fourth edition

an invitation to SOCIAL RESEARCH

How It's Done

Emily Stier Adler & Roger Clark

FOURTH EDITION

An Invitation to Social Research

How It's Done

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We dedicate this book to
Gracie and Jazzy

PREFACE

We'd like to invite you to participate in one of the most exciting, exhilarating, and sometimes exasperating activities we know: social science research. We extend the invitation not only because we know, from personal experience, how rewarding and useful research can be, but also because we've seen what pleasure it can bring other students of the social world. Our invitation comes with some words of reassurance, especially for those of you who entertain a little self-doubt about your ability to do research. First, we think you'll be glad to discover, as you read *An Invitation to Social Research: How It's Done,* how much you already know about how social research is done. If you're like most people, native curiosity has been pushing you to do social research for much of your life. This book is meant simply to assist you in this natural activity by showing you some tried-and-true ways to enlightening and plausible insights about the social world.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Active Engagement in Research

Our second word of reassurance is that we've done everything we can to minimize your chances for exasperation and maximize your opportunities for excitement and exhilaration. Our philosophy is simple. We believe that honing one's skill in doing social research is analogous to honing one's skills in other enjoyable and rewarding human endeavors, like sport, art, or dance. The best way isn't simply to read about it. It's to do it and to watch experts do it. So, just as you'd hesitate to teach yourself tennis, ballet, or painting only by reading about them, we won't ask you to try learning the fine points of research methodology by reading alone. We'll encourage you to get out and practice

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the techniques we describe. We've designed exercises at the end of each chapter to help you work on the "ground strokes," "serve," "volleys," and "overheads" of social research. We don't think you'll need to do all the exercises at home. Your instructor might ask you to do some in class and might want you to ignore some altogether. In any case, we think that, by book's end, you should have enough control of the fundamentals to do the kind of on-the-job research that social science majors are increasingly asked to do, whether they find themselves in social service agencies, the justice system, business and industry, government, or graduate school.

The exercises reflect our conviction that we all learn best when we're actively engaged. Other features of the text also encourage such active engagement, including the "Stop and Think" questions that run through each chapter, which encourage you to actively respond to what you're reading.

Engaging Examples of Actual Research

Moreover, just as you might wish to gain inspiration and technical insight for ballet by studying the work of Anna Pavlova or Mikhail Baryshnikov, we'll encourage you to study the work of some accomplished researchers. Thus, we build most of our chapters around a research essay, what we call focal research, that is intended to make the research process transparent, rather than opaque. We have chosen these essays for their appeal and accessibility, and to tap what we hope are some of your varied interests: for instance, crime, gender, election polls, life in prison, attitudes towards environmentalism, immigrants' lives, and others.

Behind-the-Scene Glimpses of the Research Process

These focal research pieces are themselves a defining feature of our book. In addition to such exemplary "performances," however, we've included behind-the-scenes glimpses of the research process. We're able to provide these glimpses because many researchers have given generously of their time to answer our questions about what they've done, the special problems they've encountered, and the ways they've dealt with these problems. The glimpses should give you an idea of the kinds of choices and situations the researchers faced, where often the "real" is far from the "ideal." You'll see how they handled the choices and situations and hear them present their current thinking about the compromises they made. In short, we think you'll discover that good research is an achievable goal, and a very human enterprise.

Clear and Inviting Writing

We've also tried to minimize your chances for exasperation by writing as clearly as we can. A goal of all social science is to interpret social life, something you've all been doing for quite a while. We want to assist you in this endeavor, and we believe that an understanding of social science research methods can help. But unless we're clear in our presentation of those methods, your chances of gaining that understanding are not great. There are, of course, times when we'll introduce you to concepts that are commonly used in social science research that might be new to you. When we do, however,

we will try to provide definitions to make the concepts as clear as possible. The definitions are highlighted in the margin of the text and in the glossary at the end of the text.

