

**TABLE 1.1** Three Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

Theoretical Perspective	Usual Level of Analysis	Focus of Analysis	Key Terms	Applying the Perspective to the U.S. Divorce Rate
<b>Symbolic Interactionism</b>	Microsociological: examines small-scale patterns of social interaction	Face-to-face interaction, how people use symbols to create social life	Symbols Interaction Meanings Definitions	Industrialization and urbanization changed marital roles and led to a redefinition of love, marriage, children, and divorce.
<b>Functional Analysis</b> (also called functionalism and structural functionalism)	Macrosociological: examines large-scale patterns of society	Relationships among the parts of society; how these parts are functional (have beneficial consequences) or dysfunctional (have negative consequences)	Structure Functions (manifest and latent) Dysfunctions Equilibrium	As social change erodes the traditional functions of the family, family ties weaken, and the divorce rate increases.
<b>Conflict Theory</b>	Macrosociological: examines large-scale patterns of society	The struggle for scarce resources by groups in a society; how the elites use their power to control the weaker groups	Inequality Power Conflict Competition Exploitation	When men control economic life, the divorce rate is low because women find few alternatives to a bad marriage. The high divorce rate reflects a shift in the balance of power between men and women.

Source: By the author.

## 2. Defining the Problem

The second step is to define the problem, to specify what you want to learn about the topic. My interest in the homeless grew until I wanted to learn about homelessness across the nation. Ordinarily, sociologists' interests are much more focused than this; they examine some specific aspect of a topic, such as how homeless people survive on the streets. In the case of spouse abuse, sociologists may want to know whether violent and nonviolent husbands have different work experiences. Or they may want to learn what can be done to reduce spouse abuse.

## 3. Reviewing the Literature

You must read what has been published on your topic. This helps you to narrow the problem, identify areas that are already known, and learn what areas need to be researched. Reviewing the literature may also help you to pinpoint the questions that you will ask. You might even find out that the question has been answered already. You don't want to waste your time rediscovering what is already known.

## 4. Formulating a Hypothesis

The fourth step is to formulate a **hypothesis**, a statement of what you expect to find according to predictions from a theory. A hypothesis predicts a relationship between or among variables, factors that change, or vary, from one person or situation to another. For example, the statement "Men who are more socially isolated are likelier to abuse their wives than men who are more socially integrated" is a hypothesis.

Your hypothesis will need **operational definitions**—that is, precise ways to measure the variables. In this example, you would need operational definitions for three variables: social isolation, social integration, and spouse abuse.

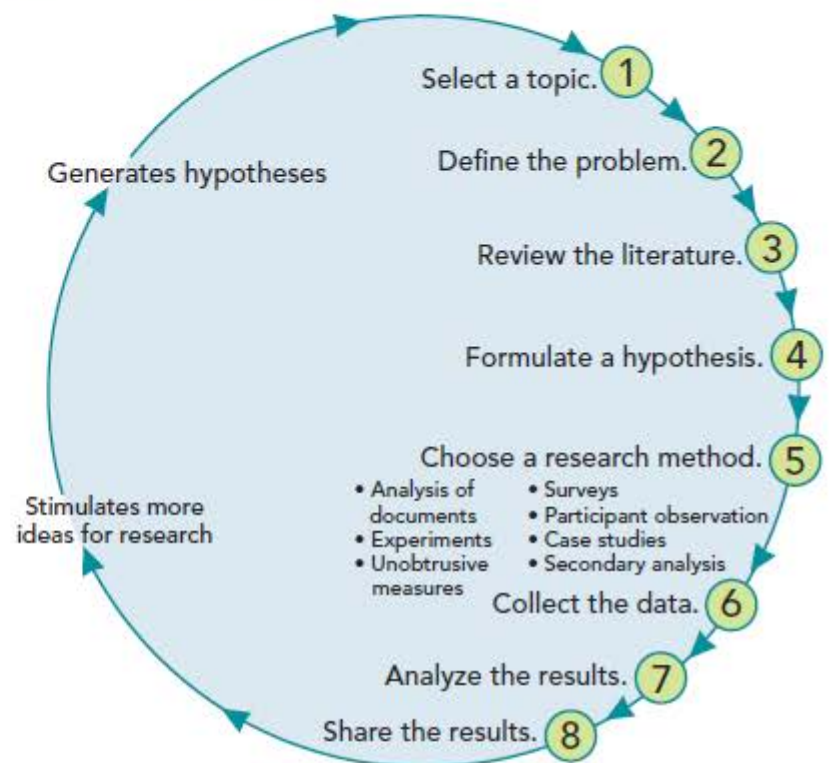
## 5. Choosing a Research Method

You then need to decide how you are going to collect your data. Sociologists use seven basic research methods (or *research designs*), which are outlined in the next section. You will want to choose the research method that will best answer your particular questions.

## 6. Collecting the Data

When you gather your data, you have to take care to assure their **validity**; that is, your operational definitions must measure what they are intended to measure. In this case, you must be certain that your scales are measuring social isolation, social

**FIGURE 1.6** The Research Model



Source: Adapted from Figure 2.2 of Schaefer 1989.

**hypothesis** a statement of how variables are expected to be related to one another, often according to predictions from a theory

**variable** a factor thought to be significant for human behavior, which can vary (or change) from one case to another

**operational definition** the way in which a researcher measures a variable