THIRD EDITION

SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches

W. Lawrence Neuman

SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE APPROACHES

THIRD EDITION

W. LAWRENCE NEUMAN
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To Diane, for service well beyond the call of duty, and to Tina and many other students who have an interest in research methods

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PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

This third edition of *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* continues to evolve from the same basic principles found in the first and second editions.

First, I want to reemphasize that I see both qualitative and quantitative techniques of investigation into the social world as valuable. I am equally wary of the qualitative researcher who automatically rejects all quantitative techniques, statistics, and so on and the quantitative researcher who places little value on in-depth qualitative research. Yes, real differences exist. Many differences have ontological and epistemological roots. These differences do not mean that researchers need to "circle the wagons," set up guards, and take a stand to defend the hallowed ground of one's viewpoint. Instead, the differences mean there is an opportunity to engage in an ongoing discussion and learn from one another. Also, I do not think that the boundaries between academic disciplines should be allowed to become impediments. I embrace an ecumenical approach and welcome extensive borrowing of ideas and techniques across such boundaries.

Second, I believe we need to better appreciate that research investigations are undertaken by real people who live in particular times and cultural contexts. Serious mistakes may occur when a researcher in a particular culture or subculture and time period ignores the powerful impact of a social-historical context on his or her patterns of thinking and observations. One subtle change in this edition is an increased recognition of how social-political events shape the direction of the social research community. The research enterprise is not totally insulated from its culture. This has dangers as well as benefits.

Third, a theme found throughout the book is that we will never have all the answers or a complete, finished set of rules and techniques for doing research. Methodology is an ongoing dialogue, a work in progress. This means 10 or 20 years from now, many parts of this book should be obsolete. I see this as healthy, because we will learn new things. There should be improvements, additions, refinements, and new techniques.

Last, this edition contains a heightened sensitivity to the relationship between the researcher and the subjects being studied. The *us* (the researchers) versus *them* (subjects) concern is part of a larger issue: how the researcher relates to others. *Others* include all researchers of the scientific community, those holding power in official institutions, larger audiences for findings, and the people being studied. The relationship involves questions of the topics one chooses to study, the orientation one brings to what is studied, how a study is conducted, and what happens to findings.

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, second edition, is written for upper-level undergraduate or beginning graduate students in the social sciences and associated applied areas (e.g., criminal justice, education, communication, human resources, marketing, management, public administration, social work). It is based on the premise that doing social research is exciting and fun. The research process involves discovering and learning new things, which are enjoyable experiences. Research can be enjoyable, yet it is also an essential tool for understanding the events and structures of the social world.

People who say that research is irrelevant or unimportant are ignorant of the great potential of research to inform us. They do not recognize the widespread use of social research throughout modern society. Although much important research occurs in colleges, universities, and research institutes, social research is being conducted in many other places for many purposes. In private industry, people in market research, personnel, public relations, and management conduct social research, as do many government agencies, to help them better plan or deliver services. Social workers, counselors, and teachers conduct social research in their jobs to make them better able to help or educate others. Many journalists, lawyers, and people in the criminal justice and health care systems use and conduct social research. Social research takes many forms, and the principles of research apply to many situations in the real world.

I wrote the first edition of this book out of frustration at my failure to find what I wanted in the many texts I tried during years of teaching research methods courses. This text is designed to remedy three of my major frustrations.

My first frustration arose from the fact that few textbooks manage to convey the excitement of doing research by giving some of the specifics of the real-life research process. I believe that students should see social research as a process of discovery, complete with human drama, uncertainty, and setbacks. It is not a mechanical process that follows a cookbook formula but a creative, conceptual process of asking the right questions, operating with partial information, following leads down blind alleys, and making difficult decisions. When conducting social research, the researchers, real people, decide how to proceed on the basis of general principles; they combine many parts of the research process in relation to a research question they are trying to answer. In this book, we will follow the process of some research projects and read the results of research. The historical background of research techniques is outlined, and specific studies are described to show that research is a real-life activity carried out by real people.

A second frustration arose because although almost all social research textbooks pay lip service to qualitative research, few give it serious attention. Students may get the erroneous idea that social research is limited to survey research and other quantitative methods. Survey research is an important method, and this book treats it seriously, but social researchers also learn a great deal from qualitative research methods. Ethnographic and historical research methods are increasingly recognized as vital approaches to the growth of knowledge in social science. In this book, qualitative research is treated as a legitimate and valuable, yet distinct, kind of social research. My stance is ecumenical; to do good social science and gain knowledge, we must look into the social world from both a qualitative and a quantitative perspective. Often, qualitative research has been ignored because it originated in a different philosophical tradition with different assumptions from those of quantitative

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research. Few texts discuss the philosophical foundations of social science, yet students need a sense of these philosophical principles so that they can understand why research is conducted in particular ways.

