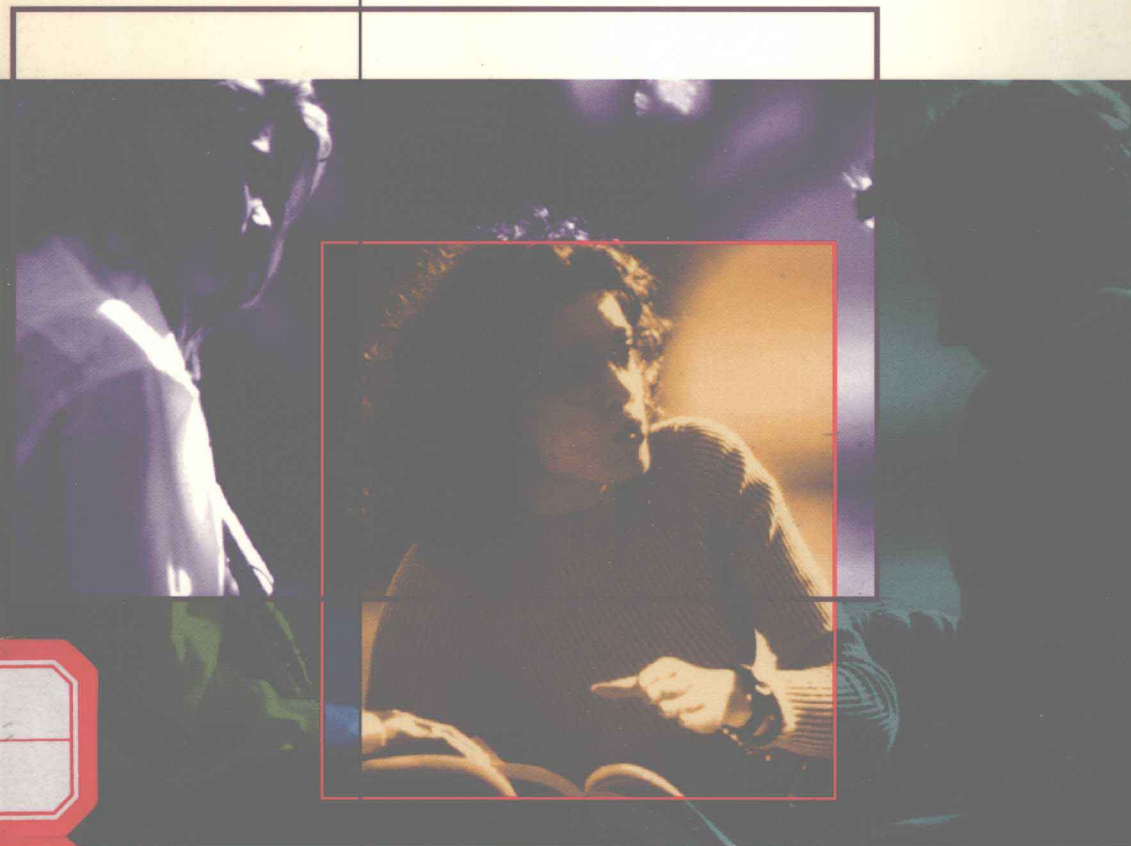
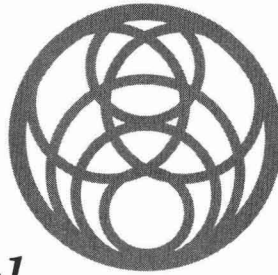


The Basics of **Social Research**

Earl Babbie



*The
Basics
of
Social
Research*



Earl Babbie
Chapman University



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The Premodern View This view of reality has guided most of human history. Our early ancestors all assumed that they saw things as they really were. In fact, this assumption was so fundamental that they didn't even see it as an assumption. No cavemom said to her cavekid, "Our tribe makes an assumption that evil spirits reside in the Old Twisted Tree." No, she said, "STAY OUT OF THAT TREE OR YOU'LL TURN INTO A TOAD!"

