

# Cross-Cultural Psychology

## Chapter 2 Methodology of Cross-Cultural Research

*A blind man who sees is better than a seeing man who is blind.*

Persian Proverb

*Never believe on faith, see for yourself! What you yourself don't learn, you don't know.*

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956)—  
Twentieth-Century German Playwright

## Goals of Cross-Cultural Research

Imagine, a researcher wants to find similarities and differences between arranged marriage practiced in India and nonarranged marriages in the United States and how they affect marital stability. What does the psychologist aim to pursue in this particular project?

First, the researcher wants to describe the findings of this research.

Then, when some differences between ethnic groups are found, the researcher tries to explain whether these factors affect stability.

The practical value of the study may be significant if it not only explains but also predicts the factors that should determine successful marital relationships in both studied groups.

## Two strategies in cross-cultural research



**Application-  
Oriented  
Strategy**

**Comparativist  
Strategy**

One of the major concerns of any cross-cultural study is equivalence. This term stands for the evidence that the methods selected for the study measure the same phenomenon across other cultures chosen for the study.

**Method A is used to  
study anxiety in  
France and Italy**



**Method B is used to  
study anxiety in India  
and Pakistan**

**The results will likely to be incompatible due to  
the equivalency problem**

**A sample of a multi-step approach to cross-cultural research design**

**Step 1. Describe a problem (an issue) you have to investigate. Review the scholarly literature on the topic. You may use popular journals, magazines, and newspapers for additional references. Check available sources in the language of the country or countries you examine, if necessary.**

**Step 2. Identify your research goal, i.e. explain what you want to achieve as a result. Then introduce one or several hypotheses for your study. You can use at least two strategies; (a) inductive: you collect data first, and then make a conclusion about the studied samples; (b) deductive: you select a hypothesis first; then you collect data to demonstrate or reject the selected hypothesis.**

**A sample of a multi-step approach to cross-cultural research design**

**Step 3. Identify and describe the research sample of your study: groups of people, newspaper reports, children's drawings, texts, etc.**

**Step 4. Choose or design a methodology for your project. Make sure that your method does not violate research ethics. Refer to your local Human Subjects Review Board for approval. Put together a schedule (time-table) for your project.**

**A sample of a multi-step approach to cross-cultural research design**

**Step 5. Conduct a pilot study, a preliminary exploration of the method to see how your methodology works and whether there are any obstacles to data collection.**

**Step 6. Collect research data.**

**Step 7. Interpret your data using statistical procedures.**

**Step 8. Present the results and analyze them critically in a report.**

**Step 9. In your report, suggest where and how your data should be or could be used (i.e., in education, counseling, advertisement, conflict-resolution, etc.)**