A third frustration came from the fact that many introductory social research textbooks attempt to cover sophisticated statistical analysis and technical details of data analysis, while giving limited attention to the basic principles of sound research methodology. The field of social science research methodology is expanding rapidly; new techniques are being developed and old ones elaborated upon. As a result, the gap between the student who is just beginning to learn about research and the modern professional scholar is growing. This book contains a minimum of technical statistical formulas and discussions. Such discussions, though important, should be engaged in only after one masters the fundamentals of doing research: knowing how to ask questions, how to design and proceed through a research project, how to collect data, and what is important to look for in data. Students should focus on how to think about research design and data collection issues and appreciate the ethics of the scientific community before they learn how to calculate specific statistical formulas. This is not to minimize the importance of statistics and computer-based data analysis. I feel they should be taught in complementary courses that are primarily devoted to statistics.

It seems that other instructors shared my concerns. The success of the first edition signalled that peers have accepted my ideas and that I have reached many more students than I could have in my own classroom. Readers of the first edition of *Social Research Methods* will not find drastic changes, but I have done a lot of fine tuning and made many small changes. In addition to smoothing out the language and correcting a few of the diagrams, I have updated examples and added new ones. I believe it is difficult to learn methodology in a vacuum; it becomes easier when there is substantive content. Therefore, I have included more examples from the rich research literature to show students what researchers are learning. This gives students a better feel for the excitement of research and the enthusiasm that active researchers have for their craft. I have also added diagrams and boxed material to help students better grasp some of the complex information.

In this second edition, I have given increased attention to the relationship between theory and research. Because many students read this book without having completed a single course in social theory, I have kept the discussion at an elementary level. In addition to upgrading the discussion throughout the book, I have added a new separate chapter on theory, Chapter 3. Ideally, a student would concurrently take coordinated courses in research methodology, social theory, and statistics.

This edition gives more attention to feminist research—a growing part of modern social research that has great vitality. More than a passing fad, feminist research touches on fundamental issues about how one does social research. You will find it sprinkled throughout several chapters. In Chapter 4, "The Meanings of Methodology," I added a box that explains both feminist and postmodern approaches.

I want to emphasize that I do not see a rigid dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative research. Rather, I see them as complementary ways of doing research. The distinction is primarily an organizational device, one that also reflects a difference that exists within the practice of social research. My position remains that we need to judge each type of research on its own merits and embrace the strengths it offers.

In sum, this book has several goals: to enable students to become better consumers of others' research and to gain access to more research findings; to give students an understanding of the type of thinking involved in research; to teach them the concepts and terminology researchers use; to provide them with a foundation for further study and work as professional researchers; and to prepare them so that they can conduct small-scale research projects on their own.

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CHAPTER 1

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> *The sociologist, then, is someone concerned with understanding society in a disciplined way. The nature of this discipline is scientific. This means that what the sociologist finds and says about the social phenomena he studies occurs within a certain rather strictly defined frame of reference.*
>
> —Peter Berger, *An Invitation to Sociology*, p. 16

INTRODUCTION

In my daily newspaper, among other items, I recently read that alcohol poses a greater risk to women than to men because women digest differently; the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) discriminated against African-American employees; a U.S. immigration law had the effect of increasing discrimination by employers against Hispanics, Asians, and legal aliens; and cocaine use contributed to about one-fourth of the fatal automobile accidents in New York State. These items come from the results of research. Some results, such as those of alcohol digestion and immigration law effects, may have future use. Other results have immediate practical implications. The findings on the FBI resulted in a lawsuit.

This book is about social research. In simple terms, research is a way of going about finding answers to questions. Social research is a type of research conducted by sociologists, social scientists, and others to seek answers to questions about the social world. You probably already have some notion of what social research entails. First, let me end possible misconceptions. When I asked students what they thought research entails. I got the following answers:

- Based on facts alone, without theory or judgment
- Read or used only by experts or college professors
- Done only in universities by people with Ph.D. degrees
- Going to the library and finding articles on a topic
- Hanging around some exotic place and observing
- Conducting an experiment in which people are tricked into doing something
- Drawing a sample of people and giving them questionnaires
- Looking up lots of tables from government reports or books
- Using computers, statistics, charts, and graphs

The first three of these are wrong, and the others are only parts of social research. It is unwise to confuse one part with the whole. Just as you would never mistake wearing shoes for being fully dressed, you should not mistake any one of these items for social research.

Social research involves many things. It is how a person finds out something new and original about the social world. To do this, a researcher needs to think logically, follow rules, and repeat steps over and over. A researcher combines theories or ideas with facts in a systematic way and uses his or her imagination and creativity. He or she quickly learns to organize and plan carefully and to select the appropriate technique to address a question. A researcher also must be sensitive to treating the people who are being studied in ethical and moral ways. In addition, a researcher must communicate to others clearly.

