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(All dates O.K.)

Anyone who has ever tried to teach quantitative methods to social work students or indeed to a certain lately fashionable brand of sociology students will understand the problems presented by indifference, ideology, neuroticism and antipathy displayed towards anything even remotely connected with systematic scientific attempts to measure, explain and predict the social world, with or without the use of statistics or computers. Many an hour has been sweated on the careful design of courses and materials to lure our budding Goffmans and Habermases towards the use of numbers and algebra to replace their confused and confusing jargon. On the other hand, many are the would-be sociology students who, presented with Durkheim's "Suicide" or Marx's "Kapital" Vol I, have retired to rethink their futures.

I wish I'd known about this book two years ago. It would have saved an awful lot of time spent preparing handouts, and even more in hassles with struggling sophomores. It is altogether too excellent an introduction to computers for non-technical students. It could equally well have been titled "An absolute beginner's introduction to quantitative methods in social research". If you want spoon-feeding, this is the book for you. It abounds with pictures, diagrams, checklists and more than succeeds in its aim to "overcome computer and research illiteracy found among fledgling social scientists". It is intended to enable such people to understand what a computer is and does, to operate packaged programs and to write up a research report; in short, to

produce meaningful research with a minimum of technical knowledge. With the advent of more complex systems and the growing tendency of advisory services to be anything but, it is likely that even senior researchers and teachers will find this little book invaluable.

The author makes a telling point on the professional value of computing and statistical skills. Certainly in Britain theoretical sociology courses are finding it hard to recruit students now that they, perhaps regrettably, are looking to future employment prospects. In fact some potential students are preferring to go to work rather than to college for this very reason. To be without computing skills is to be at a disadvantage when competing for scarce jobs in a changing market for graduates in sociology and related subjects.

As to content, the book lives up to its non-technical claim, repeats the usual GIGO (Garbage In - Garbage Out) warning, and briefly reviews the broad areas of application relevant to the social sciences. The recommendation to use packages such as SPSS, OSIRIS, BMD is welcome. Chapter 2 discusses clearly and concisely how a computer works, including the use of 80-column cards. There are photographs of the IBM-029 punch (nostalgic for some!) a card-reader, teletype terminal, care-store, tape-drive, disk, central processing unit, tone-printer, visual display unit, together with descriptions of what they all do. It may be nit-picking, but I would have liked to have seen something on card-sorters and tabulators.

Chapter 3 discusses the use of packages with brief introductions to SPSS, OSIRIS and BMD together with Job Control Language (JCL) which is the bane of many social scientists, including experienced professional This chapter contains an extended example of a completely parsed SPSS job completely explaining exactly what each command means.

Many students will find most use for Chapter 4 on writing a research report, which covers outlining the material, formulating hypotheses, operationalisation, levels of measurement, analysing tables, explaining findings (with checklists for each step) with a final summary outline. The final section is a discussion of statistics in relation to theory and methodology which will be particularly helpful to students struggling to reconcile apparently conflicting approaches to methodology.

For completeness the author has added a neat series of separate appendices on the card-punch (with a close-up photo of the IBM-029 keyboard), coding, footnotes in research reports, and a glossary of commonly used data-processing terms.

This priceless little book demonstrates yet again that the best people to teach computing and statistics to social scientists are social scientists (the author is a political scientist) and not mathematical statisticians or computer programmers, most of whom are enough to put sociologists off numerical methods for life. I have yet to meet one who could make a sensible sociological interpretation of anything, and it is a continuous battle, at least in the UK, to stop them taking over key areas of methodology, particularly survey research. The emergence of new kinds of training courses in sociology and the new British Social Research Association may put the statisticians and computer freaks where they belong: this book will help to keep them at bay and restore to sociologists the field of social research which they have till now abandoned.

Ronn J.Hy, we thank you.

The bibliography could be extended by recent publications.

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