

## SAMPLE SOCIAL ISSUE ANALYSIS PAPER (CONT.)

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## CHAPTER

## 10

CRITICAL EVALUATION  
OF SOCIOLOGICAL LITERATURE

## 10.1 BOOK REVIEWS

10.1.1 *The Objective of a Book Review*

Successful book reviewers answer two questions for their readers: What is the book trying to do? How well is it doing it? People who read a book review want to know if a particular book is worth reading, for their own particular purposes, before buying or beginning to read it. These potential book readers want to know what a book is about, and the book's strengths and weaknesses, and they want to gain this information as easily and quickly as possible.

Your goal in writing a book review, therefore, is to help people decide efficiently whether to buy or read a book. Your immediate objectives may be to please your instructor and get a good grade, but these objectives are most likely to be met if you focus on a book review's audience: people who want help in selecting books to read. In the process of writing a review according to the guidelines given in this chapter, you will also learn about the following:

- The book you are reviewing and its content
- Professional standards for book reviews in sociology
- The essential steps to reviewing books that apply in any academic discipline

This final objective, learning to review a book properly, has more applications than you may at first imagine. First, it helps you to focus quickly on the essential elements of a book, to draw from a book its informational value for yourself and others. Some of the most successful professional and business people speed-read many books. They read these books less for enjoyment than to assimilate knowledge quickly. These readers then apply this knowledge to substantial advantage in their professions. It is normally not wise to speed-read a book you are

reviewing, because you are unlikely to gain from such a fast reading enough information to evaluate the book's qualities fairly. However, writing book reviews helps you to become proficient in quickly locating the book's most valuable information and paring away material that is of secondary importance. The ability to make such discriminations is of fundamental importance to academic and professional success.

In addition, writing book reviews for publication allows you to participate in the discussions of the broader intellectual and professional community of which you are a part. People in law, medicine, teaching, engineering, administration, and other fields are frequently asked to write reviews of books to help others in their profession assess the value of newly released publications.

### 10.1.2 Elements of a Book Review

Book reviews in the social sciences contain the same essential elements of all book reviews. Since social science is nonfiction, book reviews within the disciplines focus less on writing style and more on content and method than reviews of works of fiction. Your book review should generally contain four basic elements, though not always in this order:

1. Enticement
2. Examination
3. Elucidation
4. Evaluation

*Enticement.* The first sentence should entice people to read your review. Social studies do not have to be dull. Start your review with a sentence that both sums up the objective of the book, and catches the reader's eye. Be sure, however, that your opening statement is an accurate portrayal of the book as well as an enticement to the reader.

*Examination.* Your book review should encourage the reader to join you in examining the book. Tell the reader what the book is about. When you review a book, write about what is actually in the book, not what you think is probably there or what ought to be there. Do not tell how you would have written the book, but tell instead how the author wrote it. Describe the book in clear, objective terms. Include enough about the content to identify for the reader the major points that the author is trying to make.

*Elucidation.* Elucidate, or clarify, the book's value and contribution to sociology by defining (1) what the author is attempting to do; and (2) how the author's work fits within current similar efforts in the discipline of sociology or scholarly inquiry in general. The elucidation portion of book reviews often provides additional information about the author. How would your understanding of a book be changed, for example, if you knew that its author is a leader in the feminist movement? Include in your book review information about the author

that helps the reader understand how this book fits within the broader concerns of social science.

*Evaluation.* After your reader understands what the book is attempting to do, she will want to know the extent to which the book has succeeded. To effectively evaluate a book, you should establish evaluation criteria and then compare the book's content to those criteria. You do not need to define your criteria specifically in your review, but they should be evident to the reader. The criteria will vary according to the book you are reviewing, and you may discuss them in any order that is helpful to the reader. Consider including the following among the criteria that you establish for your book review:

- How important is the subject matter to the study of culture and society?
- How complete and thorough is the author's coverage of his subject?
- How carefully is the author's analysis constructed?
- What are the strengths and limitations of the author's methodology?
- What is the quality of the writing in the book? Is the writing clear, precise, and interesting?
- How does this book compare with other books written on the same subject?
- What contribution does this book make to sociology?
- Who will enjoy or benefit from this book?

When giving your evaluation according to these criteria, be specific. If you write, "This is a good book; I liked it very much," you have told the reader nothing of interest or value. But if you say, for example, "Smith's book provides descriptions of most of the major sociological theories, but it fails to describe the full extent of Weber's concept of bureaucracy," then you have given your reader some concrete information.

