Unobtrusive Research
Unobtrusive Methods

- Measuring behavior without intruding on a situation; includes observing public behavior and analyzing content or archival data.
Benefits

- **High external validity:** Real people behaving in their natural habitats
- **Low bias:** Subject motives not an issue
- **Ethically sound:** Minimal intrusion means few ethical concerns
- **Fun and interesting:** Real-world behavior is rarely boring
Ground Rules

- Don’t interact with the humans!
  - No online chatting
  - No surveys
- Any observed behavior must be public
- Any manipulation must be:
  - Harmless
  - Non-deceptive (e.g., no fake Craigslist ads)
The Sunshine-Altruism Relationship: The Negative Correlation and Why Houston Is So Selfish

- Sunnier U.S. cities have lower ratios of found items to lost items posted on Craigslist.
Marrying a Younger Spouse: The Secret to Longevity?

- Male billionaires with younger wives live longer
Females with longer hair are more likely to be in relationships with males and more likely to have males in their Facebook profile pictures.
Golden Balls: Impacts on Behavior in the Prisoner’s Dilemma

- In a prisoner’s dilemma game, people cooperate less when the stakes are high.
- Older people cooperate more.

**Decisions depending on Jackpot (1)**

- c/c: 0%, 20,000%, 40,000%
- d/c: 40,000%, 60,000%
- d/d: <10000: 20,000%, >10000: 40,000%

**Decisions depending on Age**

- Split: 35+: 60,000%, 35-: 40,000%
- Steal: 35+: 80,000%, 35-: 60,000%
Work Those Angles!: How Angling One’s Face in Photos Affects Perceived Attractiveness

- For females, but not for males, having a more angled picture is related to higher attractiveness ratings.
Analyzed emotional content of student newspaper articles at three cold and three warm schools using LIWC

- Emotional content fluctuates with temperature at cold schools, but not at warm schools
Left a donation box for people to donate to an eye cancer charity
Used different kinds of eyes
Hostile eyes: Not so good for eliciting donations
Facebook relationships are asymmetrical among high school friends attending lower vs. higher ranking colleges. The ones at lower rankings schools are more likely to post on the walls of their friends at higher ranking schools.
Project Proposals

- Due March 9 at 5 p.m. in the drop box
- What to include in your 2-3 pages:
  - Background info/theoretical motivation
  - Hypothesis
  - Method
  - Predicted results and implications
  - Backup proposal
- Do not begin collecting data until you have received approval
For more information

- In “Section Materials” on the course website:
  - Brief Tour of Unobtrusive Methods
  - Guidelines for Project Proposals
  - All the award-winning papers from last year