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# FIELD METHODS IN CROSS- CULTURAL RESEARCH

EDITED BY

WALTER J. LONNER  
JOHN W. BERRY

## CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY SERIES

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We also want to thank our respective universities for the support they provided. Meredith Jacobson of Western Washington University and Audrey Bailey of Queen's both typed two chapters and helped with various other tasks during the past few years. Pat Brown of Queen's University deserves special thanks for the central role she played in seeing to it that indexes were in good and useful shape, and that the integrated reference list was as close to error-free as possible. The editorial work on this book reached a crescendo while the first editor was on leave during the 1984-1985 academic year, associated with the University of the Saar in West Germany. Direct support provided by that university and indirect support provided by the Fulbright Commission and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft is gratefully acknowledged.

—Walter J. Lonner

—John W. Berry



*For Marilyn and Joan*

## About the Series

The Sage Series on Cross-Cultural Research and Methodology was created to present comparative studies on cross-cultural topics and interdisciplinary research. Inaugurated in 1975, the series is designed to satisfy a growing need to integrate research method and theory and to dissect issues from a comparative perspective; a truly international approach to the study of behavioral, social, and cultural variables can be done only within such a methodological framework.

Each volume in the series presents substantive cross-cultural studies and considerations of the strengths, inter-relationships, and weaknesses of its various methodologies, drawing upon work done in anthropology, political science, psychology, and sociology. Both individual researchers knowledgeable in more than one discipline and teams of specialists with differing disciplinary backgrounds have contributed to the series. While each individual volume may represent the integration of only a few disciplines, *the cumulative totality of the series reflects an effort to bridge gaps of methodology and conceptualization across the various disciplines and many cultures.*

This book is the first in the series to be completely devoted to those methodological concerns that are most frequently confronted in cross-cultural research. As explained in more detail in the introduction, the content of the book, as well as the selection of chapter authors, was guided by a survey of seasoned, cross-cultural researchers. Although the book is intended primarily for the cross-cultural *psychological* researcher, the topics and issues are general enough and important enough to be equally useful to the cross-cultural researcher whose allegiance lies with an allied discipline, such as anthropology, sociology, or political science. And, as also noted in the introduction, the book can serve as both a text for upper-division undergraduate students, as well as the researcher who is planning to gather data in the field (or who may be already in the field).

As series coeditors, we take pleasure in adding this book to the series. As coeditors of the book, we are also pleased that it has become part of the series.

—Walter J. Lonner  
Western Washington University  
—John W. Berry  
Queen's University

## Preface

The field of cross-cultural psychology is, to a large extent, defined by its methods. Despite this, no current volume is available which brings together recent thinking and research into cross-cultural methods. The first book in the field (Brislin, Lonner, & Thorndike, 1973) is no longer available, while the second (Triandis & Berry, 1980) was cast at a rather high level, suitable more for scholars and graduate students than for field workers.

Our major goals with this book are to meet the needs of the field worker faced with a research question, and the teacher who is talking about research problems and issues in the classroom. The intent, therefore, was to provide field workers — both those actually in the field and those contemplating going into the field — with a handy, comprehensive, practical and up-to-date book which would contain helpful guidelines, background material and even some quite specific “how tos.” The intended audience is psychologists and other behavioral scientists who would be sophisticated in many research areas, but not completely conversant with the central problems in cross-cultural research.

Once the decision to go ahead was made, and the length of the book established, we needed to determine content areas and enlist the aid of authors to cover each. There were two ways to go about determining content. One way was to be intuitive: decide by ourselves which topics *should* be in a methods book, and then invite experts in the selected areas to contribute. We opted for a second way, which was more empirical. We developed a list of twenty-eight methodological topics which seemed to us to be of importance to the field worker. We decided to carry out a survey of experienced researchers, asking them to rate the topics on a seven-point scale. The survey was sent to over a hundred active cross-cultural psychologists, and the high response rates and generally enthusiastic comments were helpful and encouraging.

The results of the survey told us that experts considered it very important to have chapters dealing with the underlying rationale for comparative research, the design and analysis of field studies, sampling, translation methods, testing and assessment, various procedures of systematic observation (including unobtrusive methods), and the logistics and problems of fieldwork. The chapters in this book parallel the results of the survey. The authors of each chapter are reasonably consistent with the recommendations provided by the survey respondents, who were also given the opportunity to suggest possible authors, themselves included.

The results of the survey also told us that there is great diversity of opinion regarding what should be included in a methods book oriented toward the cross-cultural field worker. For instance, we received recommendations to include chapters on dozens of topics. A sampling (aside from those already mentioned above): the study of adolescents; attribution of success and failure in different cultures; how to conduct research on substance abuse; principles of studying nonverbal communication; methodology for multigroup analysis; industrial and organizational behavior; studies of ethnic and minority groups in particular societies; physiological measures; nonverbal (pictorial) assessment methods; moral development; sex roles; how to study sexuality and family planning. The list could go on. While it would have been nice to accommodate even the most esoteric recommendation, it would also have been impossible to be so comprehensive. Thus the ten chapters in the book cover most of the important and generic methodological and substantive areas; perhaps to some extent these chapters can be viewed as "common denominators" of methodology. Thus nested within various combinations of chapters will be found important *guidelines* for research, but not a specific list of "how tos."

