INTRODUCTION
CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES IN SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Although considerable progress has been made in recent decades, it should come as no surprise that methodologies for conducting cross-cultural research\(^1\) are not as firmly established as those routinely employed in monocultural settings. This is largely a consequence of the need to vigorously address, in addition to reliability and validity, the comparability of measurements and other practical aspects of data collection across cultures. Recognition of these challenges motivates research now being undertaken by increasing numbers of investigators in many nations who are concerned with improving the quality of comparative survey research.

Appreciation of the importance of cross-cultural comparability dates back more than half a century, and a brief assessment of published works from that time provides some insight into this. In Daniel Lerner’s (1958) classic *The Passing of Traditional Society*, only the barest of details regarding the surveys completed in six Middle Eastern nations are provided. In contrast, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba’s (1963) also classic *The Civic Culture*, published just five years later, presented extensive descriptions of their efforts to produce comparable survey data across five Western nations. Shortly thereafter, a number of books focusing specifically on methodologies for cross-cultural survey research began to appear (e.g., Rokkan 1968; Holt and Turner 1970; Przeworski and Teune 1970; Armer and Grimshaw 1973; Warwick and Osherson 1973). Over the ensuing decades, other developments led to an increased awareness of and emphasis on the methodological challenges of comparative survey research.

One was the development, beginning in the early 1980s, of several coordinated cross-national survey programs, including the World Values Survey, the International Social Survey Programme, and the European Social Survey, each of which aggressively sought to address comparability problems. The ongoing experience and knowledge generated through these collaborations contributed to our dual appreciation of the importance of tailoring methods to respect unique cultures and environments, as well as the need to develop rigorous methods for establishing comparability. These goals, of course, are

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1. Cross-cultural research is defined here as research conducted across multiple cultures, race/ethnic groups, nations, or regions.

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not mutually exclusive, and it is now recognized that both are essential to successful and meaningful cross-cultural survey efforts.

During the 1990s, another important development was the emergence of the late Janet Harkness as a leader and relentless advocate for excellence in the practice of cross-cultural survey research (c.f. Harkness, Van de Vijver, and Mohler 2003; Harkness et al. 2010). Her efforts led to the establishment of the Comparative Survey Design and Implementation (CSDI) Working Group, which has met annually now for more than a decade, and the first international conference concerned specifically with this topic, in Berlin in 2008 (a second conference is planned for 2016 in Chicago). Her contributions are now celebrated annually through WAPOR/AAPOR’s Janet A. Harkness Student Paper Award, and this special issue of Public Opinion Quarterly, which she had first advocated for a number of years ago, is dedicated to her memory.

The papers in this special issue address several of the contemporary issues and challenges now confronting cross-cultural survey methodology. Gordon Willis provides a comprehensive review of the use of cognitive interviews for the assessment of instruments being developed for cross-cultural administration. Five other papers examine analytic strategies for investigation of the comparability of constructs measured in large, multinational data-collection efforts. The papers by Susan Banducci and Daniel Stevens, by Jia He and Fons Van de Vijver, and by Dan Yu and Yongwei Yang examine measurement problems across a range of substantive fields, including political science, education, and business, respectively. The papers by Eldad Davidov, Jan Cieciuch, Bart Meuleman, Peter Schmidt, René Algesheimer, and Mirjam Hausherr, and by Zoltán Lakatos, focus specifically on challenges associated with the measurement of cultural values. In addition to these authors, I would like to thank all of the scholars who enthusiastically submitted manuscripts for consideration, and those who generously agreed to serve as reviewers for this special issue. It is with great appreciation that I also thank POQ’s editors, Patricia Moy and Tom W. Smith, and Managing Editor Phyllis Silverstein, for their wonderful support and encouragement of this special issue concerned with cross-cultural survey methodology.

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Editor, Public Opinion Quarterly’s Special Issue on Cross-Cultural Issues in Survey Methodology

References


