things earlier and the way we do things now).

When we try to make sense of the world and the information we have obtained (because concepts take their meaning differentially) we are always asking, one way or another, “compared to what?” Another way of putting this is that facts don’t speak for themselves; they have to be put into context and their significance explained.

That is where the research report comes in, and the way the report is written plays an important part in how others accept the report. The medium may not be the message, but the way information is conveyed—that is, the quality of your thinking and writing—has a significant impact on how your research is received.

## ❖ THE WAY THE HUMAN MIND WORKS

Let us return to the way people view the world. According to the humorist Robert Benchley, the world is divided into two groups of people: those who divide the world into two groups of people and those who don’t. This division is whimsical and doesn’t really tell us very much. In part, that is because we are given a statement about a group of people and then a negation.

The human mind, de Saussure argued, makes sense of the world essentially by forming **binary oppositions** such as rich and poor, happy and sad, healthy and ill, and tall and short. These oppositions establish relationships in various areas, and it is through *relationships* that we find meaning.

Facts, by themselves, tell us little. Thus, to say that John Q. Public, who is married and has two children, earns \$21,000 a year (a factoid) gives us some information about John Q. Public, but not very much. If we get another fact, that according to the federal government a family of four with an income of \$22,500 in America in 2012 is living below the poverty line, then we can see that John Q. Public and his family are living in poverty. We have here some information—how much John Q. Public makes—and a concept—level

of poverty—and we can see a relationship between the concept and the information we have.

De Saussure's (1966) great insight is that **concepts** are relational. As he wrote in his book *Course in General Linguistics*, "Concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. *Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not*" (italics added; p. 117). In other words, as de Saussure added, "In languages there are only differences" (p. 120) and, more particularly, oppositions. As he explained in his book, language is based on oppositions. Relationships, then, help us make sense of the world, and the most important relationship, de Saussure argued, is that of binary oppositions.

Let me suggest some of the more important binary oppositions that we deal with in our everyday lives and, where appropriate, the thinkers who have made these oppositions part of our fund of knowledge.

Important Binary Oppositions	
Qualitative	Quantitative
The one	The many (Plato)
Active	Passive
Nature	History
Bourgeois	Proletarian (Marx)
Digital	Analog
Gesellschaft	Gemeinschaft (Tönnies)
Raw	Cooked (Lévi-Strauss)
Potentiality	Actuality
I	Thou (Buber)
Ascetic	Hedonistic
Acid	Alkali
Idealism	Materialism
Thesis	Synthesis (Hegel)
Good	Evil

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Important Binary Oppositions	
Sacred	Profane (Durkheim, Eliade)
Young	Old
Id	Superego (Freud)
Yin	Yang
Existence	Essence (Kierkegaard)
Dionysian	Apollonian (Nietzsche)
Electronic	Mechanical
Rigid	Flexible
Superficial	Profound
Wet	Dry (Lifton)
Classical	Romantic
Ethical	Aesthetic
Free	Enslaved
Democratic	Totalitarian
Hierarchy	Equality
Overt	Covert
Western	Eastern
Free market	Command market
Beginning	End
Capitalism	Communism (Marx)

*Note:* The names in parentheses stand for thinkers who have dealt with these concepts in their work.

These oppositions, and a few dozen others, have shaped our consciousness and profoundly affected our history. In a sense, one can argue that much of history involves confrontations between people believing in one or the other side of certain oppositions in this list and some kind of final resolution of the dialectic between them.

## ❖ OVERT AND COVERT OPPOSITIONS

In many cases, oppositions are hidden in texts and have to be elicited. Let me offer an example. I will quote the first paragraph from an article by Robert Jay Lifton and then show the bipolar oppositions found in that paragraph.

Lifton's (1974) article "Who Is More Dry? Heroes of Japanese Youth" starts as follows:

In postwar Japan, especially among young people, it is good to be "dry" (or *durai*) rather than "wet" (or *wetto*). This means—in the original youth language, as expanded by the mass media—to be direct, logical, to the point, pragmatic, casual, self-interested, rather than polite, evasive, sentimental, nostalgic, dedicated to romantic causes, or bound by obligation in human relations; to break out of the world of cherry blossoms, haiku, and moon-viewing into a modern era of bright sunlight, jazz, and Hemingway (who may be said to have been the literary god of dryness). Intellectual youth, of course, disdain these oversimplified categories. But they too have made the words *durai* and *wetto* (typical examples of postwar Japanized English) part of their everyday vocabulary, and they find dry objects of admiration in an interesting place: in American films about cowboys and gunmen. (p.104)

This passage yields a considerable number of oppositions, which I have listed in the chart that follows.

