

Research Methods for Sociology of Physical Activity

Now that you know something about the subdiscipline and its historical roots, you may be wondering how sociologists of physical activity produce their knowledge. What methods do researchers use to answer important questions about the social side of physical activity? They gather both quantitative data (e.g., things you can count or measure in a standardized and often mathematical fashion) and qualitative data (e.g., texts and direct observations of social life that are measured in a deeply contextualized manner). We'll look at six methods: survey research, interviewing, thematic analysis, ethnography, societal analysis, and historical analysis. Of course, sometimes two or more of these are used in the same study. Some studies even use both quantitative and qualitative methods (**mixed methods** research).

→ Research methods used in sociology of physical activity include survey research, interviewing, thematic analysis, ethnography, societal analysis, and historical analysis.

Survey Research

Doing survey research involves using questionnaires that are completed directly by respondents or filled out by a researcher during brief, highly structured interviews. Questionnaires are used to collect data from a large sample of people. The largest survey project in the country is the U.S. census, conducted every 10 years. Political polls about voting preferences are also surveys. Investigators have conducted surveys dealing with numerous topics related to physical activity, including youngsters' opinions about what led them to become involved in sport, former collegiate athletes' thoughts about leaving competition at the end of their 4 years of eligibility, and college athletic directors' opinions about the characteristics of successful coaches.

■ Sport sociologists investigate why some activities seem to cater more toward females than males, and vice versa.