### 10.1.3 Reflective and Analytical Book Reviews

Two types of book reviews are normally assigned by instructors in the humanities and social sciences: the reflective and the analytical. Ask your instructor which type of book review she wants you to write. The purpose of a reflective book review is for the student reviewer to exercise creative analytical judgment without being influenced by the reviews of others. Reflective book reviews contain all the elements covered in this chapter—enticement, examination, elucidation, and evaluation—but they do not include the views of others who have also read the book.

Analytical book reviews contain all the information provided by reflective book reviews but add an analysis of the comments of other reviewers. The purpose is to review not only the book itself but also its reception in the professional community. To write an analytical book review, insert a review analysis section immediately after your summary of the book. To prepare this review analysis section, use the *Book Review Digest* and *Book Review Index* in the library

to locate other reviews of the book that have been published in journals and other periodicals. As you read these reviews, use the following four steps:

1. List the criticisms (strengths and weaknesses) of the book found in these reviews.
2. Develop a concise summary of these criticisms, indicate the overall positive or negative tone of the reviews, and discuss some of the most frequent comments.
3. Evaluate the criticisms of the book found in these reviews. Are they basically accurate in their assessment of the book?
4. Write a review analysis of two pages or less that states and evaluates Steps 2 and 3, and place it in your book review immediately after your summary of the book.

#### 10.1.4 Format and Length of a Book Review

The directions for writing papers provided in Part I of this manual apply to book reviews as well. Unless your instructor gives you other specifications, a reflective book review should be three to five pages in length, and an analytical book review should be from five to seven pages. In either case, a brief, specific, concise book review is almost always preferred over one of greater length.

## 10.2 ARTICLE CRITIQUES

An article critique evaluates an article published in an academic journal. A good critique tells the reader what point the article is trying to make and how convincingly it makes this point. Writing an article critique achieves three purposes. First, it provides you with an understanding of the information contained in a scholarly article and a familiarity with other information written on the same topic. Second, it provides an opportunity to apply and develop your critical thinking skills as you attempt to critically evaluate the work of a sociologist. Third, it helps you to improve your own writing skills as you attempt to describe the selected article's strengths and weaknesses so that your readers can clearly understand them.

#### 10.2.1 Choosing an Article

The first step in writing an article critique is to select an appropriate article. Unless your instructor specifies otherwise, select an article from a scholarly journal (e.g., *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, *Sociological Quarterly*, *Social Forces*, or *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology*) and not a popular or journalistic publication (e.g., *Time*, *Newsweek*, or the *National Review*). Chapter 6 of this manual contains a substantial list of academic journals that pertain to sociology. Your instructor may also accept appropriate articles from academic journals in other disciplines, such as history, political science, or criminal justice, many of which are also contained in this list.

Three other considerations should guide your choice of an article. First, browse article titles until you find a topic that interests you. Writing a critique will be much more satisfying if you have an interest in the topic. Hundreds of interesting journal articles are published every year. The following articles, for example, appeared in a 1998 issue (Vol. 26, No. 1) of *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology*:

- "Social Bonding and Juvenile Male Violence: An Empirical Investigation"
- "Understanding Adolescent Work in Social and Behavioral Contexts"
- "Examining Courtship, Dating, and Forced Sexual Intercourse: A Preliminary Model"
- "Positive Deviance: A Classificatory Model"
- "Disabilities and the Workplace: Employment Opportunities Perceptions of College Students"

The second consideration in selecting an article is your current level of knowledge. Many sociology studies, for example, employ sophisticated statistical techniques. You may be better prepared to evaluate them if you have studied statistics.

The third consideration is to select a current article, one written within the twelve months prior to making your selection. Much of the material in sociology is quickly superseded by new studies. Selecting a recent study will help ensure that you will be engaged in an up-to-date discussion of your topic.

#### 10.2.2 Writing the Critique

Once you have selected and carefully read your article, you may begin to write your critique, which should cover the following four areas:

1. Thesis
2. Methods
3. Evidence
4. Evaluation

*Thesis.* Your first task is to find and clearly state the thesis of the article. The thesis is the main point the article is trying to make. In a 1998 article in *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology*, Professors Cynthia Y. A. Jacob-Chien of the University of Northern Iowa and Richard L. Dukes of the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs examine "Understanding Adolescent Work in Social and Behavioral Contexts." In this article Jacob-Chien and Dukes (1998) state their thesis in the introduction:

Traditional explanations of crime and delinquency imply that adolescent work is a useful control mechanism. . . . [Some] theories appear to overlook the notion that the workplace can be an environment that displays significant sources of deviant activities. We expect that . . . *work intensity will have a negative effect on well-being and academics and a facilitating effect on delinquent and substance use behavior.* (P. 23) (Italics ours)

Sometimes the thesis is more difficult to ascertain. Do you have to hunt for the thesis of the article? Comment about the clarity of the author's thesis presentation, and state the author's thesis in your own paper. Before proceeding with the remaining elements of your paper, consider the importance of the topic. Has the author of the article written something that is important for sociology students or professionals to read?

