

Is Sex Research a Good Thing?

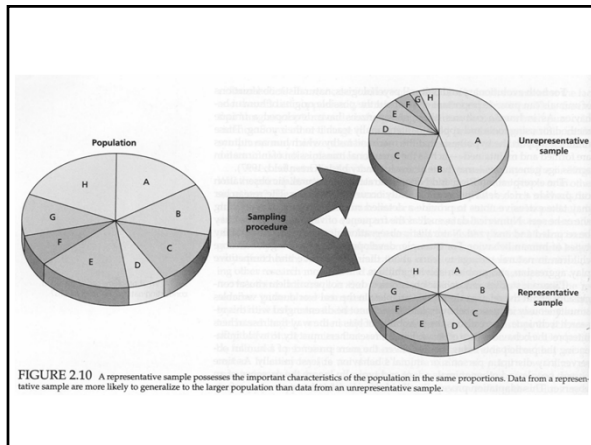
- Laumann (1994) Inquiries about sexual behavior are controversial for 2 reasons
 - Some oppose gathering information about sex because they strongly oppose one or another sexual practice and contend that reporting incidence may legitimize or encourage certain behaviors.
 - Do you think this fear has merit: talking about sex increases the activity?
Example: Is learning about anal sex a negative thing?
See on line video as well as student comments.
 - Others are afraid that if only a small percentage are reported to engage in certain practices, then some will be encouraged to forbid them or ostracize those people involved in those practices.
 - Examples? Does reporting about gay/lesbian sex ostracize the participants?
 - Some believe sex is private and should not be brought into the public sphere

- There is a case to be made to inquire about sexual behavior
 - While sex is private, it has many public aspects as well.
 - Treatment of homosexuals, legality and availability of abortions, public nudity, sexual harassment, rape, gender discrimination, contraceptives, STDs, etc.
 - Information is imperative if we are to make wise collective judgments.
 - Even in our private lives, we need guidance from counselors who offer medical advice, religious or ethical, or psychological guidance as we confront the complexities and mysteries of our sexual being. Those counselors need information from somewhere.

- We can't learn about sex by observation. We can only ask people to report on their own private lives.
- Surveys are necessary

Scientific Approach to Understanding Sexuality

- Must Use Accurate sampling
 - Drawing conclusions from a few (sample) and applying to many (population)
 - Best is probability sampling
 - A **probability sampling** method is any method of sampling that utilizes some form of *random selection*. In order to have a random selection method, you must set up some process or procedure that assures that the different units in your population have equal probabilities of being chosen.
- Is the sample Representative?
 - Does the sample match the population in terms of important variables (age, geographic region, education, race, gender etc)



Potential Problems

- Self-report bias
 - Tendency to present oneself in best light
- Volunteer bias
 - Who are these people who volunteer to fill out sex surveys?
Are they different from people who don't? (yes)
- Low Response Rate is problematic when those who answer are different from those who didn't
 - Imagine a survey inquiring about how much free time parents have to be with kids. The parents who don't answer are too busy to respond. All who responded have more time. Estimates will be inflated.
 - Imagine "Better Homes/Gardens" asking it's readers to mail in answers to sexual questions. Suppose a 3% return rate. Are these 3% different from the other 97%?
- Convenience sample is usually not helpful.
 - Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher

Methods of Sex Research

- Surveys
 - Kinsey (1940s –50s)
 - Best known, most widely cited example of survey research
 - Sampling methods criticized
 - Over-represented those educated and from NE
 - Caused a roar because
 - 50% of women had premarital sex
 - Shockingly high rates of masturbation
 - 37% of males had at least 1 same sex experience that resulted in orgasm.
 - 4% of males were “exclusively” homosexual. Rejected a simple dichotomy between homo and hetero sexuality

<https://www.kinseyinstitute.org/>

Kinsey's Geographic Sample

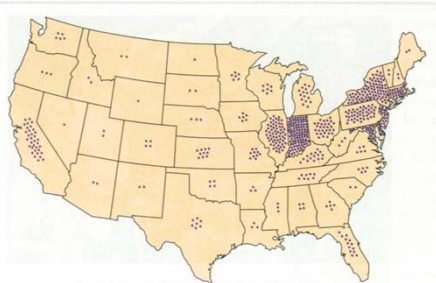
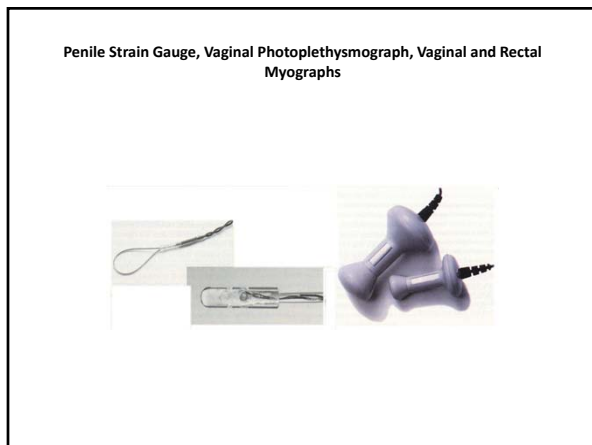


FIGURE 2.1 Geographic Sources: Total Female and Male Sample

Method of Research (cont.)

- Laboratory Observation
 - William Masters and Virginia Johnson
 - Pioneers in sex research
 - Examined physiology of sexual response
 - Observed and collected data on more than 10,000 orgasms
 - First to photograph inside of vagina during orgasm
 - Gave us 4 stages of sexual response cycle
 - Excitement, plateau, orgasm, and resolution
 - No physiological difference between vaginal or clitoral orgasm





- Hite Report (1976)
 - how not to do survey research. Entertaining but...
 - Sent out over 100,000 questionnaires to women from 1) feminists groups, readers of women's magazines, and college females, asking them all about their sexual practices. 3% of them were returned. Yet the book became a best seller "The Hite Report".
- Playboy, Redbook have surveyed their readers.
 - Their readers are a unique sample
 - Response rates are often low

NHSLS - 1994

National Health & Social Life Survey

- Used Probability Sampling
- Tracked down non-responders and tried to convince to them respond.
- Got a 79% response rate
 - Those they couldn't find were counted as a non-response.
 - If you don't count these, their response rate was much higher.