Dry (Durai)	Wet (Wetto)
Young people	(Old people)
Direct	Polite
Logical	Evasive
To the point	Sentimental
Pragmatic	Dedicated to romantic causes
Self-interested	Obligated to society
Sunlight loving	Moon viewing
Hemingway	Haiku
Cowboys, gunmen	"Samurai"

I put *old people* in parentheses because they are not mentioned but are logically present as the “wet” people in Japan, and I put *samurai* in quotations because they are not mentioned in this paragraph but are dealt with, in some detail, later on in Lifton’s article.

What we see from this little exercise is that de Saussure’s (1966) statement about concepts having meaning differentially is correct. Wet is the opposite of dry, and when we see the term *wet*, it has its meaning because of its relationship with its opposition, *dry*. Thus we get “wet, not dry” and “dry, not wet” when we think of either term.

Oppositions, I should point out, are different from negations. *Healthy* and *unhealthy* is a negation. *Healthy* and *sick* is an opposition; both terms have meaning, and one term is not simply the negation of the other. (There are some scholars who argue that de Saussure’s ideas about the mind finding meaning through polar oppositions is an oversimplification, but their arguments are somewhat arcane, and we need not bother with them.)

## ❖ QUANTITY AND QUALITY IN MEDIA RESEARCH

The stage is now set to discuss the basic opposition in media and communication research (and research of all kinds)—the difference between qualitative and quantitative research. I mentioned some of these oppositions in my introduction, but let us return to them again.

The term *quality* comes from the Latin word *qualitas*, which means “of what kind?” Quality, when it comes to texts carried by one or more of the media, involves matters such as the text’s properties, degree of excellence, and distinguishing characteristics. There is an element of evaluation and judgment and taste connected to the term *quality*.

Quantity is a different matter. The term *quantity* comes from the Latin word *quantitas* meaning “how great” or, for our purposes, “how much” or “how many.” When we think of quantitative research in the media and communication, we think of numbers, magnitude, and measurement. Of course, the problem that quantitative researchers often face is that they count only certain things, not everything, and it may be the case that something that cannot be quantified is of great importance in one’s research.

Thus, quantitative researchers are sometimes accused of being too narrow, basing their research on what they can count, measure, and observe and neglecting other matters. Qualitative researchers, however, are often accused of “reading into” texts things that are not there or of having opinions or making interpretations that seem odd,

excessive, or even idiosyncratic. (The term *idios* means private, and idiosyncratic interpretations of media and texts are highly personal and not defensible.)

Let us look at the two modes of research in terms of the oppositions connected to each of them. These oppositions are somewhat reductionist (that is, I've oversimplified them to make a point), but they do direct our attention to important elements in the two kinds of research.

Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Evaluates	Counts, measures
Uses concepts to explicate	Processes data collected
Focuses on aesthetics in texts	Focuses on incidences of X in texts
Theoretical	Statistical
Interprets	Describes, explains, and predicts
Leads to an evaluation	Leads to a hypothesis or theory
Interpretation can be attacked	Methodology can be attacked

It is instructive to look at the kinds of investigations made by qualitative and quantitative scholars in the media. A number of years ago, I received a flyer from the Qualitative Studies Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, the AEJMC, calling for papers for the annual conference. The flyer read (in part) as follows:

Entries may include studies employing any type of qualitative research approach. Essays, analyses, and literature reviews on topics within the interests of the division are also invited. Subjects falling within the Qualitative Studies Division's interests include, but are not limited to, the following:

Popular Culture

Philosophy of Communication

Literary or Textual Analysis of Communications Context

Performance Studies of Mass Communicators

Mythic/Ideological Studies

Media Criticism

Empirical or Theoretical Work in Cultural Studies

Production/Organization Studies of Mass Media

They listed a number of other topics. I offer this list because it gives a good idea of the range of interests of qualitative methodologists, many of which will be dealt with in this book.

Under quantitative methodologies, I include experiments, content analysis, surveys, and questionnaires—techniques that lend themselves to statistical manipulations to gain information.

## ❖ MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

For our purposes, we can focus on five different aspects of **communication**.

1. *Intrapersonal*. This area covers things such as talking to ourselves, thinking about how we will respond to situations we expect to arise, and writing in a journal or diary. We are communicating with ourselves.

2. *Interpersonal*. Here, the communication takes place between ourselves and a relatively small number of people. This area includes matters such as conversations between two people and conversations with friends at dinner parties. There is interaction among all parties involved.

3. *Small group*. In small-group communication, a person might be teaching a class or talking to a relatively small group of people, a group large enough so that ordinary interpersonal communication cannot take place.

4. *Organizational*. This area deals with how organizations communicate to members of the organization and to other interested parties.

5. *Mass media*. Here we are dealing with radio, television, film, and other media. The communication flows from a sender of messages to a large number of receivers of messages. A great deal of the content of the mass media takes the form of texts—narratives or stories found in radio programs, television programs, films, songs, and music videos. We also find narratives in personal conversations and many other areas.