Social research is a collection of methods people use systematically to produce knowledge. It is an exciting process of discovery, but it requires persistence, personal integrity, tolerance for ambiguity, interaction with others, and pride in doing quality work. You will learn more about the diversity of social research in Chapter 2.

Do not expect this book to transform you into an expert researcher. It can teach you to be a better consumer of research results, give you an understanding of how the research enterprise works, and prepare you to conduct small research projects yourself. After reading this textbook, you will understand research, its meaning, what it can and cannot do, and its role in the larger society.

ALTERNATIVES TO SOCIAL RESEARCH

You learned most of what you know about the social world by an alternative to social research. A great deal of what you know about the social world is based on what your parents and others have told you. You also have knowledge that you have learned from personal experience. The books and magazines you have read and the movies and television you have watched also gave you information. You may also use common sense to learn about the social world.

In addition to being a collection of methods social research is a process for producing knowledge about the social world. It is a more structured, organized, and systematic process than the alternatives.[1] Knowledge from the alternatives is often correct, but knowledge based on research is more likely to be true and has fewer potential errors. It is important to recognize that research does not always produce perfect knowledge. Nonetheless, compared to the alternatives, it is less likely to be flawed. Let us review the alternatives before examining social research.

Authority

You gain knowledge from parents, teachers, and experts and from books and television and other media. When you accept something as being true just because someone in a position of authority says it is true or because it is in an authoritative publication, you are using authority as a basis of knowledge. Relying on the wisdom of authorities has advantages—it is a quick, simple, and cheap way to learn something. Authorities often spend time and effort to learn something, and you can benefit from their experience and work.

Relying on authorities also has limitations. It is easy to overestimate the expertise of other people. You may assume that they are right when

they are not. Authorities may speak on fields they know little about; they can be plain wrong. An expert in one area may try to use his or her authority in an unrelated area. Have you ever seen television commercials where an expert in football uses that expertise to try to convince you to buy a car? In addition, there are the questions: Who is or is not an authority? Whom do you believe when different authorities disagree? For example, there was a time when I saw my high school teacher as being an authority on physics. Now I know that his authority does not stand up to that of a Nobel prize winner in physics.

History is full of past experts whom we now see as being misinformed. For example, some "experts" of the past measured intelligence by counting bumps on the skull; other "experts" used bloodletting to try to cure diseases. Their errors seem obvious now, but can you be certain that today's experts will not become tomorrow's fools? Also, too much reliance on authorities can be dangerous to a democratic society. An overdependence on experts lets them keep others in the dark, and they may promote ideas that strengthen their power and position. When we have no idea of how the experts arrived at their knowledge, we lose some of our ability to make judgments for ourselves.

Tradition

People sometimes rely on tradition for knowledge. Tradition is a special case of authority—the authority of the past. Tradition means you accept something as being true because "it's the way things have always been." For example, my father-in-law said that "drinking a shot of whiskey cures a cold." When I asked about his statement, he said that he had learned it from his father when he was a child, and it had come down from past generations. Tradition was the basis of the knowledge for the cure.

Here is an example more from the social world. Many people believe that children who are raised at home by their mothers grow up to be better adjusted and have fewer personal problems than those raised in other settings. People "know" this, but how did they learn it? Most accept it because they believe (rightly or wrongly) that it was true in the past or is the way things have always been done.

Some traditional social knowledge begins as simple prejudice. A belief such as "people from that side of the tracks will never amount to anything" or "you never can trust anyone of that race" comes down from the past. Even if traditional knowledge was once true, it can become distorted as it is passed on, and soon it is no longer true. People may cling to traditional knowledge without real understanding; they assume that because something may have worked or been true in the past, it must always be true.

Common Sense

You know a lot about the social world from your ordinary reasoning or common sense. You rely on what everyone knows and what "just makes sense." For example, it "just makes sense" that murder rates are higher in nations that do not have a death penalty, because people are less likely to kill if they face execution for doing so. This and other widely held "common sense" beliefs, such as that poor youth are more likely to commit deviant acts than those from the middle class or that most Catholics do not use birth control, are false.

Common sense is valuable in daily living, but it can allow logical fallacies to slip into your thinking. For example, the "gambler's fallacy" says: "If I have a long string of losses playing a lottery, the next time I play, my chances of winning will be better." In terms of probability and the facts, this is false. Also, common sense contains contradictory ideas that go unnoticed because people use the ideas at different times—for example, "opposites attract" and "birds of a feather flock together." Common sense can originate in tradition. It is useful and sometimes correct, but it also contains errors, misinformation, contradiction, and prejudice.

Media Myths

Television shows, movies, and newspaper and magazine articles are important sources of information about social life. For example, most peo-

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