As humans evolved and became aware of their diversity, they came to recognize that others did not always share their views of things. Thus, they may have discovered that another tribe didn't buy the wicked tree thing; in fact, the second tribe felt the spirits in the tree were holy and beneficial. The discovery of this diversity led members of the first tribe to conclude that "some tribes I could name are pretty stupid." For them, the tree was still wicked, and they expected some misguided people to be moving to Toad City.

Babbie engages students with humor and down-to-earth metaphors. His many well-placed examples often elicit chuckles and nods of appreciation. He touches students' academic and social lives, shows them how theory makes sense, how it leads to practice, and how, suddenly, the abstractions become real.

There are other ways of knowing things, however. In contrast to knowing things through agreement, you can know them through direct experience—through observation. If you dive into a

glacial stream flowing through the Canadian Rockies, you don't need anyone to tell you it's cold. You notice that all by yourself. The first time you stepped on a thorn, you knew it hurt before anyone told you.

When your experience conflicts with what everyone else knows, though, there's a good chance you'll surrender your experience in favor of the agreement.

For example, imagine you've come to a party at my house. It's a high-class affair, and the drinks and food are excellent. In particular, you're taken by one of the appetizers I bring around on a tray: a breaded, deep-fried tidbit that's especially zesty. You have a couple—they're so delicious! You have more. Soon you are subtly moving around the room to be wherever I am when I arrive with a tray of these nibblies.

Finally, you can't contain yourself any more. "What are they?" you ask. "How can I get the recipe?" And I let you in on the secret: "You've been eating breaded, deep-fried worms!" Your response

"A very readable and accessible introductory social research text [with] a first person perspective used throughout, capsule versions of what students will learn at the beginning of each chapter, reviews summarizing each chapter, and boxed material with concrete, real-world examples. . . . And perhaps most important, is the author's ability to make somewhat abstract and technical concepts understandable."

—Rae Banks, Department of African Studies, Syracuse University

Innovative projects and exercises that get students doing specific, real research—often on the web

A “Continuity Project” in every chapter

Using gender inequality as a common theme, the “Continuity Project” in each chapter asks students to apply that chapter’s material to interesting, real projects—all connected to the gender inequality theme (other themes can easily be substituted). Reviewers are praising these projects as an effective and innovative way to help students tie together the material they learn from one chapter to the next into an integrated body of usable information.

From Chapter 3, “The Nature of Causation.”

Continuity Project

Apply the logic of idiographic and nomothetic explanations to the case of gender equality/inequality. First, write a detailed idiographic explanation for why a particular woman receives less pay than a male coworker. Second, provide a nomothetic explanation by identifying a variable that affects gender income differences in general. Base your statements in fact if possible, or make up hypothetical information if necessary. The key is to illustrate the two explanatory models.

From Chapter 7, “Indexes, Scales, and Typologies.”

Continuity Project

Create three indicators of attitudes toward gender equality that represent a scale of increasing intensity. Indicate which is the strongest indicator and which the weakest.

From Chapter 15, “Data Analysis.”

Continuity Project

Assume that you have undertaken a quantitative study of attitudes toward gender equality. Create a hypothetical bivariate percentage table and interpret its meaning. One of the variables in the table must be an indicator of attitudes toward gender equality, and the other variable must represent a cause of such attitudes.

Applied! Hands-on! A new breed of “Review Questions and Exercises”

Unlike any review questions or exercises you’ve seen in research methods texts, these get students involved and interested in researching specific real-life topics and issues. They direct students to newspapers, magazines, and to the web where they get first-hand experience with qualitative vs. quantitative research, framing research questions, and actually practicing the theory and knowledge they gain in each chapter.

Review Questions and Exercises

1. Consider the possible relationship between education and prejudice (mentioned in Chapter 1). Describe how that relationship might be examined through (a) deductive and (b) inductive methods.

.....

“I really like the concept of a ‘Continuity Project.’ One of the continuing struggles of teaching undergraduate methods is enabling students to integrate massive amounts of material they learn during a semester. The ‘Continuity Project’ attached to each chapter is a creative way of helping students make these linkages. The ‘Review Questions’ are also excellent. They help convert students from passive to active learners, demonstrate the utility of social research techniques, and introduce a focus in the course beyond what the instructor has to say.” —Gregory Weiss, Roanoke College, Salem, VA

Fully integrated coverage of qualitative material throughout

The Basics of Social Research

incorporates qualitative material into the fabric and flow of every chapter, juxtaposing qualitative and quantitative methods so students can see the advantages and disadvantages of each for a given situation. In this example from Chapter One introducing qualitative and quantitative approaches, Babbie shows students that both approaches are "good science" and that both are valid methods in the researcher's arsenal.