## Sample selection in cross-cultural research



**Convenience  
Sampling**



**Systematic  
Sampling**



**Random  
Sampling**

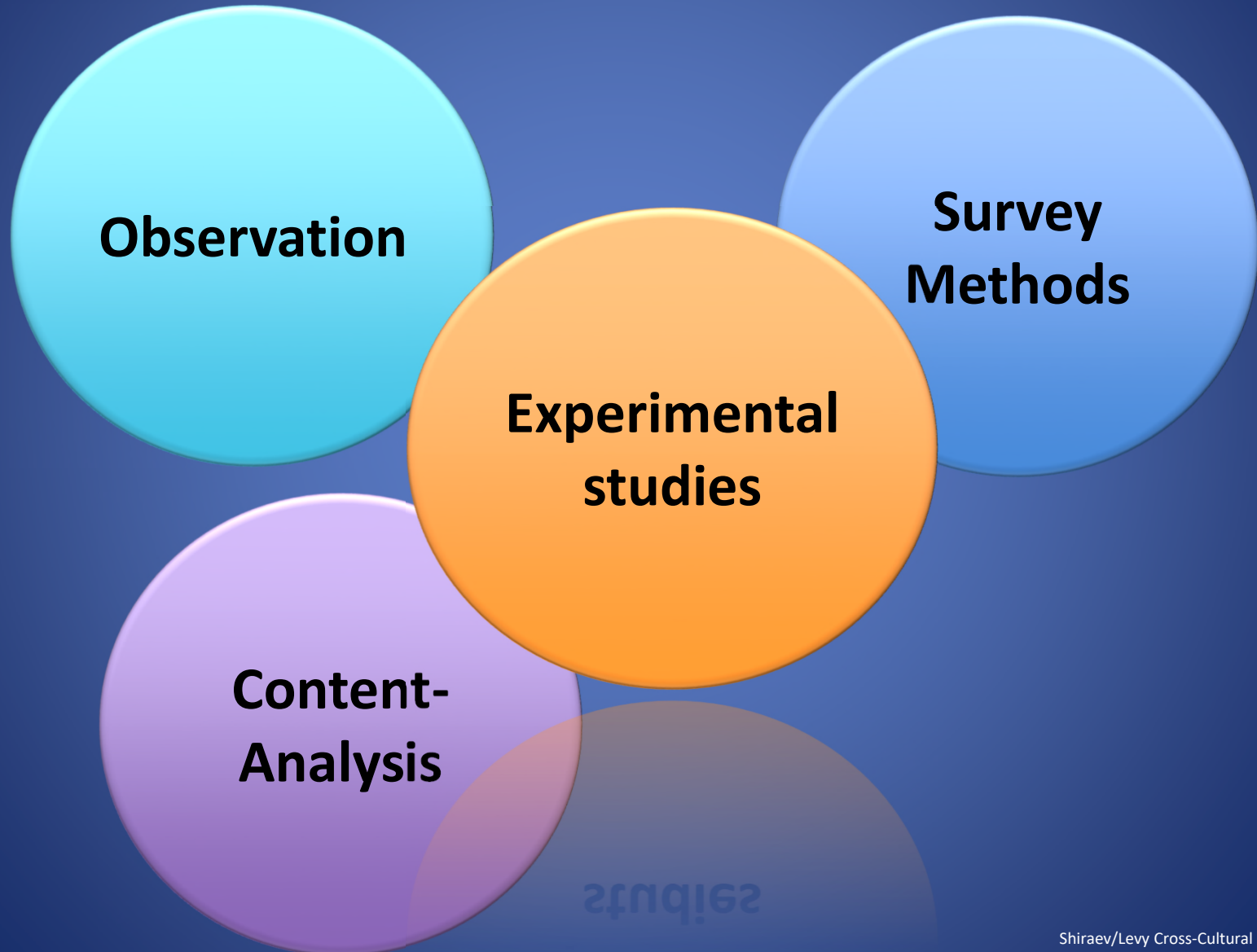


## Sample's Size

Estimates derived from large samples are more reliable than estimates derived from small samples. When forming judgments, some people do not take this principle into account. As a consequence, despite the fact that data collected from small samples cannot be counted on as trustworthy predictors of a population's characteristics, we may be prone to commit the error of overgeneralizing from too small a sample.

An illustration: What do you think: does “7 out of 10” look like better odds than “60 out of 100”? Yes, it looks like the first one is better. However, which of these indicators is more reliable? The more reliable indicator is the “60 out of 100” because it is drawn from a larger, that is, more reliable sample.

## Basic methods of cross-cultural research



# Scientific Observation

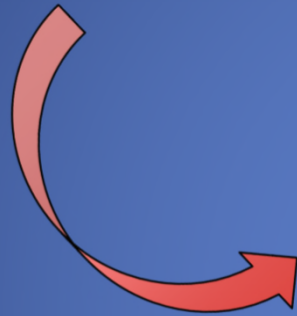
What are the differences between scientific and non-scientific observation?

Most of the time, non-scientific observation is often spontaneous and biased. The observer's attitudes can have an impact on the results of observation.

