



THIRD EDITION

Doing Social Research

Therese L. Baker

California State University, San Marcos



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DOING SOCIAL RESEARCH

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Doing Social Research

A B O U T T H E A U T H O R

THERESE L. BAKER is one of the 12 founding faculty members, and professor of sociology at California State University, San Marcos. She currently serves as program director in sociology and in social science. Born and raised in Minneapolis, she received her undergraduate education at Cornell University and graduate education at the University of Chicago. For 18 years, she was a member of the Sociology department at DePaul University in Chicago.

Her principal research interest is in the changing ways gender and ethnic differences affect the educational and career aspirations of American youth. The experience of founding a new university has encouraged an interest in access and opportunity in higher education. She has been an advisory editor for *Contemporary Sociology*, *The Sociological Quarterly*, *The American Sociologist*, and *Gender and Society*. Professor Baker has taught social research methods since 1975.

P R E F A C E

This third edition of *Doing Social Research*, like the first and second, could never have been written had I not taught social research methods for years. It has grown out of my own experiences of delivering the hows and whys of doing social research to college students, first at DePaul University in Chicago and for the last nine years at California State University at San Marcos in North County, San Diego.

We took our first students at CSU, San Marcos in 1990—juniors and seniors—and, in the Spring of 1991, I offered the first Social Research Methods class at CSU, San Marcos. There was a makeshift computer lab on our temporary campus site, and an emerging library facility; I had 17 eager students, many of whom had been out of college for years. Drawing on *Doing Social Research*, the class designed for its final project a survey of the attitudes of the residents of San Marcos to the development of a new state university in their community. Since that time students in Social Research Methods have benefited from the social science research lab we have developed on campus, the Social and Behavioral Research Institute (SBRI). For the past three years in each semester, research methods students design a survey that is then carried out by telephone interviews in the SBRI. Once the data are collected, students use the data to carry out analyses. In this text, we will describe one of these student-led surveys.

In writing the book, I have been guided by several principles. I am convinced that the way to get students interested in social research, and to recognize what it involves, is to think seriously about some of the exciting social research studies that have already been done. To consider carefully what researchers did in carrying out their studies, and what they found out, is to begin to understand not only the techniques of social research, but also the motivation for doing it. In other words, by trying to share the experience of doing social research with previous researchers, a student can come to know why people are committed to this enterprise. For this reason, interviews with three of the prominent researchers whose studies are detailed in Chapter 1 are presented.

This doesn't mean that every research methods student has to do a study. But I would like every student who reads this book to know what it would feel like to do social research and to move in the direction of wanting to do it. So I have also tried to encourage students to ask themselves, "Couldn't I do a study? What would I have to do to be able to take a question that I find tantalizing and turn it into a research project?"

I have also aimed to make this book eclectic in the wide range of methods discussed. Of course, most individual social researchers tend to specialize, using a relatively small range of methods almost exclusively. And many instructors may prefer to emphasize some methods rather than others. But a text should give broad options and encourage students to explore the rich universe of social research. Although research styles and preferences may differ, each of the methods described in this text has in the hands of some researchers produced studies of real fascination and value. In considering how they might generate a study of their own, students are invited to decide if one type of method or another would be appropriate to their interests.

Finally, I wanted the tone of this book to encourage a sense of commitment to doing social research. Other texts adopt a more humorous tone, or remain neutral and technical. Neither of these has seemed right to me. Naturally, working on a research project has its humorous moments, and nothing can be accomplished without appropriate techniques. But these do not capture the essence of social research. Students need to see—and will be more generally engaged by—the choices, the challenges, and the excitement of trying to study some piece of social action. And since the object of this book is to welcome students into the social research enterprise, students are encouraged to think that they *can* become social researchers, and that this is an activity, a way of thinking and working, that requires and is worthy of commitment.

In this third edition, several earlier sections have been substantially revised. Six new studies are presented in chapter 1 with a seventh from the earlier editions. Interviews with three of the authors of studies described in Chapter 1 are presented as a way to personalize the experiences of doing social research. Chapter 2 includes new discussions of feminist and postmodern theory.

Chapter 5 presents a new section on sampling distribution means and how to calculate a standard error.

Chapter 7 has an extensive section on designing and conducting focus groups. Offering a broad purview of different types of qualitative research, Chapter 8 explores the research techniques of the participant observer and the qualitative interviewer.

There are descriptions of currently available datasets, such as the General Social Survey (the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS), the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), and the American National Election Study (all described in Chapter 9).

Qualitative analysis skills as well as quantitative are reviewed in Chapter 11. A quantitative survey of attitudes toward recycling, how the survey data were analyzed, and statistics were generated and interpreted form the bases of Chapters 12 and 13.

Appendix A offers an updated guide to the use of libraries for social research purposes highlighting the use of computer searches using CD-ROM or online databases, as well as the most recent bibliographical materials, handbooks, and encyclopedias available for social research topics.

In response to users' suggestions, there is a greater emphasis on qualitative research, focus groups, evaluation and action research. There is also an expanded glossary at the end of the book in which all of the Key Terms which appear at the end of chapters are defined.

The book in both its editions has been the outgrowth of suggestions from reviewers from other universities and colleges who have told me how they teach research methods, what they think should be covered, and what they aim to accomplish in their own courses. For the third edition. I want to thank the following reviewers: James G. Ahler, University of St. Thomas; Robert A. Bylund, Morehead State University; Simon Gottschalk, University of Nevada at Las Vegas; Ronald J. McAllister, Northeastern University; James R. Reynolds, Winona State University; and Ira M. Wasserman of Eastern Michigan University. Keith Baker lent assistance on the postmodern discussion.

Jacqueline M. Borin, librarian at California State University, San Marcos, did a splendid job of revising and updating Appendix A on the use of libraries for social research. Allen Risley, Assistant Director of our social science lab helped prepare the computer tables and the sampling histograms. Three of the scholars whose research studies are highlighted in the first chapter—Professors Barrie Thorne, Larry Sherman and Travis Hirschi—were interviewed about their experiences in doing field research at grade schools (Thorne), on the effects of arrest on domestic violence suspects (Sherman), and in the landmark study of the causes of juvenile delinquency (Hirschi). I am very appreciative to them for their insights.

This edition would never have appeared without the help and advice of Phillip Butcher, the Sociology editor at McGraw-Hill, who has been supportive of this project from its earliest planning stages. In preparing the third edition, I was assisted by Jill Gordon and Amy Smetzley. Their support has made working on this project easier and much more pleasant. Finally I wish to thank Paula Buschman who has done a marvelous job at supervising the editing of the book.

This third edition has benefited from the support I have received from my colleagues at Cal State, San Marcos: my dean and associate dean Victor Rocha and Patricia Worden, my close colleague friends Isabel Schon and Trini Melcher, my sociology colleagues Richard Serpe, Sheldon Zhang, Bob Roberts, Darlene Piña, and Linda Shaw as well as from close friends Muriel Bell, Marian Adams, Mariella Evans, and Bettina Huber. My sister, Judy Mandel and my cousin Linda Michels have always encouraged my efforts. My two sons, Julian and Felix, are my closest and dearest friends who with Faye Jacob and Heather Bogdanoff, have helped and supported me in innumerable ways enabling me to complete this revision. In this year of Julian's marriage, I dedicate this third edition to Julian and Faye.

Therese L. Baker

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