

Preface

Why do psychologists do research? There are many answers to this question, but in my opinion, the best answer is that we do research because it is fun. People can be puzzling; research is a good way to assemble the pieces of the puzzle to help us understand those around us. This book will help you answer successfully your question about the way people behave.

I am assuming that you have already learned about the basic aspects of research. The material in this volume puts flesh on the bones as you embark on a project that you design and control. That is, when you learn the basics of research, you become aware of the general issues that are important in a good research design. But it may not be clear how to implement a project successfully. That is what this book is all about.

Throughout the book, I have made use of the research ideas that my students and I have developed to give you a sense of what kinds of questions you might ask, what research has already been done, what hypotheses you might pose, and how to develop your ideas. Over the past few decades, students have increasingly participated in conducting professional-quality research.

If you have the basic knowledge of research methodology, you can develop a research idea that will advance our psychological knowledge. It may not be apparent to you right now, but when you develop a successful research project, you are actually creating knowledge. That is, at the end of your research, you will know something that nobody else in the world knows. It will be new knowledge. This is always an exciting prospect.

As you can see by looking through the book, this volume will take you through each step of your project. First you have to develop a research idea. Other researchers have addressed many obvious and easy questions, and you probably don't want simply to repeat what others have done, so you need to figure out something else. You can make use of previous research to help you develop and refine your questions. I have described how you can generate new questions from what we already know.

In addition, I have given some important information about the ethics of research. If you are going to collect data using human or nonhuman animals, a review board must approve your work, so I have identified the practical issues regarding ethics that are associated with carrying out a project.

Before you begin the actual data collection, you need to identify your variables and methods of measurement. There is no single right way to address a question; you have options from which to choose. But I show how others have successfully done this so that you can too.

After you have collected your data, you will undoubtedly want to conduct statistical analyses. I have offered some basic information about dealing with your results and, after that, to make sense with interpretation and speculation about what the data tell you. In Appendix B, I have given some background on using IBM SPSS Statistics* to analyze the data with commonly used statistics.

Finally, you can see how to create a research report that is consistent with the guidelines set forth in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (known as APA style). There are many useful resources for writing your report; I have not duplicated those books. Instead, I have outlined what you want to include in the various sections of your paper and how to develop your ideas in the various sections of the book.

Throughout your research, you have to pay attention to a lot of details, as I noted before. But if you are studying a topic that interests you, the process of generating a question and finding a way to answer it can be highly satisfying. No research project answers all the questions about a topic, but your research can be an important and interesting piece of the puzzle of human behavior.

Writing this book was like a research project: It involved collaboration among many people. I am grateful to Chris Cardone for her initial work in developing the idea for the book. In addition, Reid Hester and Sarita Sarak at SAGE were very helpful in guiding me through the final stages of the project. I also want to thank my copy editor, Lana Arndt, whose fastidious attention to detail helped generate the final form of this book.

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*IBM SPSS Statistics was formerly called PASW® Statistics.