

Series Editor's Note

Research is all about drawing valid conclusions that inform policy and practice. The randomized clinical trial (RCT) has evolved as the gold standard for drawing causal inferences but it really isn't the golden chariot of valid inference. It's not fool's gold either—it's a sound design; but, thankfully, researchers do have other options, and sometimes these other options are better suited for a specific research question, particularly in field settings. Chip Reichardt brings you the wonderful world of valid and useful designs that, when properly implemented, provide accurate findings. His book is a delightful guide to the fundamental logic in this other world of inferential research designs—the quasi-experimental world.

As Reichardt indicates, the distinction between experimental and nonexperimental or quasi-experimental is more in the thoughtfulness with which the designs are implemented and in the proper application of the analytics that each design requires. Even RCTs can yield improper conclusions when they are degraded by factors such as selective attrition, local treatment effects, treatment noncompliance, variable treatment fidelity, and the like, particularly when implemented in field settings such as schools, clinics, and communities. Reichardt brings a thoughtful and practical discussion of all the issues you need to consider to demonstrate as best as possible the counterfactual that is a hallmark of accurate inference.

I like the word *verisimilitude*—the truthlike value of a study's results. When you take Reichardt's advice and implement his tips, your research will benefit by having the greatest extent of verisimilitude. In this delightfully penned book, Reichardt shares his vast state-of-the-craft understanding for valid conclusions using all manner of inferential design. Theoretical approaches to inferential designs have matured considerably, particularly when modern missing-data treatments and best-practice statistical methods are employed. Having studied and written extensively on these designs, Reichardt

is at the top of the mountain when it comes to understanding and sharing his insights on these matters. But he does it so effortlessly and accessibly. This book is the kind you could incorporate into undergraduate curricula where a second course in design and statistics might be offered. For sure it is a “must” at the graduate level, and even seasoned researchers would benefit from the modernization that Reichardt brings to the inferential designs he covers.

Beyond the thoughtful insights, tips, and wisdom that Reichardt brings to the designs, his book is extra rich with pedagogical features. He is a very gifted educator and expertly guides you through the numbered equations using clear and simple language. He does the same when he guides you through the output from analysis derived from each of the designs he covers. Putting accessible words to numbers and core concepts is one of his super powers, which you will see throughout the book as well as in the glossary of key terms and ideas he compiled. His many and varied examples are engaging because they span many disciplines. They provide a comprehensive grounding in how the designs can be tailored to address critical questions with which we all can resonate.

Given that the type of research Reichardt covers here is fundamentally about social justice (identifying treatment effects as accurately as possible), if we follow his lead, our findings will change policy and practice to ultimately improve people's lives. Reichardt has given us this gift; I ask that you pay it forward by following his lead in the research you conduct. You will find his sage advice and guidance invaluable. As Reichardt says in the Preface, “Without knowing the varying effects of treatments, we cannot well know if our theories of behavior are correct or how to intervene to improve the human condition.” As always, enjoy!

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*Society for Research in Child Development meeting
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