

# *Descriptive Survey*

A descriptive survey attempts to establish the range and distribution of some social characteristics, such as education or training, occupation, and location, and to discover how these characteristics may be related to certain behavior patterns or attitudes. Moser and Kalton (1971) recounted the evolution of social surveys from the studies of poverty in Great Britain by both Mayhew and Booth during the second half of the nineteenth century. Possibly the most familiar contemporary surveys are the polls conducted by the Gallup and Harris organizations.

The National Council on the Arts suggested, in 1972, that the National Endowment for the Arts carry out a survey of museums in the United States. They contracted with an affiliate of Louis Harris and Associates to conduct the survey which was the first of its kind in this country. More than 1800 museums were identified as art, history, science, or a miscellaneous classification designated as "other." The museum directors of 728 of these institutions were interviewed. Data were collected on a questionnaire developed for the study. The results were published in Museums USA (National Endowment for the Arts, 1974). The analyses of the data were presented in four categories: type, budget size, governing authority, and region. Contents, such as programs, attendance, collections and exhibitions, personnel, and facilities, were examined by comparing museums which differ in respect to the four categories. For example, this type of analysis revealed that "The largest percentages of art museums are in the Midwest, the Northeast, and the Southeast.

Twenty-three per cent of the art museums are located in the Midwest and

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20 percent in both the Northeast and the Southeast. The smallest percentage (10 per cent) is found in the Mountain Plains" (p. 13). The writers of the document did not draw conclusions nor make recommendations; the result is a demographic report on the status of U.S. museums.

In contrast to this approach, Kenneth Hudson (1977) amassed what Georges Henri Riviere referred to in the Foreword as "a composite and variegated array of impressions and reactions" from a questionnaire which he used to survey "museums in the old and new worlds." Hudson freely recommended changes based on his findings:

In Montreal, for instance, it is no doubt admirable that there should be a superb museum collection of objects made by Eskimos, as a way of showing people in this part of Canada something of the skills and artistic talent of their fellow-citizens in remote parts of the country. But it is equally necessary that Eskimos living in these same remote territories should be introduced, through museums and exhibitions, to the other sub-cultures which exist within Canadian territory. One could say much the same of the Museum of the Indian in Rio de Janeiro. Why, one wonders, is there no Museum of the Indian in the areas where the Brazilian Indians actually live? (p. 34)

In the chapter, "The Museum and its Visitors," he reported on a variety of methods used by numerous museums to learn something about their visitors and about the responses of those visitors.

Eisenbeis (1972), in his consideration of a representative survey conducted in Germany, included several examples of the questions used to elicit data on habits of visiting museums, attitudes towards museums, and the image of museums:

Question: Three acquaintances are discussing what they do in their spare time. The subject of museums crops up during the discussion. Each one gives his opinions. Whom do you agree with?

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There is something of interest for everyone in museums.  
Nowadays everyone should try a visit.

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In my view museums are only for certain people.  
People like me don't feel at ease there.  
It is no use going to a museum unless you know something  
about what you are going to see. (p. 119)

As a result of visitor surveys which indicated that about half of the viewers in London museums are there for the first time, Morris and Alt (1978) carried out a survey with ninety-six visitors to learn which of two types of maps was most useful, as well as which type was preferred. They found a strong preference for the axonometric map (a pictorial representation of the objects on display). However, people were no more accurate in locating themselves with it than they were with the ground plan type (showing galleries in relationship to one another, but with no visual information about the objects on exhibiton). Accurate locations were made most often by the people who were shown both types of maps.

DiMaggio and Useem (1979) reviewed more than 250 audience, visitor, and public opinion surveys which collected data on the performing arts and on museums. They warned that, "These findings must be treated cautiously, for the precise level of public support determined in such surveys depends on the exact wording of the questions" (p. 30). Because the wording of questions is so critical, as well as difficult, they recommended that, whenever possible, researchers use questions which already have been developed. The Museum and the Canadian Public, which may be obtained from the Arts and Culture Branch of Canada's Department of the Secretary of State, was suggested as a good source for questions.

