Chapter 6
Exercises Using 1975, 1982, 1989, 1996, 2002, 2004 and 2010 Subsets of the General Social Survey to Analyze Change Over Time

Note to the instructor: The data set used in this exercise is gss_10_04_02_96_89_82_75.por which consists of subsets of the 2010, 2004, 2002, 1996, 1989, 1982, 1975 General Social Surveys. (Some of the variables in the GSS have been recoded to make them easier to use and some new variables have been created.) This exercise uses RECODE and CROSSTABS in IBM SPSS to explore the relationships among variables. In CROSSTABS, students are asked to use percentages, chi square, and an appropriate measure of association. A good reference on using SPSS is IBM SPSS for Windows Version 19 A Basic Tutorial by Linda Fiddler, Laura Hecht, Edward Nelson, Elizabeth Nelson, and Jim Ross. To order this book, call McGraw-Hill at 1-800-338-3987. The ISBN is 0-07-804018-7. You have permission to use this exercise and to revise it to fit your needs. Please send a copy of any revision to the authors.

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These exercises will compare seven cross-sectional surveys to analyze change over time. The exercises should be used with the accompanying codebook. Not all variables are available at all points in time. The codebook indicates which variables are available in which years. There is a variable called YEAR which indicates which year the data are from. The surveys in 1975, 1982, 1989, and 1996 were selected because they were seven years apart and contained basically the same variables. There

was no GSS survey in 2003, but there were surveys in 2002 and 2004. We suggest merging the 2002 and 2004 surveys and treating the merged sample as if it was the 2003 survey for the purpose of these exercises. The 2010 survey would then be seven years after the merged 2002 and 2004 surveys representing 2003.

1. Seven variables focus on people's feelings about abortion: ABANY, ABDEFECT, ABHLTH, ABNOMORE, ABPOOR, ABRAPE, ABSINGLE. Each question asks respondents if they think a woman ought to be able to obtain a legal abortion under varying circumstances. Choose one of these variables to analyze change over time. (ABANY is not available for 1975.)

   What percent favor and oppose abortion for your variable in 1975? 1982? 1989? 1996? 2003? 2010? We'll need to use crosstabulation to get these figures. You will have to crosstabulate your variable by YEAR to do this. Be sure to ask for the column percents and chi square. What does chi square tell you about the difference between these percentages? To combine the 2002 and 2004 surveys and treat the combined years as the equivalent to a 2003 survey, you will have to recode YEAR to combine 2002 and 2004 and then label it as 2003.)

   We want to discover which types of people are more likely to change. Let's start by asking if men or women are more likely to change. You will have to crosstabulate the abortion variable by YEAR by sex, asking for the column percents and chi square. Write a short paragraph describing changes for men and for women. Be sure to cite the appropriate percent differences and use chi square in your analysis.

   Now, find out if younger, middle-aged, or older respondents are more likely to change and if those with less education are more likely to change than those with more education. You'll need to recode age and education before running the crosstabs. Another possibility is to use the recodes we included in the data set (AGE1, AGE2, ECUC1). You could also use DEGREE which does not have to recoded. Write a short paragraph describing the results.

2. Several variables measure the amount of confidence the respondent has in the major institutions of our society. These include the military, big business, organized

religion, education, the Executive Branch of the Federal Government, Congress, the press, and others. These variables all start with CON and there are thirteen of them.

Choose one of these variables that you want to analyze over time. Crosstabulate your variable by YEAR and describe the changes that have occurred over time. Be sure to use the column percents and chi square in your analysis.

Some people have more confidence in these institutions than others. Let's use political party preference (PARTYID) to divide respondents into Democrats, independents, and Republicans. You will have to recode PARTYID into three groups to do this. Combine strong and not strong Democrats into one group, combine strong and not strong Republicans into a second group and combine independents (near Democrat, near Republican, and independents) into a third group. When you recode, use recoding into different variables and call your recoded variable PARTYID1.

Now let's analyze change over time for Democrats, independents, and Republicans separately. Crosstabulate your variable by YEAR by political party preference and describe the changes separately for each group. Use the column percents and chi square to help you in your analysis. Have there been greater changes for Democrats? for Republicans? for independents? Have the changes been in the same direction for all three groups?

3. Three sets of questions ask respondents whether they are tolerant of people who hold unpopular viewpoints. One set of questions asks respondents if they would allow five different types of people to teach in a college or university (COLATH, COLCOM, COLHOMO, COLMIL, COLRAC). Another set asks respondents if a book written by these five different types of people should be allowed in the public library (LIBATH, LIBCOM, LIBHOMO, LIBMIL, LIBRAC). Still another set asks respondents if they should be allowed to make a public speech in their community (SPKATH, SPKCOM, SPKHOMO, SPKMIL, SPKRAC). The five groups of people are those who are against churches and religion, communists, homosexuals, people who advocate doing away with elections and letting the military run the country, and those who claim African-Americans are inferior.

These variables have been combined into five other variables that measure tolerance for atheists, communists, homosexuals, militarists, and racists. Each variable is the sum of the three variables from the larger set of variables. For example, tolerance for racists is the sum of COLRAC, LIBRAC, and SPKRAC. Since each variable is coded 1 and 2, where 1 is the tolerant response and 2 is the intolerant response, the new variable (called TOLRAC) will vary from 3 to 6. The value 3 means that the respondent would be tolerant of racists in all three scenarios, while the value 6 means that the respondent would not be tolerant of racists in any of the three scenarios. The values 4 and 5 would be intermediate values.

Crosstabulate TOLATH, TOLCOM, TOLHOM, TOLMIL, and TOLRAC by YEAR to see the changes that have occurred over time for tolerance. (These variables are not available for 1975.) Use the column percents and chi square in your analysis. Write a brief paragraph describing your results.

Who would you expect to be more tolerant-men or women? To find out, crosstabulate the tolerance variables by sex by YEAR. This will give you the percents you need to compare men and women for each of the years. Did you get the same results for each year? Were the differences between the figures for men and women about the same for each year or was there considerable variation from year to year?

4. Americans decide what types of social problems to spend money on. The General Social Survey includes a series of questions that ask respondents whether we are spending too much, too little, or about the right amount of money on a series of problems. These problems include foreign aid, the military, big cities, crime, drugs, education, the environment, welfare, health, mass transportation, parks and recreation, the conditions of African-Americans, highways and bridges, social security, and space exploration.

The General Social Survey includes two versions of most of these questions. All the spending variables start with NAT. The alternative version of each question ends with Y. For example, the questions on welfare are NATFARE and NATFAREY. NATFARE asks whether respondents think we are spending too much, too little, or about the right

amount of money on "welfare." NATFAREY substitutes "assistance to the poor" for "welfare" in the question. A few questions have only one version of the question (i.e., no version Y). For this exercise, we will be using the original version of each question (i.e., the one that does not end in Y).

Select one of the NAT variables and analyze the changes in opinion over time. Notice that a few of the NAT variables were not available in 1975 and 1982. Choose one of the NAT variables that was available in all time periods. Look at both the overall changes for the entire sample and the changes for subgroups (e.g., men and women, younger and older). Use chi square in your analysis. Write a brief report explaining what you did and describing the results. Include your tables in the report.