



Join the Allyn & Bacon First Editions Club!

To start your membership in our First Editions Club, simply read the following chapter and complete a brief questionnaire at: www.ablongman.com/swsurvey.

As a Thank You, we will send you a Penguin-Putnam title of your choice!

We look forward to hearing from you!

Social Work Research Methods with Research Navigator

Larry W. Kreuger
W. Lawrence Neuman

©2006

ISBN-10: 0-205-47011-4

ISBN-13: 978-0-205-47011-2

CHAPTER 14: Historical-Comparative Research



ALLYN & BACON
www.ablongman.com/socialwork

Visit www.ablongman.com/relocator to contact your local Allyn & Bacon/Longman representative.

Historical-Comparative Research

A Short History of Historical-Comparative Research

Research Questions Appropriate for Historical-Comparative Research

The Logic of Historical-Comparative Research

The Logic of Historical-Comparative Research and Quantitative Research

The Logic of Historical-Comparative Research and Interpretive Research

A Distinct Historical-Comparative Approach

Steps in a Historical-Comparative Research Project

Conceptualizing the Object of Inquiry

Locating Evidence

Evaluating Quality of Evidence

Organizing Evidence

Synthesizing

Writing a Report

Data and Evidence in Historical Context

Types of Historical Evidence

Research with Secondary Sources

Research with Primary Sources

Comparative Research

Types of Comparative Research

The Units Being Compared

Data in Cross-Cultural Research

Western Cultural Bias

Equivalence in Historical-Comparative Research

The Importance of Equivalence

Types of Equivalence

Ethics

Conclusion

Sociological explanation is necessarily historical. Historical sociology is thus not some special kind of sociology; rather, it is the essence of the discipline.

—Philip Abrams, *Historical Sociology*, p. 2

Thinking without comparisons is unthinkable. And, in the absence of comparisons, so is all scientific thought and all scientific research. No one should be surprised that comparisons, implicit and explicit, pervade the work of social scientists and have done from the beginning.

—Guy Swanson, “Frameworks for Comparative Research,” p. 145

Social scientific explanations of major societal processes—terrorism, a nation going to war, growing poverty, sources of inequality, rising immigration rates, urban decay—rely on studies that use historical and comparative research. In addition, historical-comparative (H-C) research (also called comparative-historical) brings clarity to many methodological concerns found in other forms of research, and researchers use it to address many ex-

citing questions in social research. Nonetheless, students sometimes find historical-comparative studies difficult to understand, even when such studies do not use complex statistics and have only words or maps. The reason may be that topics and issues explored with H-C research often are outside the everyday experiences of most students, especially if they are monolingual and monocultural; that is, familiar with only their own language and culture, or

lacking a solid background in history. In addition, basic researchers, more so than applied researchers, use historical-comparative research. This is because it can reveal processes over long time periods and across societies, and it addresses many central issues in general theory (Mahoney, 2004b). This makes H-C research vital to the expansion of fundamental knowledge, but students who are just beginning to acquire social science knowledge may not yet recognize its contributions.

The classic social thinkers in the nineteenth century, such as Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, who founded the social sciences, used a historical and comparative method. This method is used extensively in several areas of sociology (e.g., social change, political sociology, social movements, and social stratification) and has been applied in many others, as well (e.g., religion, criminology, gender issues, race relations, and family). Although much social research focuses on current social life in one country, historical and/or comparative studies have become more common in recent years.

A SHORT HISTORY OF HISTORICAL-COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

The nineteenth-century founders of sociology conducted historical-comparative (H-C) research, blending together sociology, history, political science, and economics. Beginning around World War I, historical-comparative research declined as the social sciences separated. Comparative research was increasingly conducted by anthropologists and historical research by historians. Sociologists conducted little historical-comparative research between World War I and the 1950s. There were a few exceptions, however. Marc Bloch, George Homans, Robert Merton, and Karl Polanyi all produced H-C works that had great influence.¹

Scholarly interest in comparative research increased after World War II with improved international communication, the breakup of colonial empires, and a world leadership role for the United States. A few H-C studies of major significance appeared during the 1950s.²

Several factors stimulated a return to H-C research. First, some historians (e.g., Lee Benson, Robert W. Fogel, Richard Jensen, and Stephen Thernstrom) imported quantitative techniques from the social sciences, increasing the interchange between history and the social sciences. Statistical studies of mobility, railroad expansion, and voting showed historians the power of quantitative data and gave quantitative researchers new questions to address with their techniques. Second, survey techniques were exported from the United States and used to study different nations. New methodological issues and questions arose from attempts to use quantitative techniques for cross-national generalizations.