Craft Horizons often reported the results of surveys related to some aspect of art. Under the heading, "Public Wants Art," they summarized a

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survey of 1,531 New Yorkers in which "more people preferred a first-rate theater (twenty-six percent) or arts and crafts workshops (twenty-one percent) to a sports stadium (seventeen percent)" (1973, p. 4). On another occasion they called attention to demographic data which revealed that sweeping cutbacks had occurred in 36 percent of museums in this country ("Crisis in U.S. Museums Studied by NEA," 1974). In June and August, 1972 they reported the results of a study conducted by Tamarind Lithography Workshop which compared the space given to exhibition reviews and articles for men and women artists for a one-year period.

Below is the report's list of the total number of lines that men and women artists received in the cited journals:

	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
CRAFT HORIZONS	55.9%	44.1%
Los Angeles Herald-Examiner	71.9%	28.1%
San Francisco Chronicle	78.8%	21.2%
Los Angeles Times	80.5%	19.5%
Arts Magazine	85.7%	14.3%
New York Times	86.5%	13.5%
Art News	88.3%	11.7%
Art Forum	91.1%	8.9%
Art in America	94.8%	5.2%

("No Sex Bias in Craft Horizons Says Art Press Study," 1972, p.3).

"The survey, which included both reviews and articles, was strictly quantitative, totting up the number of lines devoted to each sex without distinguishing content, pro or con" ("Art Press Blames Sex Bias on Museums, Galleries," 1972, p. 5).

The technique of counting lines in publications is an example of using data which are available in public records. Selltitz, Jahoda, Deutsch, and Cook (1976) discussed mass communications documents as one source of such data. They recognized personal documents as another source. They pointed out that autobiographies, letters, and diaries have the advantage of allowing us to see people as they see themselves.

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In a study which interfaced with ecological methodology, Brower (1973) used a variety of survey techniques to explore how people in a 95-block residential area of Baltimore utilized available outdoor spaces for recreation. He and his staff counted people in different recreation areas from moving cars; they hired residents from each block which was being studied to count people in recreation places within their blocks for a two month period; and a number of the residents in each study block kept diaries of their outdoor activities for this period. The last method is an instance of using personal documents as a source. "The Garbage Project" (Rathje, 1974) also shared some aspects of ecology research. Members of the project tabulated items in the refuse of a randomly selected sample of Tucson households for two years. They used categories which were designed to study health, nutrition, personal and household sanitation, education, amusement, communication, and pets. Rathje argued that, "Since their discipline functions to corroborate or disprove historical sources through the analysis of quantifiable materials, [archaeologists] are readily qualified to evaluate modern interview-survey techniques and their results" (p. 237). He projected a joint venture in which they would analyze garbage from households for a month; following this period the occupants would be surveyed, and finally a comparison would be made between their answers and the data from the garbage. He believed such a combined approach would identify weaknesses in the two methods.

A special type of museum visitor survey was carried out by Vauclair (1974) with Geneva adolescents between twelve and fifteen years of age. They were asked to rank order their preferences for colored slides of paintings arranged in several sets. Vauclair stated that one of the purposes

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of his survey was to verify an earlier Canadian study which concluded that "there is a fifty-year gap between creative innovations (of a pictorial nature, in this case) and general acceptance by the ordinary public" (p. 121). He found, when he compared the adolescents' choices with those of adults, that a certain conservatism in artistic preferences already was present in these adolescents.

On the whole, then, judgements rarely take into account questions of artistic trends or pictorial research or the plastic values of the works to be chosen. This tyrannical primacy of form probably originates in the way in which art is taught to children (beginning with drawing): rather than allowing the child to draw spontaneously what he sees, teachers often force him to transfer the exact shape of an object to paper and his drawing will not be found acceptable until it has become the closest possible imitation of the model. (p. 124)

Although he appeared to regret the above condition he followed this conclusion with a plea to respect the freedom of children and other museum visitors in their preferences.

