

Case 2

Using a Sample of Convenience¹

Problem: Professors often use samples of college students as participants in their research because they are convenient. Using such samples can be problematic.

An Example: A researcher was interested in women's preferences for married names (*traditional*—taking the husbands' surnames and *nontraditional*—retaining their surnames or hyphenating the two surnames). The researchers surveyed 150 unmarried women students enrolled in an introductory psychology course. They asked the women to indicate what they would do, assuming that their husbands had no opinion on the matter. They were told "If you have not thought much about this issue, please consider it now and give your opinion even if you are not 100% certain." They were also asked to give the reasons for their name choice. Almost 60% of the women chose to take the husband's name. In their conclusion, the researchers noted that "one of the most striking results of this study is many respondents' unquestioning attitudes toward" taking the husband's surname as indicated by the fact that many gave responses such as "I don't know, I guess it's tradition," or simply writing the word "tradition" as their reason.

Your Opinions:

1. Because of the nature of the sample, this study provides information on what women *plan to do*. Do you think this is as interesting as gathering information on what a sample of married women have done? Explain.
2. The researchers apparently suspected that some participants in this sample may not have given the issue much thought before participating in the study and might not be certain of their opinion. In light of this, would it have been interesting to have the students rate the degree of certainty they had in their answers? Explain.
3. What is your opinion on having the women assume their husbands had no opinion? (Note that because of the nature of the sample, the researchers either needed to provide an assumption on this matter or allow the participants to make their own assumptions.)
4. Are you surprised by the "unquestioning attitudes toward name traditions"?

¹ Source/reference: Twenge, J. M. (1997). "Mrs. his name": Women's preferences for married names. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 21, 417-429.