I have a young friend, Ray Zhang, who was responsible for communications at the 1989 freedom demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, Beijing. Following the Army clampdown, Ray fled south, was arrested and then released with orders to return to Beijing. Instead, he escaped from China and made his way to Paris. Eventually, he came to the United States, where he resumed the graduate studies he had been forced to abandon. I have seen him deal with the difficulties of getting enrolled in school without any transcripts from China, studying in a foreign language, meeting his financial needs—all on his own, thousands of miles from his family. Ray still speaks of one day returning to China to build a system of democracy.

Ray strikes me as someone "older than his years." You'd probably agree. This qualitative description, while it fleshes out the meaning of the phrase, still does not equip us to say *how much older* or even to compare two people in these terms without the risk of disagreeing as to which one is more "worldly."

It might be possible to quantify this concept, however. For example, we might establish a list of life experiences that would contribute to what we mean by *worldliness*:

- Getting married
- Getting divorced
- Having a parent die
- Seeing a murder committed
- Being arrested
- Being exiled
- Being fired from a job
- Running away with the circus, and so forth

We might quantify people's worldliness as the number of such experiences they've had: the more such experiences, the more worldly we'd say they were. If we thought of some experiences as more powerful than others, we could give those experiences more points. Once we had made our list and point system, scoring people and comparing their worldliness would be pretty straightforward. We would have no difficulty agreeing on who had more points than whom.

To quantify a concept like worldliness, we need to be explicit about what we mean. By focusing specifically on what we'll include in our measurement of the concept, however, we also exclude any other meanings. Inevitably, then, we face a trade-off: Any explicated, quantitative measure will be more superficial than the corresponding qualitative description.

.....
"If only one person was to be allowed to write a text on social research methods, Earl Babbie would be the obvious choice. This book covers everything I require for a sociology research methods course."

—Terry J. Russell, Frostburg State University, Frostburg, MD

Current, state-of-the-art coverage of everything from ethical issues to postmodernism

A logical, current organization that follows the research process

Reviewers praise the way the order of topics in this text unfold in 'research' order so students get a feel for how professional researchers do their work.

Strong coverage of ethics and its relation to research

In addition to an introduction to ethical issues in Chapter One, *The Basics of Social Research* comes back to this important topic throughout the book. There is also a detailed section discussing ethics in Appendix A, "The Ethics and Politics of Social Research."

Interesting and pragmatic coverage of postmodernism

Babbie makes a good case for the inevitability of subjectivity no matter how hard the researcher strives for objectivity. (This does not preclude rigorous and powerful scientific research, however, Babbie shows students how to use their subjectivity to that end.)

Up-to-date coverage and research examples throughout

Whether it's feminist paradigms, a critique of positivism, or push polls, you'll find the most current coverage available—including real GSS data.

Ethical Issues in Social Research

In most dictionaries and in common usage, ethics is typically associated with morality, and both deal with matters of right and wrong. But what is right and what wrong? What is the source of the distinction? For individuals the sources vary. They may be religions, political ideologies, or the pragmatic observation of what seems to work and what doesn't.

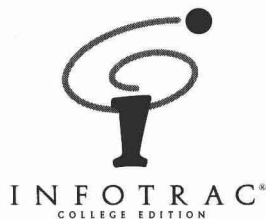
Webster's New World Dictionary is typical among dictionaries in defining *ethical* as "conforming to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group." Although the idea may frustrate those in search of moral absolutes, what we regard as morality and ethics in day-to-day life is a matter of agreement among members of a group. And, not surprisingly, different groups have agreed on different codes of conduct. If you're going to live in a particular society, then, it's extremely useful for you to know what that society considers ethical and unethical. The same holds true for the social research community.

