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## PREFACE

What should students learn in an introductory research methods course? In addition to learning about fundamental methodological concepts and approaches, students should be able to identify and evaluate these concepts and approaches in reports of actual research. Indeed, when we analyzed syllabi from nearly 100 courses in methods of social research, this was the most common learning objective, listed by 60 percent of the instructors. As one instructor put it, at the end of the course, students should be able to “read original research and accurately describe the researcher’s questions, methodology, and findings, and . . . critically assess the author’s methods and conclusions.”

With this aim in mind, we ourselves have always assigned several research articles in our methods courses. Having done this, however, we know how difficult it is to find articles that are excellent examples of research and still accessible to undergraduates. The few existing readers tend to contain articles that, although accessible, are not consistently empirically rigorous. By contrast, we want our students to be able to read and understand recent articles that are exemplars of methodological concepts and approaches. The problem is that such articles tend to be too complex and too long.

This book, a collection of 20 articles and book excerpts, is our answer to the problem. The collection is comprehensive, covering a broad range of methodological approaches and topics found in most courses in social research methods and in many research methods textbooks (e.g., Babbie, 2013; Schutt, 2012; Singleton & Straits, 2010). The selections represent some of the latest and best work in sociology; are exemplary

applications of research methods; and are highly abridged and accessible to undergraduates.

We selected readings based on several criteria. First, we chose examples of *empirical research*; therefore, we excluded literature reviews, strictly theoretical papers, commentaries, and pieces on how to conduct research. Second, selections represent research *exemplars*, which tend to be found in leading journals such as *American Sociological Review*. Third, the proposed topics, as well as many of the readings, are based on the authors’ content analyses of curricula and research methods syllabi from the top 50 research universities and the top 50 liberal arts colleges in the *US News & World Report* 2011 national rankings. Fourth, reading selections focus explicitly on the key sociological dimensions of race/ethnicity, class, gender, deviance and crime, which should pique students’ interest. Finally, we tried to balance quantitative and qualitative selections throughout the reader.

As we abridged each article, we made sure that readers could clearly follow the researcher’s report from problem statement to literature review to methods, results, and conclusions. Wanting to make the anthology affordable, we tried to keep readings as short as possible by deleting nonessential elaborations, most footnotes, and some parts of the analysis. We also included only tables and figures that were essential to the results and that could be understood with little or no statistical knowledge. In the end, the abridgments retain the sophisticated logic and analysis that made these selections important contributions to the social science literature. They clearly demonstrate key methodological concepts and approaches while drawing students

in with interesting and provocative topics and findings.

Besides the careful abridgment of articles, the reader contains several other features designed to facilitate students' comprehension of the readings and research methodology:

- Brief introductions to each unit present key methodological concepts as well as one or more examples/illustrations of that topic and note how the unit readings are related to the topic and one another.

- Following the unit introduction, we offer web links to other material, as appropriate, such as professional codes of ethics, the American Association of Public Opinion Research's (AAOPR) discussion of random sampling, supplementary articles, and relevant data and computer programs that students can use.

- For each reading, a brief introduction places the research in the context of theory and methods and asks students to consider how the reading illustrates a concept or approach.

- At the end of each abridged article, we include questions that check students' understanding of the methodology. To further enhance the usefulness of the questions, we provide answers on a website for the book.

- We also include a glossary of the major terms used in the book.

## REFERENCES

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Babbie, E. (2013). *The practice of social research* (13th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Schutt, R. K. (2012). *Investigating the social world: The process and practice of research* (7th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Singleton, R. A., Jr., & Straits, B. C. (2010). *Approaches to social research* (5th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

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# INTRODUCTION

One of the best ways to learn about research methods is to read reports of empirical studies. This book consists of a collection of 20 such studies, carefully chosen to represent a broad range of approaches and methods of contemporary social research. Organized in 10 units, selected journal articles and book excerpts illustrate the relationship between theory and research, the ethical and political dimensions of research, methods of selecting cases and measuring concepts, and various ways of gathering and analyzing data. Each unit introduces the methodological topic, provides Web resources related to the topic, presents two reading selections, and then poses questions to assess your understanding of the researchers' methodology.

Although designed primarily as an introduction to research methods, this book also has a secondary goal: to expose readers to substantive topics fundamental to, and at the forefront of, sociology and other social sciences. Through rigorous empirical research, sociology and related disciplines formulate and answer questions about the social world. As we selected examples of methodological topics and approaches, we focused on studies addressing questions in the areas of race/ethnicity, gender/sexuality, social class, deviance, and crime.

Race remains one of the most important determinants of life chances and personal well-being. Social scientists continue to examine issues of racial segregation and discrimination and racial differences in nearly every aspect of social life. In this book, you will find reading selections that address several questions about race:

Given that information about the race of respondents routinely appears in a variety of sociological studies (Snipp, 2003), it is important to examine how researchers determine a person's racial identity. Many studies rely on a question from the U.S. decennial Census, but Selection 5 asks: Does the standard Census question about a person's race adequately capture the lived experience of race?

Selection 10 addresses a question of employment discrimination, asking if employers are less likely to hire black than white applicants, given equivalent credentials and work experience. Selection 17 further asks: Is there a difference between what employers say they will do and what they actually do when it comes to hiring black and white ex-criminal offenders?

In addition to racial discrimination, racial segregation remains an obstacle to personal well-being and equal life chances. African Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities continue to live in segregated neighborhoods, which often are located in economically depressed areas with high crime rates and other social problems. Selection 2 addresses the issue of police surveillance in a predominantly black and largely poor ghetto, asking: What is it like for young black men to be wanted by law enforcement authorities or otherwise "on the run"?

One way of measuring change in the racial climate is to trace media images of racial groups over time. Selection 15 asks: What does the portrayal of blacks in U.S. children's picture books reveal about changes in race relations in the mid- to late-twentieth century?

Research on gender has burgeoned in the last third of the 20th century. As women entered the