A scientific cross-cultural observation should use measurable variables. For example, a study measures how fast the individuals walked on the streets on New York, Tokyo, and Teheran.

# Surveys

Surveys are, perhaps, the most common technique of data collection in cross-cultural psychology. In a typical survey, the researcher asks the subject to express an opinion regarding a particular topic, issue, or issues.



**Adrian White, from the UK's University of Leicester, used the responses of 80,000 people worldwide to map out subjective wellbeing.**

Dr. White: "When people are asked if they are happy with their lives, people in countries with good healthcare, a higher GDP [gross domestic product] per capita, and access to education were much more likely to report being happy."

**Test Translation**

**Cultural Applicability**

**Cultural Bias**

## Obstacles in Cross-Cultural Research

### Test Translation

If you are bilingual, translate the following words in another language. Next, translate them back in English. What will you get?

**“Sexual harassment”**



**“Privacy”**



**“Shame and Embarrassment”**



## Cultural Applicability

Could a child from a non-Western culture understand this question?

***My neighbor has just received some singular visitors. He received one after the other a doctor, a lawyer, and a priest. What is going on at my neighbor's?***

***(Alfred Binet. From an IQ test, the early 1900s)***



## Cultural Bias

In self-assessment surveys, three national groups consistently mark themselves as “hardest working”: Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.

Respondents from Chinese, Korean, and Japanese samples evaluate themselves among least hard-working in the world!

# Experiment

**Independent Variable:  
Conditions controlled by  
the experimenter**



**Dependent  
Variable:  
Something  
you study**

## Other methods of cross-cultural research

**Content-  
Analysis**

**Meta-  
Analysis**

**Focus-Group  
Methodology**

## Comparing two Phenomena in Cross-Cultural Psychology

Psychologists supporting the **absolutist approach** (often called the universalist approach) will argue that psychological phenomena are basically the same in all cultures: honesty is honesty, sexual abuse is abuse, and depression is depression, no matter where, when, or how the researcher studies these and other psychological phenomena. Within this approach, there is a tendency to use the standards of one group as the norms for viewing other groups.

## Comparing two Phenomena in Cross-Cultural Psychology

The **relativist approach** suggests that human behavior in its full complexity can be understood only within the context of the culture in which it occurs. Therefore, the scientist should study an individual's psychology from within his culture.

## Beware of Cultural Dichotomies!

There could be fewer differences between two “dissimilar” groups that you may think

Or, there could be more differences between two apparently “similar” groups

On Similarities and Differences:  
Some Critical- thinking Applications

Without comparisons, there is no cross-cultural psychology. When we compare—take, for example, emotional expressions in two countries or test scores in two national or ethnic groups—we look for either similarities or differences between two variables. When comparing any two phenomena, initially they may “match” with respect to their mutual similarities.

But no matter how many features they might share in common, there is no escaping the inevitable fact that at some point there will be a “conceptual fork” in the road, where the phenomena will differ. We may refer to this juncture as the **point of critical distinction (PCD)**, before which the phenomena are similar and after which they are different.



## Avoiding Bias of Generalizations

**To avoid making quick generalizations from research findings, ask these questions:**

What were the size and representation of the chosen samples in this project? If the study included only 50 subjects from two countries who answered several survey questions regarding attitudes toward religion, it is not possible to make reliable conclusions about religious differences between the studied countries.

Was the method chosen for the study adequate in different cultural settings? Was it translated properly? When it could be demonstrated that the instrument, produced in one setting, was nonetheless applicable in many other settings, differences obtained with that instrument could be taken as reflections of some cultural variables.

Are the data convincing? To make sure that the results of the study reflect a particular trend and are not due to chance alone, the researcher should repeat the same study or find out about other similar studies.

Are there any factors that could have affected the outcome that were not taken into consideration in this study? For instance, think about social, political, environmental, and physiological factors.