The art sections of the National Assessment of Educational Progress which began in 1969 were administered to a representative sample of nine, thirteen, and seventeen-year-olds. The form of these tests is similar to a survey and the presentation of the data which are reported in such categories as geographic location, size of community, and gender, as well as age, is demographic. In Attitudes toward Art (1978) it is possible to learn that 74% of the thirteen-year-olds said they participated in three or more kinds of art work, and that 58% of the seventeen-year-olds indicated this was the situation for themselves. This survey also elicited the information that 50% of the nine-year-olds, 78% of the thirteen year-olds, and 61% of the seventeen-year-olds reported that they spent time outside of school drawing.

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Some artists use surveys as art forms. Often the procedures take place in art galleries, or the documentation of the process is displayed along with the results. Willats (1973) employed a participant-gathering strategy. His tools were a West London Manual and a West London Re-Modelling Book which had duplicate sheets with carbon paper between them. The top sheets were collected and displayed. Various visual cue sheets were used: for example, a photo of a front gate which was located in the participant's neighborhood was a cue to ask for a description of the gate's social function. He pointed out that questionnaires traditionally are considered to be retrieval mechanisms, but he has people doing their own processing so the problem is generative--people are able to feed back into it. In an interview at the conclusion of the article Willats specifically refuted that he is doing sociology. He maintained that he was involved with an art project because "it is concerned with the changing of conventions, which I see as being something that art has always been concerned with, whether aesthetic conventions, conventions of reading a visual painting, or social conventions" (p. 23).

"Hans Haacke's Gallery Visitors' Profile" (1973) reported the results of Haacke's asking visitors to the John Weber Gallery to complete a questionnaire. One-half of the questions were about demographic background, while the other half dealt with their opinions on political issues. A running display of the current results was exhibited on a wall of the gallery during the period of the survey. He used four sub-groups in which to break down the political information: artists; students; professional interest in art, but not artist or students; and no professional interest in art. In an accompanying commentary Bruce Boice noted

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that Haack's survey was tautological because the people who filled it out and who saw the results were the same. This condition directly contrasts with the procedures of the national polling organizations. He also made an observation which has implications for other surveys:

To notice the kinds of groupings Haacke makes from the questionnaires, is to be aware of the enormous range of further possible groupings and subgroupings implicit in the information. If 74% of artists completing the questionnaire supported McGovern, how many female artists of Polish origin, over 30, and against busing supported McGovern? The possible new groups and subgroups that could be formed from these results are not infinite, but they seem to be infinite. (p. 46)

As a first step in using the survey research method the graduate students were to decide on what aspect of art they wanted to study, and next to choose the population each was interested in and to define it. Suggested category possibilities were: art/non-art; various grade levels; various media, such as painters, potters, etc.; male/female; various occupations. Although scientifically selected samples were not possible, they were urged to give their questionnaires to different categories within their designated populations. They were asked to construct about ten questions and it was noted that closed or forced-choice questions result in more easily handled data. The following examples were distributed:

Some people have said that in a community such as ours every child should be taken on a field trip to an art museum at least once each year. Do you . . .

Strongly agree	( )
Agree	( )
Don't know	( )
Disagree	( )
Strongly disagree	( )

My favorite medium is:

Paint	( )
Clay	( )
Pencil	( )
Pastels	( )



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Plaster

( )

The first type of question is designed to elicit a degree or intensity of feeling; the second, is a cafeteria-style that allows people to choose answers that pertain to themselves. An open-ended question might ask: "How do you think the schools should use art museums?" The first two types of questions are effective when you know the possible answers and want to find out how they are distributed in your population; the open-ended type is useful when you do not know the range of answers. Finally, they were to analyze their data by making a tally of the number of responses in each choice offered for each question. If they elected to use any open-ended questions, categories were to be set up to cover the answers, and tabulations were to be carried out within these. In the examples which follow the two graduate students chose to investigate aspects of their teaching situations.

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