*Methods.* What methods did the author use to investigate the topic? In other words, how did the author go about supporting the thesis? In your critique, carefully answer the following two questions. First, were appropriate methods used? In other words, did the author's approach to supporting the thesis make sense? Second, did the author employ the selected methods correctly? Did you discover any errors in the way he conducted his research?

*Evidence.* In your critique, answer the following questions: What evidence did the author present in support of the thesis? What are the strengths of the evidence presented by the author? What are the weaknesses of the evidence presented? On balance, how well did the author support the thesis?

*Evaluation.* In this section, summarize your evaluation of the article. Tell your readers several things. Who will benefit from reading this article? What will the benefit be? How important and extensive is that benefit? What is your evaluation of the article? What suggestions do you have for repeating this study or one like it? Your evaluation might begin like this:

Jacob-Chien and Dukes's article titled "Understanding Adolescent Work in Social and Behavioral Contexts" is an excellent presentation on measuring the effect of intensive work on a variety of social and behavior aspects of adolescence. They examine the weaknesses of several theoretical explanations that see adolescent work as a "useful control mechanism," while concluding that the current structure of work for teens "has become an unwholesome process in the personal growth of adolescents."

When writing this assignment, follow the directions for formats described in Chapter 3 of this manual. Ask your instructor for directions concerning the length of the paper, but in the absence of further directions, your paper should not exceed five pages (typed, double-spaced).

The sample article critique that follows (starting on page 187) was written by a student in Professor Johnson's Social Psychology class at the University of Central Oklahoma. As you read it, ask yourself how well this student followed the previously described guidelines.

## SAMPLE ARTICLE CRITIQUE

Critique

of

Johnson, J. D., N. E. Noel and J. Sutter-Hernandez. 2000. "Alcohol and Male Acceptance of Sexual Aggression: The Role of Perceptual Ambiguity."

*Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 30(6):1186-1200.

by

Nancy K. Hamilton

for

Social Psychology 2303

Section 105

Professor William A. Johnson, Jr., Ph.D.

University of Central Oklahoma

October 10, 2000

## SAMPLE ARTICLE CRITIQUE (CONT.)

## THESIS

Studies have established that alcohol use disrupts cognitive functions, and the fact that alcohol intoxication is a factor in a significant proportion of "date rape" incidents has also been well established by prior research. This study attempts to document the relationship between the level of alcohol consumption and male acceptance of sexual aggression.

The researchers examined how the interpretation of subtle versus explicit behavioral cues, as related to perceived sexual intent, is impacted by blood alcohol level. In this study, it was expected that the effects of alcohol consumption would be moderated by the behavior of the female (i.e., that when the female appeared receptive to the sexual advances, intoxicated male subjects would consider sexual aggression to be more acceptable than would sober subjects). If the thesis were correct, sexual aggression would be unacceptable even to intoxicated subjects, provided the female's behavior indicated a clear and consistent message of disinterest.

## METHODS

Researchers recruited 118 volunteers through posters and class announcements at a medium-sized Southeastern state university. The study participants included university staff and students, students' friends, and students' relatives. The study excluded those volunteers with self-reported alcohol/drug problems, alcohol-related arrests (other than one charge of DUI), and those with significant medical or psychiatric problems. Study participants were tested for blood alcohol level (BAL) at the beginning of the session, and only those with an initial BAL of 0.00 percent were included in the study results. To minimize the probability of "demand bias," participants were told the experiment was intended to measure the effect of alcohol on visual acuity and social perceptions.

Subjects were given one of four beverages on the basis of random selection. Those in the control group got ice water, and knew they were part of the control

## SAMPLE ARTICLE CRITIQUE (CONT.)

group. The placebo group got tonic water with 0.08-ml alcohol/kg body weight. The low-dose group got 0.33-ml alcohol/kg body weight, and the moderate-dose group got 0.75-ml alcohol/kg body weight. Drinks were served in such a way that participants other than those in the control group did not know what dosage they had received. Subjects were given 20 minutes to consume the beverage and then spent 25 minutes completing a visual-acuity task. Then the subjects were asked to participate in two social perception experiments, one of which was the videotaped interaction of a male/female couple at the beginning of a "blind date." Subjects were shown two interactions, one in which the female was enthusiastic about the upcoming date, touched the male's arm, and laughed extensively, and one in which the female maintained a rigid posture, frequently checked her watch, and reminded the male of her need to end the date at the prescribed time. Both sequences ended as the couple left for the movies. Participants were then asked three questions: Should the man try to have sex with the woman, even if it means using force? Would you try to have sex with the woman, even if it meant using force? How responsible would the female be if the male forced her to have sex? Responses to the third question were rated on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (not responsible at all) to 9 (totally responsible).

