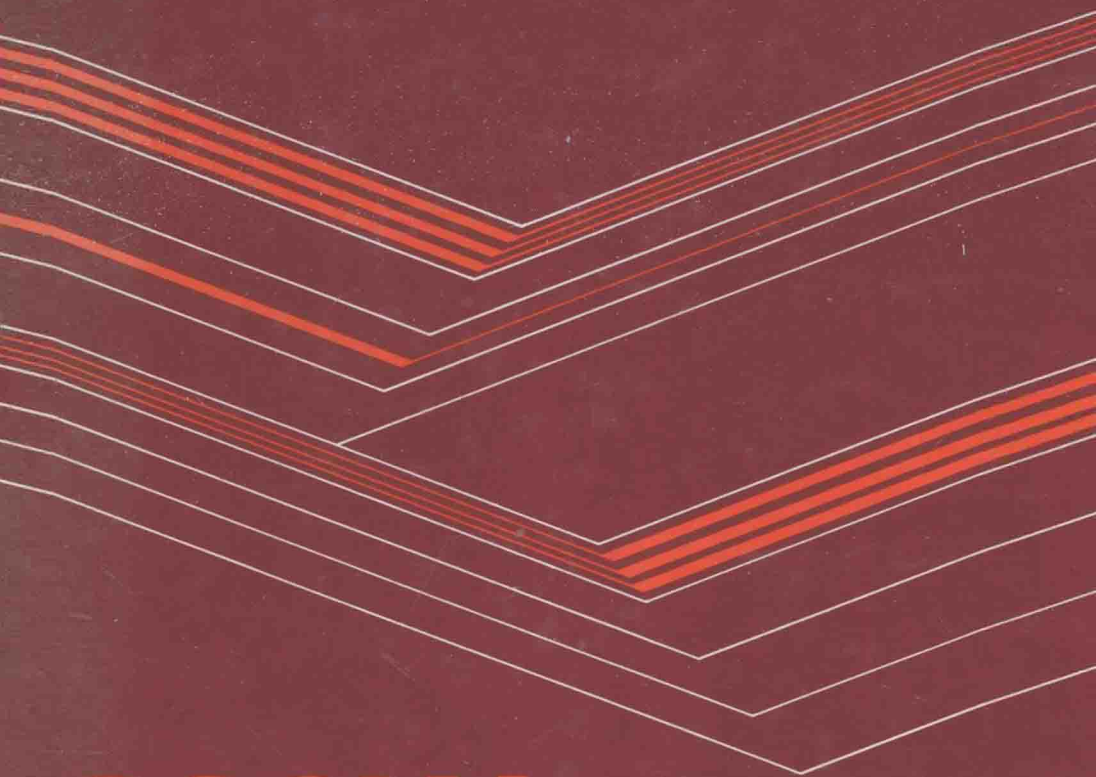


**MARK ABRAHAMSON**



**SOCIAL  
RESEARCH  
METHODS**

# QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

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PRENTICE-HALL, INC., Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 07632

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

ABRAHAMSON, MARK.

Social research methods.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

1. Sociology—Research—Methodology. 2. Social sciences—Research—Methodology. I. Title.

HM48.A35 1983 301'.01'8 82-12261

ISBN 0-13-818088-1

Editorial production supervision: *Edith Riker*

Manufacturing buyer: *John Hall*

Cover design: *Wanda Lubelska Design*

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Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 0-13-818088-1

Prentice-Hall International, Inc., *London*  
Prentice-Hall of Australia Pty. Limited, *Sydney*  
Editora Prentice-Hall do Brazil, LTDA, *Rio de Janeiro*  
Prentice-Hall Canada Ltd., *Toronto*  
Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, *New Delhi*  
Prentice-Hall of Japan, Inc., *Tokyo*  
Prentice-Hall of Southeast Asia Pte. Ltd., *Singapore*  
Whitehall Books Limited, *Wellington, New Zealand*

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# PREFACE

This book is intended to serve as the basic text in the research methods course that is typically taken by juniors and seniors, and in some departments, by first year graduate students as well. In addition, I have assumed that most students who use this book will do so in a course that is an integral part of a sociology curriculum. Therefore, the methodological issues that were selected for discussion and the nature of the illustrations presented were all primarily intended for students of sociology.