Third, the historical-comparative works of Max Weber and Karl Marx were translated and made available in English for the first time. “The translation of Weber probably did more to influence the writing of history in the 1960s than any other single influence from the social sciences” (Stone, 1987:13). Fourth, several H-C studies appeared that made important theoretical advances.³ In the 1970s, several new models of how to do H-C research appeared.⁴

H-C grew into a vital force during the 1980s. In 1983, a section on it was formed in the American Sociological Association (ASA). In his presidential address to the ASA, Melvin Kohn (1987) said that cross-national research was experiencing a revival after being nearly abandoned in the 1930s. Hunt (1989:1) remarked, “Historical sociology has become one of the most important subfields of sociology, and perhaps the fastest growing.” Articles using some form of historical-comparative research appeared in leading scholarly journals. For example, about 40 percent of the articles published in the most prestigious U.S. sociology journals after 1990 were historical or comparative in some sense.⁵

RESEARCH QUESTIONS APPROPRIATE FOR HISTORICAL-COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

Historical-comparative research is a powerful method for addressing big questions: How did major societal change take place? What fundamental

features are common to most societies? Why did current social arrangements take a certain form in some societies but not in others? For example, historical-comparative researchers have addressed the questions of what caused societal revolutions in China, France, and Russia (Skocpol, 1979); how major social institutions, such as medicine, have developed and changed over two centuries (Starr, 1982); how basic social relationships, such as feelings about the value of children, change (Zelizer, 1985); why public policy toward treatment of the elderly developed in one way instead of another in the United States (Quadagno, 1988); and what caused the failure of a mass political movement in the United States that advocated greater equality and democracy (McNall, 1988).⁶

Historical-comparative research is suited for examining the combinations of social factors that produce a specific outcome (e.g., civil war). It is also appropriate for comparing entire social systems to see what is common across societies and what is unique, and to study long-term societal change. An H-C researcher may apply a theory to specific cases to illustrate its usefulness. For example, if France has highly centralized power and high political dissatisfaction, whereas the United States is low on both centralized power and political dissatisfaction, a researcher can begin to build a causal account relating centralized power and dissatisfaction. Changes within a country over time in centralization of power and dissatisfaction can verify causal links.⁷

Historical-comparative research can strengthen conceptualization and theory building. By looking at historical events or diverse cultural contexts, a researcher can generate new concepts and broaden his or her perspectives. Concepts are less likely to be restricted to a single historical time or to a single culture. General concepts can be grounded in the experiences of people living in specific cultural and historical contexts.⁸

A difficulty in reading H-C studies is that one needs a knowledge of the past or other cultures to fully understand them. Readers limited to knowing about their own cultures or contemporary times alone may find it difficult to understand the H-C studies or classical theorists. For example, it is difficult to understand Karl Marx's "The Communist Manifesto"

without a knowledge of the conditions of feudal Europe and the world in which Marx was writing. In that time and place, serfs lived under severe oppression. Feudal society included caste-based dress codes in cities and a system of peonage that forced serfs to give a large percent of their product to landlords. The one and only Church had extensive landholdings, and tight familial ties existed among the aristocracy, landlords, and Church. Modern readers might ask, Why did the serfs not flee if conditions were so bad? The answer requires an understanding that serfs had little chance to survive in European forests living on roots, berries, and hunting. Also, no one would aid a fleeing serf refugee because the traditional societies did not embrace strangers, but feared them. To understand H-C studies by classical theorists, "one must appreciate what they took for granted as characteristic of their time and their interpretations of the past" (Tuchman, 1994:310).

THE LOGIC OF HISTORICAL-COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

Confusion over terms reigns in H-C research. Researchers call what they do historical, comparative, or historical-comparative, but mean different things. The key question is: Is there a distinct historical-comparative method and logic, or is there just social research that happens to examine social life in the past or in several societies?

The Logic of Historical-Comparative Research and Quantitative Research

Quantitative versus Historical-Comparative Research. A source of the confusion is that some H-C researchers use a positivist, quantitative approach to study historical or comparative issues. Others rely on the qualitative, interpretative, or critical approaches. According to Ragin and Zaret (1983), a Durkheimian (or positivist) approach and a Weberian (or interpretative) approach to H-C research use different logics.⁹

This confusion is summarized by Øyen (1990:7):

The vocabulary for distinguishing between different kinds of comparative research is redundant and not

TABLE 14.1 Logically Possible Kinds of Historical-Comparative Research

TIME DIMENSION AND KIND OF DATA	COMPARATIVE DIMENSION		
	Single Nation*	Few Nations	Many Nations
<i>One Time in Past</i>			
Quantitative	1	2	3
Qualitative	4	5	6
<i>Across Time</i>			
Quantitative	7	8	9
Qualitative	10	11	12
<i>Present</i>			
Quantitative	13	14	15
Qualitative	16	17	18

*Nation different than researcher's and audience of results for present time.

very precise. Concepts such as cross-country, cross-national, cross-societal, cross-systemic, cross-institutional, as well as trans-national, trans-societal, trans-cultural, and comparisons on the macro-level, are used both as synonymous with comparative research in general and as denoting specific kinds of comparisons.