If you're going to do social scientific research, then you need to be aware of the general agreements shared by researchers about what's proper

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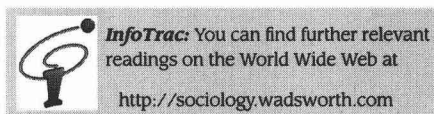
—Gregory Weiss, Roanoke College, Salem, VA

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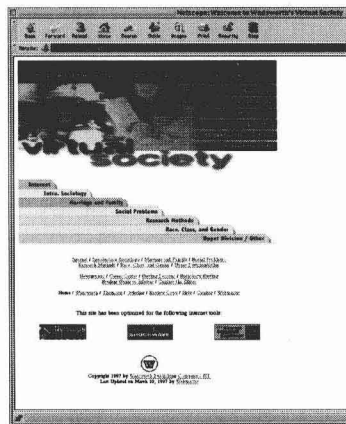
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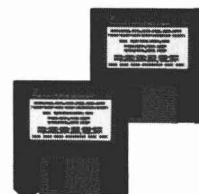
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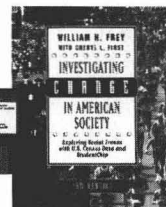
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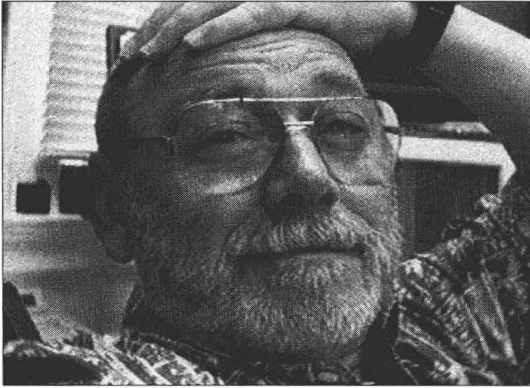
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The Basics of Social Research



A Note from the Author

Writing is my joy, sociology my passion. I delight in putting words together in a way that makes people learn or laugh or both. Sociology is one way I can do just that. It represents our last, best hope for planet-training our race and finding ways for us to live together. I feel a special excitement at being present when sociology, at last, comes into focus as an idea whose time has come.

I grew up in small-town Vermont and New Hampshire. When I announced I wanted to be an auto-body mechanic, like my dad, my teacher told me I should go to college instead. When Malcolm X announced he wanted to be a lawyer, his teacher told him a colored boy should be something more like a carpenter. The difference in our experiences says something powerful about the idea of a level playing field. The inequalities among ethnic groups run deep.

I ventured into the outer world by way of Harvard, the USMC, U.C. Berkeley, and 12 years teaching at the University of Hawaii. Along the way, I married Sheila two months after our first date, and we created Aaron three years after that: two of my wisest acts. I resigned from teaching in 1980 and wrote full-time for seven years, until the call of the classroom became too loud to ignore. For me, teaching is like playing jazz. Even if you perform the same number over and over, it never comes out the same twice, and you don't know exactly what it'll sound like until you hear it. Teaching is like writing with your voice.

At last, I have matured enough to rediscover and appreciate my roots in Vermont each summer. Rather than a return to the past, it feels more like the next turn in a widening spiral. I can't wait to see what's around the next bend.

Dedication

Sheila Babbie

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Preface

From the beginning, social scientists have been interested in both pure and applied research. Some have primarily justified their efforts in terms of “knowledge for knowledge’s sake,” while others have focused on the ways their research could make a practical impact on the quality of life. Over time, the emphasis on these two orientations has shifted back and forth.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, the social sciences were generally tipped toward “pure” research. The emphasis was on the collection of masses of data, often through large-scale social surveys, which could be subjected to complex statistical analyses. Social theorists such as Talcott Parsons committed themselves to the development of general theories of social behavior, akin to the general theories being developed in the physical sciences. More generally, the physical sciences provided a model of “objective” science dedicated to the discovery of fundamental laws of nature. While it was imagined that such pure research and general theories would surely benefit humankind in the long run, that was not the immediate aim for the most part.

The Civil Rights movement during the latter part of the 1950s brought many social scientists face-to-face with the daily problems of social life, problems that could and should be powerfully addressed by social scientists. This commitment to making a practical impact was further fueled by other social movements that followed the student movement that began at the University of California’s Berkeley campus in 1964, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the women’s movement, and environmental move-

ments that gained momentum in the 1970s, to name a few.

