

**Introduction to Sociology**  
**SOCI 10100.14 – Spring 2010**  
**Assignment #1**

Social science survey data is commonly reported in the news. You read about the use of survey data in Howard Schuman's article ("Sense and Nonsense About Surveys") in the *Contexts Reader*. For this assignment, you will conduct an online search for a recent news article that make use of social science survey data.

This assignment is designed to meet the following course goals:

- To enable you to articulate the unique perspective of sociologists (as opposed to other disciplines), particularly (1) the types of questions sociologists ask and (2) the ways that sociologists answer those questions;
- To give you an opportunity to apply sociological insights to your own lived experience and the world around you.

The guidelines for your search are as follows

1. You may use any reputable written news source (i.e., New York Times, Time Magazine, Associated Press, The Ithacan). You should avoid video/audio news (because you have to print the document to hand in) and also tabloids/fake news (i.e., The Onion, The Enquirer). If you are unsure about the appropriateness of your source, you should contact Dr. Baker to ask.
2. The article must be recent. The article must have been placed online on October 1, 2009, or later.
3. This article should be a feature (lengthy, substantial) article. A short article will not give you enough material to work with.
4. The author of the article should use some kind of social science survey data.
  - a. Social science surveys are generally used to collect information on demographics (race, sex, income, etc.), people's opinions and beliefs, and sometimes people's behavior.
  - b. Evidence may appear in the form of a graph or a statement within the article.
  - c. Avoid data that is not social science-oriented and is not survey based. For example, you will want to avoid information such as stock profiles and data on physical health.
  - d. Avoid interviews with individuals.
5. Failure to comply with any of these parameters will result in a significant grade-deduction.

**Print the article that you selected and highlight (using a highlighter or circle with a pen) the relevant social science data.** Then, answer the questions below. You must read the entire article to answer these questions.

1. Identify the article: Article name, date published, source/website.
2. Summary
  - a. What is the article about?
  - b. Why did you choose this article? (Presumably there were several you could choose from. I am looking for an answer that is more sophisticated than "This article was the first one I found" or "I understood it." Give me a reason to care about the information contained in this article.)
3. Authority
  - a. Who wrote the article?
    - i. Do a web search on this author. What kind of information can you find out about this author (education, types of articles that she/he writes, associations with organizations, etc.)? Be sure to cite your sources!

- ii. Do you think this author has authority on this topic? Explain your answer.
4. Quality of the Data
    - a. Using both Schuman's article, the Sullivan textbook, and class discussion, evaluate the quality of the data (i.e. how good is it?). Be sure to cite course material that you reference.
      - i. Choose 3 issues to address and explain whether the data is of high quality. If you are unable to determine if the article meets the standards of quality put forth in course materials, explain your answer. Some issues you might want to consider include (but are not limited to)
        1. The sample – size, randomness, who is not included
        2. The quality/neutrality of the question
        3. Whether comparative data is offered (either comparisons over time or a different study)
  5. Final Analysis
    - a. What is the main argument/position of the author? (In other words, what does she/he want to convince people to think?)
    - b. How does the author use this piece of data to make her/his larger argument? What other evidence does the author use to make her/his case?
    - c. Is the article better or worse for making use of this data?
    - d. Are you convinced by the author's argument? Defend your position. (It would be good here to make reference to some of your previous discussion.)

Here are some additional notes on formatting your assignment.

1. Your assignment must be at least 2 pages, double-spaced. (Do not make unreasonable changes in your font or margin size to accomplish this page requirement.)
  2. You must include a printed copy of the article with the relevant social science data highlighted.
  3. You must address explicitly each of the questions above, following the outline provided. It is a good idea to label your answers with the outline numbers provided (1, 2, 3, etc.). All of your answers must be in complete sentences (and most of your answers will be in paragraph form).
  4. You should explicitly cite course material and outside sources. You will need to include a bibliography that lists all of your sources. *Plagiarism will not be tolerated.* If you are unsure how to cite properly, visit the writing center.
  5. Style, grammar and spelling will be taken seriously. If you struggle with any of these issues, I highly recommend that you visit the Writing Center.
  6. The tone of the assignment should be formal and academic (avoid jargon and colloquialisms). Your writing level should be college-appropriate and the final assignment should be fully edited.
  7. **The assignment must be printed and handed in. Include your name and the page number in the header. Staple all pages together.** Collaboration is prohibited. All work must be your own.
  8. Late book reviews will be penalized 10 points per day, including weekends.
- Failure to follow these instructions will result in a grade penalty.

### Grading Rubric

Item	Excellent - Student has engaged with the material in a sophisticated and creative way	Good - Student understands the material on a basic level (can repeat/restate ideas)	Weak - Student's understanding is flawed or student did not meet a requirement
<b>Summary (20 points)</b>	Student clearly and thoroughly understands article and the use of social science data within this article	Student generally understands article but misses a key point or discussion is superficial	Student does not appear to understand article or does not understand use of social science data
<b>Authority (20 points)</b>	Student has thoroughly researched source/author and has critically (and creatively) assessed the authority of the article	Student has done research on the authority of article, but does not offer special insight or sophisticated argument	Student has not seriously engaged in researcher, or analysis is underdeveloped
<b>The Quality of Data (20 points)</b>	Student has made good use of course materials to assess the quality of the data; student offers unique insight and demonstrates engagement with course materials	Student makes some reference to course materials, but arguments are underdeveloped or there is an occasional mistake	Analysis of the quality of the data is seriously flawed
<b>Final Analysis (20 points)</b>	Student successfully defends her/his position	Student is somewhat convincing	Student's argument is unsuccessful
<b>Writing (10 points)</b>	College-appropriate writing/very few errors	In need of some revision/editing	In need of serious revision/not college-appropriate writing
<b>Article Appropriateness &amp; Following Directions (10 points)</b>	Article fits the requirements of the assignment; Student followed directions	Article somewhat appropriate; Student followed directions	Article inappropriate and/or student did not follow directions

**FINAL GRADE:** \_\_\_\_\_