Historical-comparative research can be organized along three dimensions. First, does the researcher focus on what occurs in one nation or a small set of nations, or does the researcher attempt to study many nations? Second, how does the researcher involve time or history? Does he or she focus on a single time period in the past, examine events across many years, or study the present or a recent time period? Finally, does the researcher rely primarily on quantitative or qualitative data? If we cross-classify the three dimensions, we get a typology of 18 logically possible kinds of H-C research (see Table 14.1). No wonder there is so much confusion over what constitutes H-C research.

Most social research is in cells 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, and 16. This includes all of the single-nation column.

Many H-C studies try to identify universal or near-universal processes, that is, social processes or relationships operating across all human societies,

or at least within a major type of society (i.e., highly industrial, agricultural) for a long time period (Ember and Ember, 2001). Studies that consider data for only one society or a brief time period have limited generalizability, and we cannot say with confidence whether an explanation based on such data applies only to that one society or is found across most human societies, or whether it is specific to one time point or holds across a stretch of history.

For example, a study might find that economic inequality is associated with higher property crime in major Australian cities in 2005. We do not know whether this is something unique to Australia in the beginning of the twenty-first century. If we find that economic inequality and crime rates are highly associated in the cities of Australia, the United States, Great Britain, and Canada, our findings are far stronger. If we find this correlation held in the 1950s and 1980s as well, it is also more generalizable. The comparison set is still limited to English-speaking industrialized nations with an Anglo culture in the recent historical era. If we can add Brazil, Egypt, France, Turkey, and South Korea and go back to 1900 and find the same relationship, the generalization gets much stronger.

Some researchers try to get data for many of the world's 170 nations, such as Beckfield's (2003) research on inequality that considered 90 nations, Schofer's (2004) data on over 120 nations for a study of the world expansion of science, Sung's (2003) study of women's political participation that included 99 countries, and Tsutsui and Wotipka's (2004) study of international human rights organizations with 77 nations. However, data on many societies are unavailable or not comparable, so most comparative studies are limited to between 10 and 20 nations. For example, Brady (2003) studied politics and welfare in 16 rich nations, Chang (2004) examined sex segregation in 16 developing countries, Mahoney (2003) (discussed in Chapter 2) looked at 15 South American nations, Moller and colleagues (2003) examined poverty in 14 advanced countries, Sutton (2004) studied imprisonment in 15 nations, and van Tubergen and associates (2004) looked at immigrant policy in 18 countries. Other researchers focus on comparing two or three cases.

BOX 14.1 Women of the Klan

In *Women of the Klan*, Kathleen Blee (1991) noted that, prior to her research, no one had studied the estimated 500,000 women in the largest racist, right-wing movement in the United States. She suggested that this may have been due to an assumption that women were apolitical and passive. Her six years of research into the unknown members of a secret society over 60 years previous shows the ingenuity needed in historical-sociological research.

Blee focused on the state of Indiana, where as many as 32 percent of White Protestant women were members of the Ku Klux Klan at its peak in the 1920s. In addition to reviewing published studies on the Klan, her documentary investigation included newspapers, pamphlets, and unpublished reports. She conducted library research on primary and secondary materials at over half a dozen college, government, and historical libraries. The historical photographs, sketches, and maps in the book give readers a feel for the topic.

Finding information was difficult. Blee did not have access to membership lists. She identified Klan women by piecing together a few surviving rosters, locating newspaper obituaries that identified women as Klan members, scrutinizing public notices or anti-Klan documents for the names of Klan women, and interviewing surviving women of the Klan.

To locate survivors 60 years after the Klan was active, Blee had to be persistent and ingenious. She mailed a notice about her research to every local newspaper, church bulletin, advertising supplement, historical society, and public library in Indiana. She obtained 3 written recollections, 3 unrecorded interviews, and 15 recorded interviews. Most of her informants were over age 80. They recalled the Klan as an important part of their lives. Blee verified parts of their memories through newspaper and other documentary evidence.

Membership in the Klan remains controversial. In the interviews, Blee did not reveal her opinions about the Klan. Although she was tested, Blee remained neutral and did not denounce the Klan. She stated, “My own background in Indiana (where I lived from primary school through college) and white skin led informants to assume—lacking spoken evidence to the contrary—that I shared their worldview” (p. 5). She did not find Klan women brutal, ignorant, and full of hatred. Blee got an unexpected response to a question on why the women had joined the Klan. Most were puzzled by the question. To them it needed no explanation—it was just “a way of growing up” and “to get together and enjoy.”

For example, Fretzer (2000) looked at public attitudes toward immigration in France, Germany, and the United States; Gangl (2004) compared welfare state policies and unemployment in Germany and the United States; Marx (1998) (discussed in Chapter 2) studied race relations in Brazil, South Africa, and the United States; whereas Tobin and associates (1989) looked at preschools in Japan, the United States, and China. Last, studies focus on one location but are implicitly comparative (see Box 14.5 later in this chapter).