The authors of this study were diligent in structuring the experiment in a way that minimized unintended influences: (1) Care was taken to ensure that participants were not influenced by their own or the researchers' expectations; (2) there were clear distinctions between the behaviors exhibited by the females in the two scenarios; and (3) variations in the experimental treatments (alcohol dosage) were consistent across experimental groups.

## EVIDENCE

Researchers found a strong positive correlation between increased alcohol consumption, acceptance of sexual aggression, and attribution of responsibility to the female. As expected, study participants consistently rejected sexual aggression



## SAMPLE ARTICLE CRITIQUE (CONT.)

toward the female in the unreceptive scenario, but accepted sexual aggression toward the female in the receptive scenario, and were more accepting of that aggression as they become more intoxicated. Responsibility for the aggression was assigned to the female in the receptive scenario and to the male in the unreceptive scenario. These findings supported the thesis that unambiguous behavioral cues would be recognized and accepted even when the males were intoxicated, but that in a state of intoxication the males would attend to the most obvious behavioral cues and be more inclined to disregard other inhibitory cues (such as legal and moral sanctions against sexual aggression).

Participants' responses to the three questions indicated that BAL and the acceptance of sexual aggression increased in tandem, as did the attribution of female responsibility for the aggression, and those responses support the thesis of the experiment.

## EVALUATION

This study is valuable to anyone who has occasion to be in social situations where alcohol consumption occurs. We know that males are influenced by the effects of alcohol in their interpretation of female behavior that appears to be sexually receptive. Consequently, women need a clear understanding of how their actions may be perceived and interpreted by male companions who are under the influence of alcohol. In the end, when a woman says "no," that should always mean "no." However, it is important to understand that this message can be obscured in a haze of intoxication from alcohol.

In continuing the pursuit of this and related research, it would be instructive to see if these findings apply across broader economic and educational lines, and to study how female intoxication impacts the perception of sexual aggression and the attribution of responsibility for that aggression.

## 10.3 LITERATURE REVIEWS

Your goal in writing a research paper is to provide your readers an opportunity to increase their understanding of the subject you are addressing. They will want the most current and precise information available. Whether you are writing a traditional library research paper, conducting an experiment or survey, doing an observational study, or preparing an analysis of a policy enforced by a social service agency, you must know what has already been learned in order to give your readers comprehensive and up-to-date information or to add something new to what is already known about the subject. For example, if your topic is how marital satisfaction is influenced by sex, you will need to survey the professional journals to discover what is already known about this subject. When you seek this information, you will be conducting a literature review, a thoughtful collection and analysis of available information on the topic you have selected for study. It tells you, before you begin your experiments or analyses, what is already known in this area.

Why do you need to conduct a literature review? It would be embarrassing to spend a lot of time and effort preparing a study, only to find that the information you are seeking has already been discovered by someone else. Also, a properly conducted literature review will tell you many things about a particular subject. It will tell you the extent of current knowledge, sources of data for your research, examples of what is not known about the subject (which generates ideas for formulating hypotheses), methods that have been used for research, and clear definitions of concepts relevant to your own research.

Let us consider an example. Suppose you are enrolled in a political sociology class and have been assigned to research the question: "How are voter attitudes affected by negative advertising?" First, you will need to establish a clear definition of "negative advertising," then find a way to measure attitudes of voters, and finally use or develop a method of discerning how attitudes are affected by advertising. Using research techniques explained in this and other chapters of this manual, you should begin your research by looking for studies that address your research question or similar questions at the library, on the Internet, and through other resources. You will discover that many studies have been written on voters' attitudes and the effects of advertising. As you read these studies, certain patterns will appear. Some research methods will appear to have produced better results than others. Some studies will be quoted in others many times—some confirming and others refuting what previous studies have done. You will constantly be making choices as you examine these studies, reading very carefully ones that are highly relevant to your purposes, and skimming those of only marginal interest. As you read, constantly ask yourself the following questions:

- How much is known about this subject?
- What is the best available information, and why is it better than other information?
- What research methods have been used successfully in relevant studies?
- What are the possible sources of data for further investigation of this topic?

- What important information is still unknown, in spite of previous research?
- Of the methods that have been used for research, which are the most effective for making new discoveries? Are new methods needed?
- How can the concepts being researched be more precisely defined?

