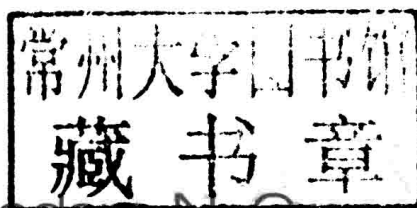


3rd edition

Methods of
**FAMILY
RESEARCH**

3^{edition}



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For Lori (TNG)
For Frank and Alex (SND)

Preface

I first taught research methods 35 years ago. Each time I taught the course, I became increasingly convinced that the approach I was taking was all wrong. I was trying to teach people how to *do* research—to give them a metaphorical toolbox of technical skills so that they could someday design and conduct their own research. Although I knew that few of my students would actually do research, I continued to teach the course the same way for years.

When SAGE asked me to write this text, I realized that I had an opportunity to correct this mistake. *Methods of Family Research* reflects my philosophy that what most people want (and need) to learn about family research methods is not how to *do* research on families but how to *read* research on families. Few of you will become active researchers, but all of you will need to know how to read and interpret research reports. Whether you work in a commercial organization, a government agency, or some not-for-profit group involved with families and children, you must be able to critically examine reports of research relevant to your work. Becoming a critical consumer of research reports is important even if you don't find employment in a family-related field, because our daily lives are increasingly filled with research findings. Newspapers, the Internet, television, and magazines routinely report results of opinion polls, evaluations of social programs, and other research. Without some understanding of research methods, it's impossible to be an active and knowledgeable 21st-century citizen. *Methods of Family Research* will help you to acquire this understanding.

—Ted Greenstein

The first course I taught as a graduate student was a social research methods course. And like Ted Greenstein, I quickly came to realize that I wanted the students in all of my classes, but especially in my research

methods courses, to become critical consumers of social research. Having taught using earlier editions of *Methods of Family Research* and observed how students respond to and learn from the text, I was honored to be invited to be a co-author for the third edition.

—Shannon Davis

The Goal of This Text

The goal of this text is *not* to teach you to be a researcher. No single book or course can do that. Instead, this text is aimed at helping you become an intelligent and critical *consumer* of research on families. To that end, the text will introduce you to how research on families is conducted and how to read journal articles and books reporting such research. The focus will be on interpreting and understanding research techniques commonly used in research on families rather than on the mechanics of actually doing the research.

By the time that you finish this text, you should be competent to read and evaluate published reports of research on families. This is a valuable skill, because we are inundated with reports of research findings every day. Whether you plan to be a practitioner, a teacher, or an administrator, some knowledge of research methods will be essential to your career success. Some of you may even be inspired to seek out additional training so that you can become a producer of social research yourself.

What's New in the Third Edition

The structure of this new edition is similar to that of the first and second editions, with some important additions and changes. Most notably, there is new coverage (Chapter 12) on advanced topics on analysis of data from couples and families. Chapter 8 on qualitative methods has been expanded. Almost every example has been updated. The For Further Reading lists at the end of each chapter have been revised to take into account new publications since the release of the second edition. Input from colleagues and students using the text have been used to improve both the content and the style of the text, and hardly a page has not been revised or updated. The ordering of the chapters has also been changed to more accurately reflect the typical flow of the research process (the chapters on sampling and scales and indices have been moved up prior to the discussions of specific research techniques).

To the Student

This text has several features to aid in the learning process. Key terms and concepts are boldface when they first appear in the text; all the boldface terms appear and are defined in the Glossary. The Glossary also serves as an index, because the page number(s) on which each term is discussed appear there, as well. The For Further Reading lists at the end of each chapter present additional or more advanced treatments of the issues discussed in the text. Exercises designed to enhance your skills appear in the Study Questions sections. Even if your instructor doesn't require you to do these exercises, you may find that they help you to prepare for exams.

To the Instructor

We've never encountered a text that completely fulfills our needs in teaching a course, and *Methods of Family Research* is no exception. We expect that you will want to supplement the text with an assortment of journal articles and research monographs (and possibly newspaper and magazine articles) reporting relevant research. We have presented more examples in the text, all of which appear in the For Further Reading sections. If time permits, you may want to assign the original articles to your students.