Many studies focus on the present, but others look at one society at one point in the past, such as Einwohner’s (2003) study of Warsaw, Poland, in 1943 (discussed in Chapter 3), Emigh’s (2003) study on fifteenth-century Tuscany (discussed in Chapter 15), or Blee’s study of women in 1920s Indiana (see Box 14.1). Often, researchers focus on a 20–30 year time period. For example, Ruef

(2004) studied agricultural forms in the U.S. South 1860–1880. Olzak and Shanahan (2003) looked at racial conflict in the United States 1869–1924 (see Box 14.2), and Sutton (2004) studied imprisonment in 15 nations 1960–1990. A few look at long time periods, such as Lachman’s (2003) study of elites in four European states, 1500s to 1700s, Mahoney’s (2003) study of South America across two centuries (described in Chapter 2), or Behrens and colleagues’ (2003) study of voting disenfranchisement in the United States 1850–2002 (discussed in Chapter 3).

The Logic of Historical-Comparative Research and Interpretive Research

A distinct, qualitative historical-comparative type of social research differs from the positivist approach. It also differs from an extreme interpretive approach,

BOX 14.2 Seeing Past Events in a New Light, Racial Boundaries in the United States

H-C researchers reorganize data and use theory to see events in new ways. Olzak and Shanahan (2003) did this in a study of past racial conflicts in the United States. They noted that before 1870, the U.S. racial divide was between Whites, understood as people from a few northwestern European countries, and all others, and Whites alone had full citizenship. After an 1870 law granted citizenship rights to African Americans and large-scale immigration from southern or eastern Europe and Asia, the line between being White and others began to blur. In the 1890s, southern and eastern Europeans (e.g., Italians) were called colored and lynched as blacks, and Asians who tried to become naturalized citizen were turned down by the courts using a 1790 law that limited U.S. citizenship to “white persons.”

Competition theory states that when racial barriers weaken between two groups in the same social-economic position, competition and conflict between the groups will grow. The authors argued that legal action affecting the dominant racial group’s exclusive

position can increase intergroup conflict. They examined historical records of racial-ethnic relations and immigration, information on new laws and court rulings, and newspaper reports of racial conflict in 76 local settings between 1869 and 1924. They documented patterns of White attacks on Asian and African Americans and found that laws clarifying racial divisions and reinforcing a new “White” identity to include all people of European ancestry were associated with greater attacks on African Americans and Asians. U.S. courts rulings sharpened a new racial division, placing all European-origin immigrants on one side, and African Americans and Asians on the other. Mob attacks and the court rulings or new laws were dual strategies to exclude non-Whites, with the legal action legitimating attacks on non-Whites. The authors concluded, as a result of the legal policy, “race became a master identity for newcomers and racial boundaries become salient to many types of interaction” (p. 506).

which some field researchers, cultural anthropologists, and traditional historians advocate.

Historical-comparative researchers who use case studies and qualitative data may depart from positivist principles. Case studies, even on one nation, can be very important. Without case studies, scholars “would continue to advance theoretical arguments that are inappropriate, outdated, or totally irrelevant for a specific region” (Bradshaw and Wallace, 1995:155). Case studies can elaborate historical processes and specify concrete historical details.

Scholars who adopt the positivist approach to social science criticize the historical-comparative approach for using a small number of cases. Such scholars believe that historical-comparative research cannot produce the types of probabilistic causal generalizations that they take as being indicators of a “true” (i.e., positivist) science.¹⁰

Like interpretive field research, H-C research focuses on culture, tries to see through the eyes of those being studied, reconstructs the lives of the people studied, and examines particular individuals or groups. An extreme interpretive position goes beyond

a desire to see the world through the eyes of others. It says that an empathic understanding of the people being studied is the primary goal of social research. It avoids causal statements, systematic concepts, or theoretical models. An extreme interpretive approach assumes that each social setting is unique and that comparisons are impossible. It re-creates specific subjective experiences and describes particulars. As Stone (1987:31) noted, traditional history “deals with a particular problem and a particular set of actors at a particular time and a particular place.”

A distinct H-C approach borrows from ethnography and cultural anthropology, and some varieties of H-C attempt to re-create the reality of another time or place. Yet, borrowing from the strengths of ethnography does not require adopting the extreme interpretive approach.¹¹

A Distinct Historical-Comparative Approach

The distinct historical-comparative research method combines a sensitivity to specific historical or cultural contexts with theoretical generalization.