You will find that this process, like the research process as a whole, is recursive: Insights related to one of the above questions will spark new investigations into others; these investigations will then bring up a new set of questions, and so on.

Literature reviews can be either a complete product or part of a larger, more comprehensive creation. For example, your instructor may request that you include a literature review as a section of the paper you are writing. Your written literature review may be from one to several pages in length. It should tell the reader the following:

- The best available information on the selected topic from previously compiled or published studies, articles, or other documents
- What these studies conclude about the topic
- The apparent methodological strengths and weaknesses of these studies
- What remains to be discovered about the topic
- What appear to be, according to these studies, the most effective methods for developing new information on the topic

Your literature review should consist of a written narrative that answers, not necessarily consecutively, the above questions. The success of your own research project depends in large part on the extent to which you have carefully and thoughtfully answered these questions.

The following example is extracted from a student research paper submitted in Professor Johnson's Sociological Research and Statistics class. This review is designed to assess the available information on marital satisfaction as it relates to several potentially influential variables: age, sex, number of children, number of years married, and extramarital affairs. It is a portion of a research paper like the review described in the Survey-Based Quantitative Research Papers section in Chapter 11. While some reviews are meant to be extensive in their survey of the topic and to stand alone, this model presents the information as succinctly as possible in one section of a research paper. Some instructors refer to this shorter, more concise presentation as "article format."

This sample literature review also models the ASA citation system described in Chapter 4 and the headings/subheadings format described in Chapter 3. When writing this assignment you should follow the guidelines outlined in these two chapters. Ask your instructor for directions concerning the length of the paper. Depending on the type of review you are writing, the length can vary greatly. If your review is an assignment that stands alone, your instructor may wish you to include a title page like the one with the following sample review (starting on page 193).

### SAMPLE LITERATURE REVIEW

Marital Satisfaction:  
A Review of the Literature

by

LaKrista Evans

for

Sociology of the Family 3303

Section 5635

Professor Maria Juarez

Colorado State University

November 15, 2001

## SAMPLE LITERATURE REVIEW (CONT.)

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*Age*

While early research found little or no association between age and marital satisfaction, more current research has concluded otherwise (Stephenson 1988; Trimble 1978; Tucker and O'Grady 1991). Tucker and O'Grady (1991) suggest that the younger the individual (especially under twenty years of age), the lower the marital satisfaction and the higher the likelihood of divorce. Stephenson (1988) reports that women's marital satisfaction may decline as they age, but that men's satisfaction increases. This may be the result of society's tendency to view female aging as negative, while aging men are often considered to have become more sophisticated.

In addition, Trimble (1978) believes that individuals going through the so-called midlife crisis often experience a loss of intimacy that results in marital dissatisfaction. According to Trimble (1978:107), around the age of forty "men and women may experience a kind of alienation from each other. This in turn produces a crisis in the marriage that sometimes ends in divorce."

*Sex*

Some studies disclose little difference between the sexes in rates of marital happiness (Rowers 1991; Gorman 1992), while others reveal that women have higher dissatisfaction rates than men (Dion and Dion 1993; Stephenson 1988). This may be due to the increasing independence of women as they enter into the workforce, become financially secure, and establish a larger pool of eligibles. In addition, different expectations about communication often create a strong barrier to a successful marriage. For example, women tend to discuss feelings and their relationships, while men would prefer to avoid these issues (Satran 1995). Satran (1995:92) observes that "the happiest couples speak each other's language." Whatever the reasons may be, women seem to be more dissatisfied with

## SAMPLE LITERATURE REVIEW (CONT.)

the actual degree of intimacy (Dion and Dion 1993). In addition, men tend to perceive their marriage as having more psychological and physical benefits than women do (Campbell 1989; Dion and Dion 1993; Fowers 1991).

*Number of Children*

The large majority of professional literature agrees that the transition to parenthood affects marital satisfaction (Abbey et al. 1994; Campbell 1989; Hunt 1995; Kephart and Jedlicka 1991; Levy-Skiff 1994; Lewis 1989; Stephenson 1988; Turner and Helms 1994). Although some research concludes otherwise, most believe children cause a decrease in marital happiness (Lewis 1989; Turner and Helms 1994). Usually this unhappiness is greater among women, probably due to the added responsibilities. This unhappiness increases if the husband does little to help out with the added responsibilities (Abbey, Andrews, and Halman 1994; Hunt 1995; Levy-Skiff 1994).

While Stephenson (1988) points out that no consistent findings have determined whether the actual number of children affects marital satisfaction, one might assume that as the number of children increases, added responsibilities, especially for the wife, increase as well. This in turn would create a deficiency in intimate relations, which could then lead to a decrease in marital satisfaction.

