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Preface

Social research provides necessary support for innumerable professions, bolsters and directs policy decisions, fact-checks both wild and mundane claims about the world, and helps us understand ourselves and others. But even beyond these valuable endeavors, social research has a simple mission “to help us know what’s going on.” In this era of what is sometimes called globalization, everyone’s lives are impacted by vast numbers of things happening all over the planet, in all segments of industry, society, politics, economics, culture, and religion. Even the well-informed have little idea about most of it. We cannot observe and understand everything we need on our own. Research compresses the vast variability of life into more or less consistent and predictable bits of reality. It gives us a leg to stand on.

New to the Edition

The new edition of *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* continues the mission of the original—to teach students where our data comes from, how to manage it, how to make sense of it, what it can mean, and what it can do. In this edition, I have also added an emphasis on the other side of that coin. Each chapter briefly highlights the limitations on the various methods of data collection and analysis. There are things that research cannot do. Well-planned studies with reliable data and valid analyses can teach us a great deal, but they are not magic. As students of research, we must be critical consumers as well as producers. We have to know where to set the limits on our own ambitions and how to critically evaluate the claims that others make based on their understandings of the measurable world.

Research methods continue to grow and develop in exciting new ways, through experience, interdisciplinary conversation, new technologies, and in response to new needs. It has been centuries since maps were routinely produced with large areas of unknown topology. The world is no longer a mystery of undiscovered places and people. Now we are living with the opposite challenge: There is too much data. Everything we do seems to occur in public, in measurable ways. We are data. With increasing use of surveillance technologies, the very concept of anonymity is losing meaning. And, of course, with our mini-oracles in our pockets ready to search the world’s databases in less than one second to immediately retrieve even the most obscure bits of cultural trivia, it seems as though everything is knowable. It isn’t. Factoids of information, traces of personal histories, photographs, song lyrics, and train schedules, as well as body counts and temperature readings are merely data points. None of this

is useful information until it is organized, explored, and interpreted. Research methods grow to manage larger pools of more diverse data. Yet the basic principles and underlying practices remain the same. While this text covers both new and old tricks and techniques, my primary purpose is to emphasize the logic of research planning and the elusive task of finding meaning. The organization of chapters and topics remains unchanged since the last edition. Our job remains the same.

This edition of the book builds on the foundation of the previous editions while offering a number of improvements. I have corrected errors wherever I could find them and sought to clarify the most confusing discussions. I have added new and more challenging exercises and questions for discussion. The present edition gives more attention to visual and spatial analysis and to qualitative analysis software, but only in relation to the familiar methodologies where those tools apply. In addition to the challenge of presenting contemporary technologies before they change again, I have updated many of the examples used throughout the book to provide more contemporary data, except in the cases of certain classic studies or exemplary discussions that, to me, are irreplaceable. I have also reorganized sections for students in order to provide more clarity and to improve readability.

This ninth edition contains expanded discussions in key areas, such as research design, research ethics, and writing. I have given more attention to the context for the different techniques, with explicit attention to when they work best or least. And, to accommodate this new material, I have judiciously removed portions of the text throughout. Overall, I have tried to serve the two goals that have always driven this text from its first edition: to be as useful and challenging as possible without being dull.

This edition of *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* may be read straight through, at approximately one chapter per week, for 12–15 weeks. Or, one can read selectively and in any order. Each chapter is intended to be sufficiently self-contained to allow students to start anywhere and to proceed at your own pace. The coverage of materials is intended to be thorough enough to use as a stand-alone text, while sections are divided in a manner to allow instructors to isolate specific units in conjunction with other texts or readers. Most importantly, the advice and exercises offered here are intended to support students’ efforts to actually get out of the classroom and try some of this out. There is no better learning method than to throw yourself into it, make mistakes, and figure out what went wrong. Success is useful too, but failure can be the best teacher.

Available Instructor Resources

The following instructor resources can be accessed by visiting <http://www.pearsonhighered.com/irc>.

- **Instructor Manual**
Detailed instructor's manual with learning objectives, chapter outlines, discussion questions, activities, and assignments.
- **PowerPoint Presentation**
Provides a core template of the content covered throughout the text; can easily be added to customize for your classroom.
- **Test Bank**
Exhaustive test banks with MCQs, fill in the blanks, and essay-type questions.

- **My Test**

Create custom quizzes and exams using the Test Bank questions. You can print these exams for in-class use. Visit <http://www.pearsonhighered.com/mytest>.

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