

Quantitative (statistical) data makes this relatively easy to compare differences between two or more things, (such as middle-class and working-class family size) . Alternatively, *cross-cultural* comparisons (crime rates in different countries, for example) are made possible through the use of quantitative data.

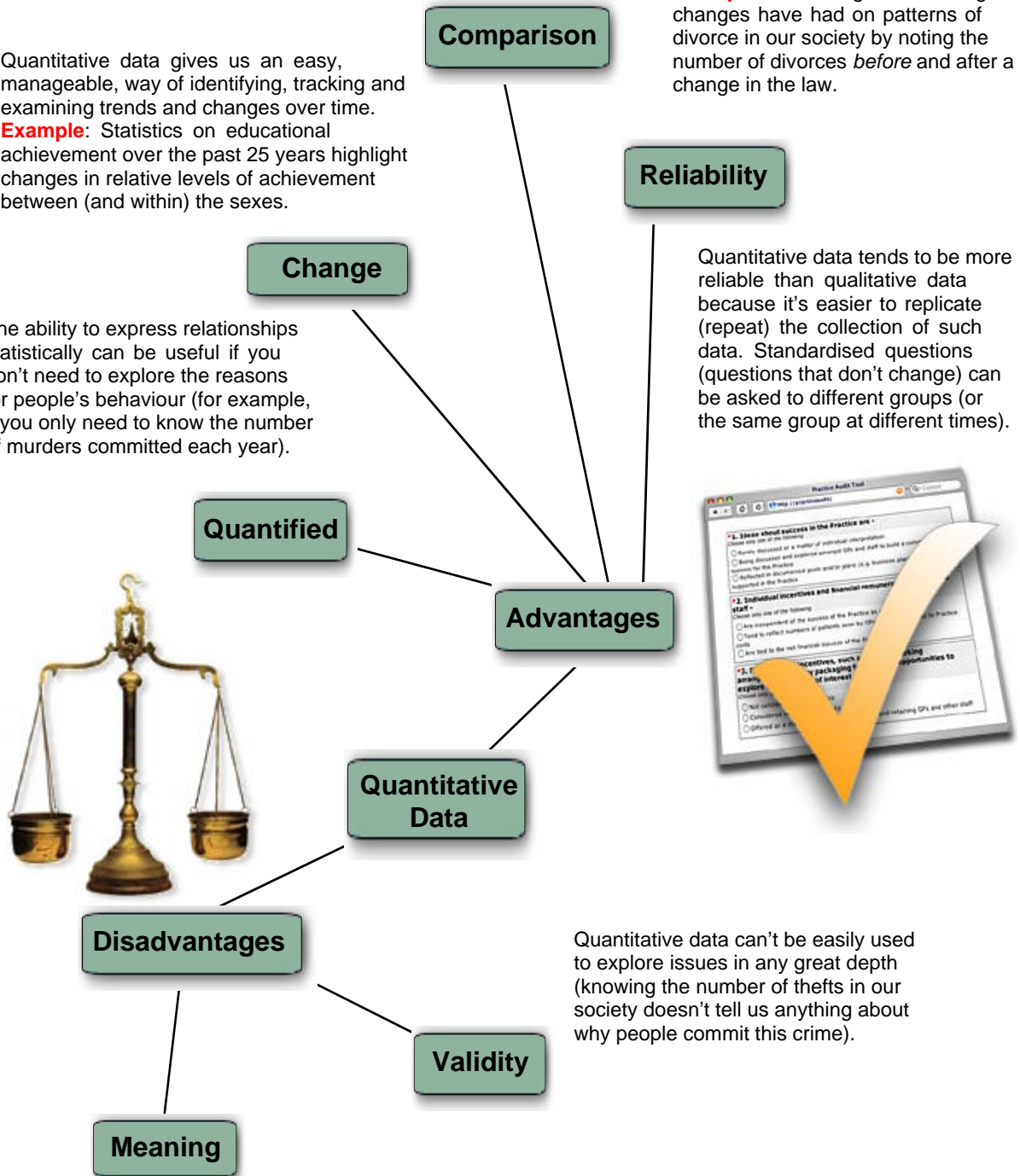
“Before” and “after” studies are a further type of comparison we can make using quantitative data.

**Example:** Examining the effect legal changes have had on patterns of divorce in our society by noting the number of divorces *before* and *after* a change in the law.

Quantitative data gives us an easy, manageable, way of identifying, tracking and examining trends and changes over time.

**Example:** Statistics on educational achievement over the past 25 years highlight changes in relative levels of achievement between (and within) the sexes.

The ability to express relationships statistically can be useful if you don't need to explore the reasons for people's behaviour (for example, if you only need to know the number of murders committed each year).



Quantitative data tends to be more reliable than qualitative data because it's easier to replicate (repeat) the collection of such data. Standardised questions (questions that don't change) can be asked to different groups (or the same group at different times).

Quantitative data can't be easily used to explore issues in any great depth (knowing the number of thefts in our society doesn't tell us anything about why people commit this crime).

Quantitative data isn't designed to tell sociologists about how people interpret and understand social behaviour; that is, in terms of the various meanings they give to both their own behaviour and that of others.

**Example:** While it might be possible to quantify “the fear of crime” (counting the percentage of people who fear being a victim, for example), this type of data tells us nothing about *why* people may fear victimisation.