TABLE 14.2 Summary of a Comparison of Approaches to Research: The Qualitative versus Quantitative Distinction

TOPIC	BOTH FIELD AND H-C	QUANTITATIVE
Researcher's perspective	Include as an integral part of the research process	Remove from research process
Approach to data	Immersed in many details to acquire understanding	Precisely operationalize variables
Theory and data	Grounded theory, dialogue between data and concepts	Deductive theory tested with empirical data
Present findings	Translate a meaning system	Test hypotheses
Action/structure	People act and construct meaning but within structures	Social forces shape behavior
Laws/generalization	Limited generalizations that depend on context	Discover universal, context-free laws

FEATURES OF DISTINCT H-C RESEARCH APPROACH

TOPIC	HISTORICAL-COMPARATIVE RESEARCHER'S APPROACH
Evidence	Reconstructs from fragments and incomplete evidence
Distortion	Guards against using own awareness of factors outside the social or historical context
Human role	Includes the consciousness of people in a context and uses their motives as causal factors
Causes	Sees cause as contingent on conditions, beneath the surface, and due to a combination of elements
Micro/macro	Compares whole cases and links the micro to macro levels or layers of social reality
Cross-contexts	Moves between concrete specifics in a context and across contexts for more abstract comparisons

Historical-comparative researchers may use quantitative data to supplement qualitative data and analysis. The logic and goals of H-C research are closer to those of field research than to those of traditional positivist approaches (see Table 14.2).

Similarities to Field Research. First, both H-C research and field research recognize that the researcher's point of view is an unavoidable part of research. Both involve interpretation, which introduces the interpreter's location in time, place, and worldview. Historical-comparative research does

not try to produce a single, unequivocal set of objective facts. Rather, it is a confrontation of old with new or of different worldviews. It recognizes that a researcher's reading of historical or comparative evidence is influenced by an awareness of the past and by living in the present.

Second, both field and H-C research examine a great diversity of data. In both, the researcher becomes immersed in data to gain an empathic understanding of events and people. Both capture subjective feelings and note how everyday, ordinary activities signify important social meaning.

The researcher inquires, selects, and focuses on specific aspects of social life from the vast array of events, actions, symbols, and words. An H-C researcher organizes data and focuses attention on the basis of evolving concepts. He or she examines rituals and symbols that dramatize culture (e.g., parades, clothing, placement of objects, etc.) and investigates the motives, reasons, and justifications for behaviors. For example, Burrage and Corry (1981) measured changes in occupation status in London between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries using records of the official order of appearance of guilds at major public events (parades, pageants, feasts, royal visits, etc.).¹²

Third, both field and H-C researchers often use *grounded theory*. Theory usually emerges during the process of data collection. Both examine the data without beginning with fixed hypotheses. Instead, they develop and modify concepts and theory through a dialogue with the data, then apply theory to reorganize the evidence. Thus, data collection and theory building interact. Thompson (1978:39) called this “a dialogue between concept and evidence, a dialogue conducted by successive hypotheses, on the one hand, and empirical research on the other.”¹³

Next, both field and H-C research involve a type of translation. The researcher’s meaning system usually differs from that of the people he or she studies, but he or she tries to penetrate and understand their point of view. Once the life, language, and perspective of the people being studied have been mastered, the researcher “translates” it for others who read his or her report.

Fifth, both field and H-C researchers focus on action, process, and sequence and see time and process as essential. Both are sensitive to an ever-present tension between agency, the fluid-social action and changing social reality, and structure, the fixed regularities and patterns that shape social actions and perceptions. Both see social reality simultaneously as something created and changed by people and as imposing a restriction on human choice.¹⁴

Sixth, generalization and theory are limited in field and H-C research. Historical and cross-cultural knowledge is incomplete and provisional, based on

selective facts and limited questions. Neither deduces propositions or tests hypotheses in order to uncover fixed laws. Likewise, replication is unrealistic because each researcher has a unique perspective and assembles a unique body of evidence. Instead, researchers offer plausible accounts and limited generalizations.

Unique Features of Historical-Comparative Research. Despite its many similarities to field research, some important differences distinguish H-C research. As the title to David Lowenthal’s *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (1985) suggests, research on the past and on an alien culture share much in common.

First, the evidence for H-C research is usually limited and indirect. Direct observation or involvement by a researcher is often impossible. An H-C researcher reconstructs what occurred from the evidence. Historical evidence depends on the survival of data from the past, usually in the form of documents (e.g., letters and newspapers). The researcher is limited to what has not been destroyed and what leaves a trace, record, or other evidence behind.

Historical-comparative researchers interpret the evidence. The researcher becomes immersed in and absorbs details about a context. For example, a researcher examining the family in the past or a distant country needs to be aware of the full social context (e.g., the nature of work, forms of communication, transportation technology, etc.). He or she looks at maps and gets a feel for the laws in effect, the condition of medical care, and common social practices. For example, the meaning of “a visit by a family member” is affected by conditions such as roads of dirt and mud, the inability to call ahead of time, and the lives of people who work on a farm with animals that need constant watching.