You may wish to create a set of readings organized around research strategy: one article using sample survey methods, another using an experimental design, and so forth. Or you might assign different research monographs to a number of student teams for classroom critique. One valuable extended exercise is to find a newspaper or magazine article reporting some family-related study, then assign both that article and the original research report for reading and comparison by the students. Students will be amazed at the discrepancies between the actual research and how it is reported in the popular press! Throughout your course, we hope you will emphasize that simply because a piece of research is published—even if it's in a major journal—doesn't mean the study is perfect. On the contrary, encourage your students to critically analyze what they read.

Organization of This Text

The sequencing of chapters in *Methods of Family Research* now more closely follows the usual flow of the research process. Chapter 1 begins with a discussion on the nature of research on families and some relevant issues

in the philosophy of science. Chapter 2 presents the crucial concept *variable* and the various theoretical roles that variables can occupy in family research. Chapter 3 shows an analysis of the structure of a typical research article in a professional journal and provides an introduction to literature searches. Chapter 4 provides an overview of sampling procedures. In Chapter 5, the key issues of measurement and operationalization are introduced. Creating and finding scales and indices is the topic of Chapter 6. Chapters 7 and 8 outline the basics of quantitative and qualitative research strategies, whereas Chapter 9 introduces the idea of mixed methodologies. Chapter 10 covers the increasingly important topic of locating and using secondary data sets. Chapter 11 serves as a brief introduction to descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Chapter 12 is completely new to the third edition and covers some of the analytic techniques specific to studying dyads (couples) and families. Evaluating applied family programs is discussed in Chapter 13. Finally, political and ethical issues in family research are presented in Chapter 14.

However, we encourage instructors to rearrange the chapters as they see fit. For example, some will want to cover ethical issues (Chapter 14) earlier in the course. You may want to change the order of presentation of quantitative methods (Chapter 7) and qualitative methods (Chapter 8).

Acknowledgments

I owe a great debt to the instructors who introduced me to social research methods. Bill Crano sparked my interest in social research when I was an undergraduate at Michigan State University. Michael Allen, Duane Alwin, Howard Bahr, Charlie Bowerman, Lew Carter, Lee Freese, Vik Gecas, Gary Lee, and especially Louis Gray shaped my thinking about methods as a graduate student at Washington State University.

My colleagues at North Carolina State University—especially Ron Czaja and Cathy Zimmer—read various sections of the first draft of this text. NC State also provided a research leave to work on the first draft of the manuscript during its early stages. SAGE Series Editors Dave Klein of Notre Dame and Bert Adams of Wisconsin made extensive comments and suggestions throughout the writing process. I would also like to thank the following reviewers who provided valuable suggestions for the third edition: Dorothy Berglund, Mississippi University for Women, Columbus; Alicia V. Fahr, Capella University of Minneapolis; Ann Marie Kinnell, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg; Mark Troedson, Antioch University, Los Angeles–Culver City; and Amy Yates, Louisiana Tech University, Ruston, as well as the many anonymous individuals who were so generous with their feedback. Any errors, of course, are our own.

—*Ted Greenstein*

My passion for teaching social research methods is a direct result of having been taught by instructors who were also passionate about teaching social research methods: Marcia Ghidina and Bill Haas at the University of North Carolina—Asheville, and Cathy Zimmer and Don Tomaskovic-Devey at North Carolina State University. Ted Greenstein has shaped not only the way I teach and write about social research methods but also the way I do social research. I am so grateful to have the opportunity to be a co-author with him in this third edition.

—*Shannon Davis*

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Chapter One

Why Do Research on Families?

What Are the Stages of Social Research?

Exploration

Description

Explanation

Prediction

Intervention

Evaluation

How Is Research on Families Different?

Families Are Systems of Individuals

Defining Family

Multiple Statuses and Multiple Roles

Backstage Behavior

Preconceptions About the Family

The Benefits of Well-Conducted Research

Study Questions

For Further Reading

To many people, doing research on families seems a waste of time. After all, we all have families, don't we? We know about families through our own experiences. Most surveys simply confirm what we already know, right? So why bother to do social research on families?

To really understand why we do social research, we have to recognize that curiosity is one of the most basic of human drives. Some biologists believe that the human brain is hardwired to solve challenges and answer questions. It's probably this drive that led the human species from learning