*Number of Years Married*

There are fewer studies concerned with length of marriage and its association with overall marital satisfaction. Of those assessing the impact of this variable, most agree that marital satisfaction tends to decline with time (Brinkerhoff and White 1991; Glenn 1993; Stephenson 1988). This could be a direct result of a lack of intimacy as the marriage progresses; it has consistently been found that the frequency of sexual intercourse declines steadily after the first year of marriage (Brinkerhoff and White 1991). In contrast to the above conclusion, Glenn (1993)



## SAMPLE LITERATURE REVIEW (CONT.)

found that while women's satisfaction decreases with the length of marriage, men's satisfaction actually increases.

*Extramarital Affairs*

Kinsey and many other researchers agree that approximately 50 percent of males and 25 percent of females have engaged in extramarital sexual behavior at least once (Libby and Whitehurst 1977; Turner and Helms 1994). Whipple and White (1995) claim that more recent surveys indicate about 60 percent of men and 50 percent of women have been involved in this behavior.

Many researchers believe that extramarital affairs are highly associated with low marital satisfaction (Kinder and Cowan 1989; Libby and Whitehurst 1977; Pittman 1993; Turner and Helms 1994). But Pittman (1993) has observed some marriages as being stable and happy before the affair, with the rate of dissatisfaction in the marriage occurring after the affair begins. "The decision that they were not in love with their marriage partner was an effort to explain and justify their behavior" (Pittman 1993:36). However, most researchers agree that, in the majority of cases, a low degree of marital satisfaction precedes an extramarital affair.

## 10.4 ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES

10.4.1 *What Is an Annotated Bibliography?*

A bibliography is, simply, a listing of written items—essays, reviews, books—that share one or more important characteristics: They were all written by the same author, perhaps, or they all deal with the work of a particular author or else focus on a particular field of study. The sort of annotated bibliography we will be dealing with in this chapter is a listing and brief description of articles, books, or other sources on a given topic. Depending on the uses for which it is intended, the annotated bibliography may be organized in various ways. For example, if the purpose of the bibliography is to chart the growth and development of critical interest in its topic, then the listed items may appear in chronological order according to the dates when they were first published. Most frequently, however, the items listed in an annotated bibliography are simply organized alphabetically, each one placed either by the last name of its author or, if no author's name is available, by the first important word in its title.

There are usually two components to each item in an annotated bibliography:

1. The bibliographical citation, using one of the standard citation systems, such as the MLA system or the ASA system described in Chapter 4
2. The annotation, a brief description or summary (usually 100 to 250 words) of the contents of the source

Sometimes the annotation attempts to be strictly objective in nature, meaning that it only describes the contents and purpose of the source without offering an opinion as to its quality. Scholars in some disciplines refer to this type of objective annotation as an *abstract*. Another type of annotation offers a brief assessment or appraisal of the source in addition to a description. We'll call this type an *evaluative annotation*.

Annotated bibliographies are usually limited to a specific theme, area, topic, or discipline. Taken together, the annotations provide a lucid and balanced account or synopsis of the state of research on its subject.

10.4.2 *Why Write an Annotated Bibliography?*

The purpose for writing an annotated bibliography can differ with the audience and the assignment. It might be a project in a course you are taking or a requirement for research in the organization or agency for which you work. (Your supervisor or colleagues may wish to know more about a particular topic.) Depending on the assignment, the annotated bibliography may serve a number of purposes, such as the following:

- To review the literature on a particular subject
- To illustrate the quality of your research

- To give your research historical perspective
- To illustrate the types of sources available in a given area
- To describe other items relating to a topic of interest to the reader
- To explore a particular subject for further research

#### 10.4.3 Who Uses Annotated Bibliographies?

One of the great benefits of an annotated bibliography is that it saves time for those who consult it. Since extensive and scholarly annotated bibliographies provide a comprehensive overview of material published on a topic, they can give both researchers and practitioners a swift impression of the types of research already conducted on that topic, as well as a notion of the types of research left to do. An annotated bibliography can make researchers aware of articles or books they should read to advance their own research. Practitioners can scrutinize annotated bibliographies rapidly in order to see what new research their colleagues have conducted or what new practices have been developed in their fields and whether it would be worth their time to locate and read the entire article or book annotated.

But there is another important use for annotated bibliographies written by students. There are few ways of developing the descriptive and analytical skills needed in most scholarly disciplines more effectively than by compiling and writing an annotated bibliography. By summarizing and evaluating articles on a particular topic you are both learning valuable information about that topic and gaining confidence in assimilating and connecting facts the way scholars do. You are learning mastery of the material and the mental processes that comprise your discipline.