Another feature is that a researcher’s reconstruction of the past or another culture is easily distorted. Compared to the people being studied, a researcher is usually more aware of events occurring prior to the time studied, events occurring in places other than the location studied, and events that occurred after the period studied. This awareness gives the researcher a greater sense of coherence than was experienced by those living in the

past or in an isolated social setting. “In short, historical explanation surpasses any understanding while events are still occurring. The past we reconstruct is more coherent than the past when it happened” (Lowenthal, 1985:234). A researcher’s broader awareness can create the illusion that things happened because they had to, or that they fit together neatly.

A researcher cannot easily see through the eyes of those being studied. Knowledge of the present and changes over time can distort how events, people, laws, or even physical objects are perceived. For example, the old buildings that survive into the present are more permanent and solid than those that did not survive. Moreover, a surviving building looks different in 2005 than it did in 1805 because of the context in which it appears. When the 1805 building was newly built and standing among similar buildings, the people living at the time saw it differently than people do in the twenty-first century. They experienced building styles differently, and the building did not appear as something preserved in an old style in the context of newer buildings from the subsequent two hundred years.

Historical-comparative researchers recognize the capacity of people to learn, make decisions, and act on what they learn to modify the course of events. When conscious people are involved, law-like generalizations that hold across societies are limited.¹⁵ For example, if a group of people are aware of or gain consciousness of their own past history and avoid the mistakes of the past, they may act consciously to alter the course of events. Of course, people will not necessarily learn or act on what they have learned, and if they do act they will not necessarily be successful. Nevertheless, people’s capacity to learn introduces indeterminacy into historical-comparative explanations.

An H-C researcher wants to find out whether the people involved saw various courses of action as plausible. Thus, the worldview and knowledge of those people is a conditioning factor, shaping what the people being studied saw as possible or impossible. The researcher asks whether people were conscious of certain things. For example, if an army knew an enemy attack was coming and so decided to cross a river in the middle of the night, the action

“crossing the river” would have a different meaning than in the situation in which the army did not know the enemy was approaching.

Historical-comparative research takes a contingent view of causality. An H-C researcher often uses combinational explanations. They are analogous to a chemical reaction in which several ingredients (chemicals, oxygen) are added together under specified conditions (temperature, pressure) to produce an outcome (explosion). This differs from a linear causal explanation. The logic is more “A, B, and C appeared together in time and place, then D resulted” than “A caused B, and B caused C, and C caused D.” Ragin (1987:13) summarized:

Most comparativists, especially those who are qualitatively oriented, are interested in specific historical sequences or outcomes and their causes across a set of similar cases. Historical outcomes often require complex, combinational explanations, and such explanations are very difficult to prove in a manner consistent with the norms of mainstream quantitative social science.

For example, Max Weber’s explanations gave cultural factors equal weight to economic, demographic, or social structural factors. Weber employed a combination of causal factors through the ideal type, which was neither a deductive formal theory to test, nor an inductive, problem-specific theory.¹⁶

Historical-comparative research focuses on whole cases versus separate variables across cases. A researcher approaches the whole as if it has multiple layers. He or she grasps surface appearances as well as reveals the general, hidden structures, unseen mechanisms, or causal processes.

A historical-comparative researcher integrates the micro (small-scale, face-to-face interaction) and macro (large-scale social structures) levels. Instead of describing micro-level or macro-level processes alone, the researcher describes both levels or layers of reality and links them to each other.¹⁷ For example, an H-C researcher examines the details of individual biographies by reading diaries or letters to get a feel for the individuals: the food they ate, their recreational pursuits, their clothing, their sicknesses, their relations with friends, and so on. He or

she links this micro-level view to macro-level processes: increased immigration, mechanization of production, proletarianization, tightened labor markets, and the like.

H-C research shifts between a specific context and a general comparison. A researcher examines specific contexts, notes similarities and differences, then generalizes. He or she then looks again at the specific contexts using the generalizations.

Comparative researchers compare across cultural-geographic units (e.g., urban areas, nations, societies, etc.).¹⁸ Historical researchers investigate past contexts, usually in one culture (e.g., periods, epochs, ages, eras, etc.), for sequence and comparison.¹⁹ Of course, a researcher can combine both to investigate multiple cultural contexts in one or more historical contexts. Yet, each period or society has its unique causal processes, meaning systems, and social relations. This produces a creative tension between the concrete specifics in a context and the abstract ideas a researcher uses to make links across contexts.

The use of transcultural concepts in comparative analysis is analogous to the use of transhistorical ones in historical research.²⁰ In comparative research, a researcher translates the specifics of a context into a common, theoretical language. “The comparative investigator can thus be regarded as fighting a continuous struggle between the ‘culture-boundness’ of system-specific categories and the ‘contentlessness’ of system-inclusive categories” (Smelser, 1976:178).