The development of **social media** sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest and video sites such as YouTube and Vimeo means that people now have the capacity to create messages and images that can be seen by huge numbers of people. The fact that most cell phones have decent-resolution cameras and video-taking capabilities has made everyone with such a camera a potential photo journalist, and sometimes these photos and video uploads go “viral,” which means huge numbers of people see them.



Social media

Source: Thinkstock/iStockphoto

Different research methods lend themselves to each of these areas of communication. For example, if you are interested in the narratives carried by the mass media, you will use qualitative or interpretative techniques such as semiotics or ideological analysis, but if you are interested in the effects of the media, you will probably use quantitative techniques such as content analysis or surveys. In some cases, you might wish to use a number of techniques at the same time.

### ❖ WHY A BOOK THAT TEACHES BOTH METHODOLOGIES?

There is a logic to teaching both methodologies, for quite often it makes sense to do both a qualitative and a quantitative study research project. Take, for example, a television series about the police. The qualitative

researcher might study the metaphors in the dialogue and the narrative structure of the shows in the series, whereas the quantitative researcher might study incidences of violence per minute in the series. It is quite possible that the amount of violence in the series affects the qualitative interpretation of the text or vice versa.

It's reasonable to expect, then, that if a text is so violent it creates psychological distress and a sickening feeling in audiences, quite likely viewers, and perhaps critics, will be rather negative about their aesthetic evaluations. It may be that physiological or ethical considerations will shape evaluations of the text and decisions about whether to look at other episodes.

In some cases, the intensity of the violence in a given scene (a qualitative measure) may be more important than the amount of violence (a quantitative measure) in the text as a whole. So we need to have a repertoire of analytic and measurement techniques so that we can obtain the full array of information we need or want. It's better to have many arrows (that is, techniques one can use in doing research) in one's quiver than just one.

## ❖ CONSIDERING RESEARCH TOPICS

Here are some things to consider before undertaking a research project:

- Is the problem important enough to bother with?
- Is your hypothesis reasonable and testable?
- Are there ethical problems involved in the research? (Will it violate the privacy of people? If so, should it be done?)
- Do you have the skills to do the research? For example, do you know enough about statistics to be able to deal with your data (if it requires statistical analysis, that is)?
- Is the topic sufficiently narrow and focused so that you can do it in the time you have at your disposal and with limited funds?
- Is your methodology the best one to deal with your hypothesis or subject being investigated?
- Does your college or university have resources in the library and in the computer labs that are adequate for your research?

## ❖ WHAT IS RESEARCH? APPLICATIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Find an article in the *New York Times* based on a scholarly article that deals with social science research involving media. Analyze the article and answer the following questions:

- A. What methodology was used in the research?
- B. How important is the topic?
- C. What conclusions were reached?
- D. Are the conclusions supported by the data? Are they credible?
- E. Can one generalize from the research?
- F. Do the findings have any policy implications?

2. Find the scholarly article on which the *New York Times* article was based and compare them in terms of how accurate the *New York Times* article conveyed what was in the scholarly article. Did it leave out anything important? Was the report biased in any way?

3. Investigate cell phones. What have scholars found about the impact cell phones have on American culture and society? Deal with topics such as cell phones and the socialization of young people and cell phones and politics. On a personal level, which cell phone do you think is “best” for the typical student? What brand and model of cell phone do you have, and why did you decide to purchase it? If you could afford to purchase any cell phone, which brand and model would you choose?

## ❖ CONCLUSIONS

If we look at research as an attempt to find out about things and people and the complexities of communication, research becomes fascinating. Because of the way the human mind works, we are, in a sense, always doing research—but not always doing scientific and scholarly research. This book offers an introduction to scientific and scholarly research. It functions as a primer and describes the more commonly used techniques for analyzing media and communication.

A number of years ago, I was asked by a German publisher to write a book—with both a historical and a comparative perspective—on techniques used by women who seduce men. This led to a fascinating search to find material I could use and to a book about women who

might be called superstar seductresses, covering everyone from Lilith to Madame de Pompadour, from Cleopatra to Monica Lewinsky.

Who says research can't be fun?

## ❖ FURTHER READING

- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (M. Holquist, Ed.; C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press.
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*My Illustrious Friend and Joy of My Liver!*

*The thing you ask of me is both difficult and useless. Although I have passed all my days in this place, I have neither counted the houses nor have I inquired into the number of the inhabitants; and as to what one person loads on his mules and the other stows away in the bottom of his ship, that is no business of mine. But, above all, as to the previous history of this city, God only knows the amount of dirt and confusions that the infidels may have eaten before the coming of the sword of Islam. It were unprofitable for us to inquire into it. O my soul O my lambi Seek not after the things which concern thee not. Thou earnest to us and we welcomed thee: go in peace.*

—Reply of a Turkish official to an Englishman's questions, quoted in Austen H. Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon* (London, 1853, p. 663; see Barzun & Graff, 1957, p. 3)