#### 10.4.4 What Is the Content of an Annotated Bibliography?

The specific structure and approach to writing an annotated bibliography may vary with the professional community for which you are writing it. For example, in some situations an annotated bibliography may have an introductory paragraph or two in order to define its audience, purpose, rationale, and topic. In other situations, it may not. Here are a list and description of the most commonly found elements of an annotated bibliography:

*Introduction.* In addition to defining your audience and expressing your purpose, your introduction should also describe the scope of your bibliography (the specific areas or types of works upon which you are focusing) and explain the reasons why you have limited your exploration to these parameters. It is also important to let your reader know clearly what kind of annotations you are providing, whether objective or evaluative. If you say your annotations are objective, then you are telling your reader that every opinion or theory expressed in each annotation belongs to the source and its author. If, however, the annotation is

evaluative, then at least some of the material in it expresses *your* opinion about the quality of the source, an opinion that the writer might not share. You must not let your reader think that every opinion or theory expressed in the annotation belongs to the source when, in fact, that is not the case.

*Citations.* Like a regular (unannotated) bibliography or a works cited page at the end of a research paper, an annotated bibliography provides a full bibliographic entry for each source it lists. Make sure you follow a bibliographical format approved by your instructor or by the publication for which you are writing. Chapter 4 of this manual gives guidelines for the ASA system of bibliography.

*Annotations.* For most annotated bibliographies, the annotations should be one or two paragraphs that together range from about 100 to 250 words. To some extent the conventions of the professional community in which you are writing will dictate the contents of your annotations, as well as your specific purpose and audience. If you are writing your annotated bibliography for a course, your instructor will provide guidelines. It can be helpful to your reader for you to establish a consistent form for your annotations, perhaps beginning each time with a clear statement of the source's thesis, then a brief description of the argument used to prove or justify that thesis, followed, if required, by your evaluation of the work's value and achievement.

*To quote or not to quote?* How much of your annotation should be direct quoting as opposed to your own wording? This is an important question to address, and one whose answer depends to a large extent on the uses you project for your bibliography. Importing the thesis sentence directly from the source, for example, may help you to be accurate about the source's purpose—but it may also establish a tone or a level of complex reasoning that the rest of a brief annotation cannot sustain. You do not want to give the impression that you are merely pasting together passages from the source without having thoroughly understood them yourself. Remember: While the style and tone of the source belong to the source's author, the style and tone of the annotation belong to you. You want your annotation, though it is small, to have the coherence and confidence of a well-made paragraph.

Depending on your project or assignment, your annotations may provide one or more of the following:

*Summation.* As stated above, while *some* annotations offer evaluative comments, *most* annotations summarize the source. Here is a tip about summarizing: Although it is logical, when summarizing, to ask yourself what the source is about, it is rarely a good gambit to begin a brief annotation with the phrase, "This source is about. . . ." Why not? Because a sentence beginning with these words cannot help but end with a generalization about the source's subject that will be vaguer than a simple restatement of the source's thesis.

Here are introductory sentences from two objective annotations of the same source. Which sentence more effectively sets up the rest of the annotation?

Rafelson's article is about racial profiling and how it is misused in school counseling programs.

Rafelson argues that racial profiling should be prohibited in school counseling programs because it results in preferential treatment for certain minorities at the expense of others.

Sentence one establishes the *topic* of the source, but sentence two establishes the *thesis*, which is a more comprehensive and necessary task.

After relating the thesis of the source, you might describe such elements as methodology, results, and conclusions. The required length of the annotations will determine how detailed your summary should be.

**Evaluation.** Your assignment may require you to include a brief critique or appraisal in each annotation. If you are writing evaluative annotations, ask yourself the following questions: What is the overall goal of this source? Does the source achieve its goal? Do you find the contents of the source useful in relation to your own research? How does the source compare with other sources in your bibliography? Is the information reliable? How biased is it?

**Reflection.** If you are compiling this annotated bibliography in order to facilitate your own research project, you will probably want to examine the perspective taken in each source to ascertain how it fits into your research on the topic. The perspective could be a political one (liberal or conservative), a subject-matter perspective (sociological, psychological, medical, and so on), or some other perspective. It might help to point out similarities or contradictions between sources. For example, you might say, "Like Munson, Eversol approaches racial profiling from a sociological perspective. However, while Munson focuses on how law enforcement has used racial profiling to increase the probability of arrests, Eversol analyzes the practice of businesses profiling blacks to apprehend shoplifters." You might then want to reflect on how this source has changed how you think about your topic and how it fits into your research project.