Despite the so-called “Me Decade” of the Reagan-Bush 1980s, the commitment to making a difference among social scientists is alive and well today. The image of the objective, “value-neutral” scientist now faces a moral challenge from social activists and a philosophical challenge from post-modernists. Often, these challenges have been accompanied by a renewed interest in qualitative research techniques as an alternative to complex statistical analyses of quantitative data. This is clearly an exciting time to be engaged in social science.

The current interest in applied research has not been limited to social problems and social reform. Increasingly, social scientists have shown their research skills to be invaluable in the day-to-day operations of society—in government, business, medical care, education, and all other facets of social life. Both qualitative and quantitative research techniques have proven valuable.

From the vantage point of writing textbooks to train new generations of social scientists, I’ve had the opportunity of observing nearly three decades of the evolution of social research. When I began, with *Survey Research Methods* in 1973, the existing texts pretty much reflected the image of objective and pure quantitative research, and that orientation seemed appropriate for a book on survey research. Even so, I was criticized for being “too nominalistic” because I suggested that the concepts we use are only linguistic conventions and don’t have any real, ultimate existence. There were also objections

raised to the inclusion of a chapter on research ethics. Where I wrote about “the rights of subjects,” one reviewer retorted, “What about the rights of science?”

Despite these criticisms, both students and instructors seemed to like the book, and it was a publishing success. In fact, several instructors around the country began asking Wadsworth if “that same guy” could write a more general methods text. It turned out that there were not all that many courses dealing specifically with survey research, so plans for a more general book began almost immediately.

Preparations for what would become *The Practice of Social Research* proceeded soon thereafter. My intention was that the book reflect the needs, opinions, and practices of instructors around the country. The preface of the first edition (1975) acknowledged the assistance of a dozen social research instructors from California to Florida. The resulting book, then, was a collaboration in a very real sense, even though only my name was on the cover and I was ultimately responsible for it.

The Practice of Social Research was an immediate success. It was initially written for sociology courses, but subsequent editions have been increasingly used in fields such as political science, social work, marketing research, and so forth. Moreover, teachers and researchers in numerous countries around the world, including China and Russia, use it today.

I’ve laid out this lengthy history of the book for a couple of reasons. First, when I was a student, I suppose I thought of textbooks the same way I thought about government buildings: They were just there. I never really thought about them being written by human beings. I certainly never thought about textbooks evolving: being updated, getting better, having errors corrected. As a student, I would have been horrified by the thought that any of my textbooks might contain mistakes!

Second, pointing out the evolution of the book sets the stage for introducing the volume you have in your hands. While *The Practice of Social Research* has been the primary text for introducing social research methods for over two decades, some students and instructors have indicated they would be

better served by a slightly different book. *Doing Social Research* differs from its ancestor in three ways:

1. It is shorter.
2. It is in paperback.
3. It focuses particularly on the application of social research.

This third distinction relates to the discussion that opened this preface, social science’s struggle to establish a balance between abstract knowledge and practical application. All the methods texts I’ve written reflect both the commitment to social research making a difference and an appreciation of the power of fundamental knowledge about the workings of society. This book is no different in these concerns.

In contrast to the methods texts that preceded it, however, this book focuses more on the uses of social research. While I have dealt with the fundamentals of designing and undertaking both qualitative and quantitative social research projects, I have tried to show how each of the techniques discussed can be used to address practical issues. In a keynote speech at the 1996 meetings of the California Sociological Association, Jon Turner spoke of the need to develop engineering applications for sociology, and I hope this book will represent a step in that direction.

Supplements

Study Guide

The student study guide and workbook accompanying this text is modeled after the study guide that Ted Wagenaar and I prepared for *The Practice of Social Research*. The study guide continues to be a mainstay in my own teaching. Students tell me they use it heavily as a review of the text, and I count the exercises as half their grade in the course. I specify a certain number of points for each exercise—depending on how hard it is and how much I want them to do it—and give a deadline for each exercise, typically right after we’ve covered the materials in class. Most exercises rate between 5 and 25 points.