Focus on Ethics

Given the importance of doing research that is methodologically correct and practical as well as ethical, we've put a focus on ethical principals in each chapter. The "Thinking about Ethics" section of each chapter applies the ethical principles we cover in depth in Chapter 3 to research projects presented in the subsequent chapters.

Balance between Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches

We think you'll also appreciate the balance between quantitative and qualitative research methods presented here. Quantitative methods focus on things that are measured numerically. ("He glanced at her 42 times during the performance.") Qualitative methods focus on descriptions of the essence of things. ("She appeared annoyed at his constant glances.") We believe both methodological approaches are too useful to ignore. Emblematic of this belief is the inclusion of a chapter (Chapter 15), which devotes about as much space to the discussion of qualitative data analysis as it does to quantitative data analysis. The presence of such a chapter is another defining feature of the book.

Moreover, in addition to more conventional strategies, we will introduce you to some relatively new research strategies, such as using the Internet to refine ideas and collect data and visual methodologies. We cover the link between theory and research, compare research to other ways of knowing, and focus on basic and applied research.

Our aims, then, in writing this book have been (1) to give you firsthand experiences with the research process, (2) to provide you with engaging examples of social science research, (3) to offer behind-the-scenes glimpses of how professional researchers have done their work, (4) to keep our own presentation of the "nuts-and-bolts" of social science research as clear and inviting as possible, (5) to focus on doing research following ethical principles, (6) to give a balanced presentation of qualitative and quantitative research methods, and (7) to introduce recent technological innovations. Whether we succeed in these goals, and in the more important one of sharing our excitement about social research, remains to be seen. But rest assured, however, of our conviction that there is excitement to be had.

WHAT IS NEW IN THE FOURTH EDITION

The fourth edition represents a substantial revision of the third. Once again, we've rewritten major sections of every chapter to clarify the process of social research and to provide up-to-date material from the social research literature. In doing so, we've focused our presentation on the essentials of social research and covered some new material as well as classic sources. Throughout the text, you'll notice a new emphasis on visual sociology and methods that use this approach. In addition, we have expanded our data analysis chapter,

Chapter 15, to include a section on multivariate analysis and retained a thorough introduction to both quantitative and qualitative data analyses. We have added two new appendixes, one on comparing methods and one on using multiple methods, both by way of summarizing important issues in our discussion of sociological methods.

Our data analysis chapter (Chapter 15) also reflects, as does the rest of the current text, our belief that research, as practiced by social (and all other) scientists, is increasingly computer assisted and Internet based. So, for instance, in the data analysis chapter, we introduce students to data that they can analyze online. In other chapters we also present ways of finding research reports and data that can be accessed quickly online.

Themes from the first three editions have been retained here. This edition has 12 focal research pieces—7 of them new and 1 updated. While incorporating the new pieces, we have enhanced the balance between qualitative and quantitative research in the book. In Chapter 5, for instance, we present a new piece that considers calling cell phones and the implications for noncoverage bias. In Chapter 7, we present a new piece on how people make the transition to retirement, based on a series of interviews with workers before and after they retire from full-time employment. In Chapter 14, the new focal research describes a needs assessment done in Ecuador to evaluate the conditions that incarcerated women there face. We note that, as a result of their research, the researchers were able to influence policy and create social change. In all cases, our new contributors have volunteered important "behind-the-scenes" insights into the research process, insights that we gratefully share here.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We cannot possibly thank all those who have contributed to the completion of this edition, but we can try to thank those whose help has been most indispensable and hope that others will forgive our neglect. We'd first like to thank all the students who have taken research methods courses with us at Rhode Island College for their general good-naturedness and patience as we've worked out ideas that are crystallized here, and then worked them out some more. We'd also like to thank our colleagues in the Sociology Department and the administration of the college, for many acts of encouragement and more tangible assistance, including released time.

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glimpses of the research process that we think distinguishes our book. We'd like to extend special thanks to Aaryn Ward at Louisiana State University who composed the excellent instructor's manual accompanying the book.

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