The following sample short-version annotated bibliography (on page 201) is fictitious. It describes articles that might be written on racial profiling. The annotations in this example are like abstracts, since they are summative and contain no evaluative component.

Pages 202–203 show longer, abstract-type annotations for the same sample articles.

### SAMPLE 1: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

#### Annotated Bibliography

##### Racial Profiling

Jones, William B. 2003. "Targeting Blacks in Shoplifting Surveillance: Unjust and Inaccurate." *Social Issues* 26(2):37–45.

Jones argues that while racial profiling of shoplifters by major department stores is an unjust practice, the process also fails to target those most likely to shoplift. No data exists that supports the probability that blacks are more likely to shoplift than other racial groups. Targeting blacks in surveillance procedures only increases the opportunity to catch those blacks that shoplift and improves the chances of success for whites that shoplift.

Monroe, Victor G. 2003. "Using Racial Profiling to Impede the Trafficking of Illicit Drugs." *Drug Enforcement Bulletin*, August 14, pp. 42–45.

Using racial profiling to impede drug trafficking, contends Monroe, is not a good way to decrease the flow of illicit drugs in the United States. Race should never be a factor in probable cause, and the harm done from this practice far outweighs any perceived benefit. He supports applying legal sanctions to those practicing racial profiling to catch drug traffickers.

Arnold, Eugene H. 2003. "Terrorism and Racial Profiling." *Journal of International Terrorism* 17(3):510–518.

Arnold believes that the use of racial profiling to help control terrorist activities is both justified and necessary. Applying a random intervention policy wastes precious time investigating those with little potential for terrorism, while allowing those most likely to put others in harm's way—Middle Eastern, Muslim males between fifteen and twenty-nine years of age—to avoid careful examination.

## SAMPLE 2: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

**Annotated Bibliography****Racial Profiling**

Jones, William B. 2003. "Targeting Blacks in Shoplifting Surveillance: Unjust and Inaccurate." *Social Issues* 26(2):37-45.

Jones argues that while racial profiling of shoplifters by major department stores is an unjust practice, the process also fails to target those most likely to shoplift. No data exists that supports the probability that blacks are more likely to shoplift than other racial groups. Targeting blacks in surveillance procedures only increases the opportunity to catch those blacks that shoplift and improves the chances of success for whites that shoplift. Jones takes issue with Elsner and Squires, whose study, published in the June 2002 *Journal of Crime and Criminology*, supports racial profiling on the basis of its cost-effectiveness. While Jones concedes that targeting a single race reduces the cost to businesses by allowing them to streamline their security operations, he argues that this cost-effectiveness is offset by the increase in white shoplifting. Instead of using racial profiling, Jones recommends that businesses invest in more extensive human-relations training for security personnel.

Monroe, Victor G. 2003. "Using Racial Profiling to Impede the Trafficking of Illicit Drugs." *Drug Enforcement Bulletin*, August 14, pp. 42-45.

Using racial profiling to impede drug trafficking, contends Monroe, is not a good way to decrease the flow of illicit drugs in the United States. Race should never be a factor in probable cause, and the harm done from this practice far outweighs any perceived benefit. Monroe supports this argument by discussing recent, disastrous attempts of government agencies in six different countries to base a drug interdiction policy on data regarding race. While two of the six

## SAMPLE 2: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY (CONT.)

countries, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, reported a slight drop in the importation of marijuana and cocaine during their interdiction campaigns, all six of the countries eventually abandoned racial profiling for two reasons: The legal tangle it caused in the courts and the negative effect such profiling had on race relations within each country. Monroe provides information charting the effects of racially based drug policing programs on morale and social and economic development among minority populations in the United States. A former state attorney-general, Monroe concludes with an argument supporting the application of legal sanctions against those practicing racial profiling to catch drug traffickers.

Arnold, Eugene H. 2003. "Terrorism and Racial Profiling." *Journal of International Terrorism* 17(3):510-518.

Arnold believes that the use of racial profiling to help control terrorist activities is both justified and necessary. Applying a random intervention policy wastes precious time by focusing on those with little potential for terrorism, while allowing those most likely to put others in harm's way—Middle Eastern, Muslim males between fifteen and twenty-nine years of age—to avoid careful examination. Arnold constructs a three-part defense of his position, establishing first the legal argument for racially geared antiterrorist policies, then the economic argument, and, finally, what he calls the moral argument. Borrowing heavily on scripture from both the Old Testament and the Koran in the last third of the article, Arnold defines a religious imperative for racial profiling that, he admits, will not be to everyone's taste but that may provide direction and control for a problem that threatens to spiral out of control.