The Annales School. H-C research draws from the **Annales school**,²¹ a research method associated with a group of French historians (e.g., Marc Bloch, Fernand Braudel, Lucien Febvre, and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie), and named after the scholarly journal *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, founded in 1929. The school’s orientation can be summarized by four interrelated characteristics.

One characteristic is the school’s synthetic, totalizing, holistic, or interdisciplinary approach. Annales researchers combine geography, ecology, economics, and demography with cultural factors to give a total picture of the past. They blend together the diverse conditions of material life and

collective beliefs or culture into a comprehensive reconstruction of the past civilization.

A second characteristic is illustrated by a French term of the school, the **mentalities** of an era. This term is not directly translatable into English. It means a distinctive worldview, perspective, or set of assumptions about life—the way that thinking was organized, or the overall pattern of conscious and unconscious cognition, belief, and values that prevailed in an era. Thus, researchers try to discover the overall arrangement of thought in a historical period that shaped subjective experience about fundamental aspects of reality: the nature of time, the relationship of humans to the physical environment, how truth is created, and the like.

The Annales approach mixes concrete historical specificity and abstract theory. Theory takes the form of models or deep underlying structures, which are causal or organizing principles that account for everyday events. Annales historians look for both the deep-running currents that shape the surface events and individual actions.

A last characteristic is an interest in long-term structures or patterns. In contrast to traditional historians who focus on particular individuals or events over short time spans, from several years to a few decades, Annales historians examine long-term changes, over periods of a century or more, in the fundamental way that social life is organized. They use the term **longue durée**. It means a long duration or a historical era in geographic space (e.g., feudalism in western Europe, or the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries in the Mediterranean region).

Annales school A group of French historians that developed a research approach is that holistic, blends attention to the concrete specificity of daily life with abstract theory building, and considers long-term society-wide structural change.

Mentalities An Annales school idea meaning a pattern of everyday consciousness and assumptions about ordinary life that pervades during a particular historical period.

Longue durée An Annales school idea meaning a long period of time, often a century or longer, across which fundamental patterns or structures in social life remain stable and shape daily life.

To do this, a researcher must adopt a unique orientation toward history.

The Annales school has influenced H-C research in several ways. It puts events in a broader context, builds theory about underlying structures, and emphasizes a sensitivity to the different subjective consciousness of the past. Finally, it encourages a holistic integration of diverse types of data.

STEPS IN A HISTORICAL-COMPARATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT

In this section, we turn to the process of doing H-C research. Conducting historical-comparative research does not involve a rigid set of steps and, with only a few exceptions, it does not use complex or specialized techniques.

Conceptualizing the Object of Inquiry

An H-C researcher begins by becoming familiar with the setting and conceptualizes what is being studied. He or she may start with a loose model or set of preliminary concepts and apply them to a specific setting. The provisional concepts contain implicit assumptions or organizing categories that he or she uses to see the world, “package” observations, and search through evidence.

If a researcher is not already familiar with the historical era or comparative settings, he or she conducts an orientation reading (reading several general works). This will help the researcher grasp the specific setting, assemble organizing concepts, subdivide the main issue, and develop lists of questions to ask.²² Concepts and evidence interact to stimulate research. For example, Skocpol (1979) began her study of revolution with puzzles in macro-sociological theory and the histories of specific revolutions. The lack of fit between histories of revolutions and existing theories stimulated her research.

Whether or not a researcher is conscious and explicit about it, he or she organizes specific details

into analytic categories. Researchers find it best to recognize this process explicitly and avoid the **Baconian fallacy**. Named for Francis Bacon (1561–1626), it is assuming that a researcher operates without preconceived questions, hypotheses, ideas, assumptions, theories, paradigms, postulates, prejudices, or presumptions of any kind.

Locating Evidence

Next, a researcher locates and gathers evidence through extensive bibliographic work. A researcher uses many indexes, catalogs, and reference works that list what libraries contain. For comparative research, this means focusing on specific nations or units and on particular kinds of evidence within each. The researcher frequently spends many weeks searching for sources in libraries, travels to several different specialized research libraries, and spends months or years reading books and articles. Comparative research often involves learning one or more foreign languages.

As the researcher masters the literature and takes detailed notes, he or she completes many specific tasks: creating a bibliography list (on cards or computer) with complete citations, taking notes that are neither too skimpy nor too extensive (i.e., more than one sentence but less than dozens of pages of quotes), and developing a file on themes or working hypotheses.