All too often I have heard students describe a research methods course as seeming to be utterly divorced from the rest of their coursework in sociology. They have regarded it as a course that could just as easily have been offered by some other department in their college. Many of the textbooks frequently used in methods courses, in my opinion, are partly responsible for conveying the impression that methods and research are separate from the rest of sociology.

One of my primary objectives in preparing this book was to integrate research methods with other portions of the sociology curriculum. To this end, I have discussed connections between various methods and theoretical perspectives. For example, experimentation in sociology is often conducted to test hypotheses associated with symbolic interaction or exchange-reinforcement theories. These perspectives are briefly discussed in the chapter on experimentation so that students can grasp not only the mechanics of experimental design, but the research traditions with which they are associated in sociology.

In order to make research methods relevant to students of sociology

I have also examined a number of conceptual issues that other texts usually ignore. To illustrate, sample surveys tend to focus upon attitudes rather than behavior because the former are more amenable to self-report designs involving, for example, questionnaires. The complex relationship between attitudes and behavior should be recognized by students of sociology. Therefore, the theoretical implications of an investigators' focus upon either attitudes or behavior are discussed at several junctures in this text.

The substantive illustrations of principles and procedures in the text are also drawn from the mainstreams of sociological theory and research. For example, the chapter on measurement of complex concepts examines bureaucracy, and includes a brief discussion of Weber's formulation. In sum, there was a systematic effort to help students relate the methodological skills they are acquiring to the conceptual problems of our discipline.

It is obviously important for a methods course to provide "nuts and bolts" information to students so that they comprehend the mechanics of constructing a questionnaire, drawing a sample, and so on. This text correspondingly presents how-to discussions in detail, and periodically notes the vocational applications of these skills. However, an exclusive emphasis upon mechanical details is not congruent with what I consider to be the primary objectives of an introduction to research methods.

Statistical procedures have been discussed in the text only where their inclusion is imperative. I view statistical analysis as the proper subject matter of a separate course, but there are times when statistical reasoning must be introduced before a methodological procedure can fully be understood. In such situations I have emphasized the conceptual meaning, rather than the calculation, of statistical techniques. Thus, a prior course in statistics, while helpful to students, is not a prerequisite to use of this textbook. Similarly, I view learning how to use computers in data analysis to be a valuable, and related, skill; but yet a separate skill. Correspondingly, I have included only a minimum of information on computer-assisted data analysis.

Although the objectives of this text, as already described, are somewhat distinctive, the chapter by chapter organization of this text is not very different from most others. Instructors will find that the topics included and their order of presentation are generally similar to other research methods texts. (Both brief and detailed tables of contents precede this preface.) The only chapter included here that is not to be found

in most other books entails a discussion of how to assess the accuracy and honesty of people's self-reports (see Chapter 16). Another, less dramatic, organizational and content difference of this book is its relatively extended treatment of secondary data sources—sample survey data sets, census documents, occupational directories, and so on. I have elaborated upon these sources of data because they are increasingly utilized in sociological research. Finally, I have included a chapter on ethics and values near the beginning (cf. Chapter 2) rather than in its more familiar place near the end of the book because I believe that students should be sensitive to these issues from the onset.

I am particularly indebted to Jerry Heiss for helping me think through how to present a number of methodological principles, and to Marilyn Horton who typed most of the manuscript. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of the following reviewers: Ann G. T. Young, SUNY–Geneseo; Charles Fremont Sprague, IV, Social Science Operations Center, McLean, Virginia; Andrew Michener, University of Wisconsin–Madison; Marilyn Essex, Lawrence University; James Marshall, SUNY–Buffalo.

Mark Abrahamson

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