The development of the book was aided by those who participated in two workshops concerning its progress. These workshops were on the programs of two IACCP conferences:<sup>1</sup> the first in 1982 (Aberdeen) and the second in 1984 (Acapulco). A majority of chapter authors attended both meetings: at the first the overall design of the volume was considered and debated, while at the second authors presented summaries of their coverage and progress, and received helpful comments from those who represent potential users of the book. We thank those who attended these workshops, and we hope that they will see some of their comments reflected in the

different chapters. If their ideas or suggestions were not incorporated it is because we could not adequately cover all recommendations.

As work on the book progressed, two factors emerged as stumbling blocks to an expeditious production of a truly useful field methods book. One factor was that many productive and knowledgeable people initially have every intention of completing all the jobs they take on, but apparently tend to overestimate what they can do. Several "deadlines" slipped by, resulting in a delayed publication. The more important factor that emerged relates to the *content* of the book and how useful it may be to the field worker. Looking back at our initial letters inviting people to contribute chapters, we said that we wanted to provide field workers with a "handy, comprehensive, practical, and up-to-date statement on how to conduct cross-cultural research in the field." The operative and contentious word in this statement of plans is "how." To many, this word meant that we intended to produce a cookbook, or a specific guide that would say something like this in various ways: "If you want to study the effects of modernization in Country X, then select samples of sizes Y, give them each Test Z, and analyze the data according to conventional statistical methods." It is clear to us that such a book as that cannot and perhaps should not be written, since it would necessarily be an imposition of a ready-made psychology on the local phenomena to be studied.

What the book does accomplish, we feel, is to give the relatively sophisticated and thoughtful field worker (not only newcomers, fresh from graduate school, but seasoned researchers as well) a reasonably comprehensive statement on epistemological and methodological issues, a review of what has succeeded for many and failed for others, and in general an overview of common concerns and questions that will be asked and that need to be answered during various phases of any cross-cultural research project. We beg the reader's indulgence, and we apologize for not producing the "perfect" field methods book. That remains for others to do after the flaws of the present effort are fully exposed, excised, and replaced by other material that the field worker will find indispensable.

The chapters are not uniform in style, depth of coverage, or use of references. This nonuniformity is attributable to two factors. First, contributors were given a summary statement of what their chapter should *basically* cover. Because experts in any field write best when unconstrained by the stylistic preferences of others we accepted any

approach that was consistent with the goals of the book. Second, different topics require differing degrees of abstraction and technicality. For example, the underlying rationale for particular methods, or the psychometric theory behind particular tests, are inherently more difficult than observational methods. What you will read, then, are methodological statements and prescriptions that a panel of experienced researchers consider to be important. Our job as editors involved putting limits on length, seeing to it that the level of treatment was neither too high nor too elementary, cross-referencing, and trying to meet deadlines.

The chapters have been arranged so that broader, more methodological issues are placed first; this includes theoretical issues that are involved in cross-cultural comparison. Then follow some more concrete methods, including chapters on sampling (culture, communities, individuals, and behaviors), carrying out field work, problems of translation, and of using observations in the field. More substantive issues are then addressed, including how to assess abilities and aptitudes, personality and psychopathology, and social behavior. The volume ends with a chapter on acculturation, a necessary topic for two reasons: first, to avoid invalid interpretations of phenomena as due to cultural influences when they may have come about because of intercultural contact, and second, to render the volume as useful for the study of ethnic groups in plural societies as we hope it is for the study of independent cultural groups across nations.

Chapters 1 and 2 are concerned with somewhat complex methodological and theoretical details of cross-cultural research. The authors of these two chapters have done an excellent job of explaining these important matters. However, some readers may prefer to enjoy an appetizer or two before tackling such material. If the reader is not yet familiar with the special technical problems of cross-cultural research, we suggest reading Chapter 3 first, followed perhaps by a perusal of a few of the other more substantive chapters. Because each chapter is more or less an independent unit, this can be done without interrupting the "flow" of the book. Such an approach would probably help one understand the first two chapters much better when one returns to them.

A final introductory statement we wish to make concerns two basic ways in which the book can be used. It can serve as a textbook in classes dealing with considerations of whys and wherefores of

cross-cultural psychology. If used in this manner, one of course need not go into the field to derive the benefits of each chapter, for there are as many substantive issues as there are methodological issues in the book; it can therefore be used as a springboard to discussing a wide range of topics in cross-cultural research. The second use of the book, and the main reason it was prepared, concerns its helpfulness as a methodological guide to research. While we would be flattered to think that cross-cultural researchers will take it with them on field trips as a general resource book, it is *essential* that it (or, more likely, it and a number of other books, articles, and other aids) be read long before leaving for the field. The very best cross-cultural research is well-planned from start to finish. This is not a cookbook, but it does cover the major issues and problems of method, and it should serve well as a resource or reference book while in the field. The best research done in cross-cultural psychology demands creativity, scholarship, preparation, and thoughtful reflection of the best way to deal with a specific research question. If this book serves as a stimulus for the satisfaction of these demands, then it will have served its major purpose.

—Walter J. Lonner  
—John W. Berry

## NOTE

1. International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology.



