Chapter 16  Rubin and Babbie (2008)
Analyzing Available Records

Secondary Data Analysis -- using existing data to answer a research question and/or to test a research hypothesis; using data collected by another researcher for some purpose other than the topic of the current study.

Numerous sources of existing data may be available, including census data, local agency records, Statistical Abstract of the United States, and state and federal agency records (see web sources on pp 393-394).

Potential advantages of secondary analysis include: 1) fewer human subject concerns, 2) access to hard-to-identify populations, 3) ability to monitor trends over times, 4) possibility to monitor trends over time, 5) possible access to technical support, and 6) unobtrusive data collection. Potential limitations of secondary data analysis include: 1) missing data, 2) problems with reliability and validity, inadequate documentation, and feasibility issues.

Content analysis -- transforming qualitative material (such as narrative writing or audiotapes) into quantitative data or qualitative generalizations.

Sampling considerations in content analysis
- units of analysis -- what units will you examine (e.g. words, pages, times)
- sampling techniques -- random, stratified, etc.

Coding considerations in content analysis (quantitative approach)
- must attend to both manifest (visible or surface content) and latent (underlying meaning) content;
- conceptualization and creation of code categories include interaction of theoretical concerns and empirical observations (both inductive and deductive methods);
- counting and record keeping should be numerical and in context.

Qualitative analysis of content is also possible.

Phases in content analysis: 1) developing the research questions, 2) choosing a sample, 3) selecting the unit of analysis, and 4) coding, tallying, and analyzing data.

Potential advantages of content analysis include 1) economy in terms of time and money, 2) ease in correcting mistakes, possibility of historical research, and 4) being unobtrusive; potential disadvantages include 1) it’s limited to recorded communication, 2) reliability of content, and 3) validity of content.

Historical research (historical/comparative analysis) -- usually a qualitative method where the main resources for observation and analysis are historical records.

- may include content analysis of historical resources (see above)
- can be comparative in the sense that social scientists often seek to discover common patterns that recur in different times and places.