A researcher adjusts initial concepts, questions, or focus on the basis of what he or she discovers in the evidence. New issues and questions arise as he or she reads and considers a range of research reports at different levels of analysis (e.g., general context and detailed narratives on specific topics) and multiple studies on a topic, crossing topic boundaries. For example, Quadagno’s (1988) study of old-age and welfare programs started with an interest in the history of U.S. programs for the aged. She began with government records on programs for the elderly. Soon, she discovered the importance of southern political pressure, so she spent months learning about southern U.S. history. As the issue unfolded, she examined the literature on social programs. Then, as her inquiry expanded, she read theoretical and empirical discussions showing con-

Baconian fallacy The fallacy of assuming that a researcher can operate without any preconceived questions, ideas, assumptions, theories, or presumptions.

nections to other social welfare programs. They suggested a comparison with extensive western European programs. In western Europe, organized labor is represented by the social democratic parties, which shaped most social programs in those countries. Therefore, Quadagno's research turned to U.S. labor history. The records of labor officials and labor history led her to examine the actions of employers and the power of the private sector. She stated, "I moved back and forth between theory and archival materials, with each new set of empirical observations guiding my generalizations about factors shaping welfare policy" (1988:x).

Evaluating Quality of Evidence

As an H-C researcher gathers evidence, he or she asks two questions: How relevant is the evidence to emerging research questions and evolving concepts? How accurate and strong is the evidence?

The question of relevance is a difficult one. As the focus of research shifts, evidence that was not relevant can become relevant. Likewise, some evidence may stimulate new avenues of inquiry and a search for additional confirming evidence.

An H-C researcher reads evidence for three things: the implicit conceptual framework, particular details, and empirical generalizations (factual statements on which there is agreement). He or she evaluates alternative interpretations of evidence and looks for "silences," or cases where the evidence fails to address an event, topic, or issue. For example, when examining a group of leading male merchants, a researcher may find documents that ignore their wives and many servants.

Researchers try to avoid fallacies in the evidence. Fischer (1970) provided an extensive list of such fallacies. For example, the fallacy of *pseudo-proof* is a failure to place something into its full context. The evidence might state that there was a 50 percent increase in income taxes, but its impact is not meaningful outside of a context. The researcher must ask: Did other taxes decline? Did income increase? Did the tax increase apply to all income? Was everyone affected equally? Another fallacy to avoid with historical evidence is **anachronism**, when an event appears to have occurred before or

after the time it actually did. A researcher should be precise about the sequence of events and note discrepancies in dating events in evidence.

Organizing Evidence

As a researcher gathers evidence and locates new sources, he or she begins to organize the data. Obviously, it is unwise to take notes madly and let them pile up haphazardly. A researcher begins a preliminary analysis by noting low-level generalizations or themes. For example, in a study of revolution, a researcher develops a theme: The rich peasants supported the old regime. He or she can record this theme in his or her notes and later assign it significance.

Next, a researcher organizes evidence, using theoretical insights to stimulate new ways to organize data and for new questions to ask of evidence (see Box 14.2).

The interaction of data and theory means that a researcher goes beyond a surface examination of the evidence to develop new concepts by critically evaluating the evidence based on theory. For example, a researcher reads a mass of evidence about a protest movement. The preliminary analysis organizes the evidence into a theme: People who are active in protest interact with each other and develop shared cultural meanings. He or she examines theories of culture and movements, then formulates a new concept: "oppositional movement subculture."

Synthesizing

The next step is the process of synthesizing evidence. The researcher refines concepts and moves toward a general explanatory model after most of the evidence is in. Old themes or concepts are revised, and new ones are created. Concrete events give meaning to concepts. The researcher looks for patterns across time or units, and draws out similarities and differences with analogies. He or she

Anachronism An error whereby a historical-comparative researcher locates an event before or after when it actually occurred.

organizes divergent events into sequences and groups them together to create a larger picture. Plausible explanations are then developed that subsume both concepts and evidence into a coherent whole. The researcher then reads and rereads notes and sorts and resorts them on the basis of organizing schemes. He or she looks for links or connections he or she sees while looking at the evidence in different ways.

Synthesis links specific evidence with an abstract model of underlying relations or causal mechanisms. Researchers may use metaphors. For example, mass frustration leading to a revolution is “like an emotional roller coaster drop” in which things seem to be getting better, and then there is a sudden letdown after expectations have risen very fast. The models are sensitizing devices.

A researcher often looks for new evidence to verify specific links that appear only after an explanatory model is developed. He or she evaluates how well the model approximates the evidence and adjusts it accordingly. He or she goes back and forth from the abstract to the concrete (see Chapter 15).

The major task for the historical-comparative researcher is organizing and giving new meaning to evidence. Skocpol (1979:xiv) argued:

The comparative historian’s task—and potential distinctive scholarly contribution—lies not in revealing new data about particular aspects of the large time periods and distinctive places surveyed, but rather in establishing the interest and prima facie validity of an overall argument about causal regularities across various historical cases.

Historical-comparative researchers also identify critical indicators and supporting evidence for themes or explanations. A **critical indicator** is unambiguous evidence, which is usually sufficient for inferring a specific theoretical relationship. Researchers seek these indicators for key parts of an explanatory model. Indicators critically confirm a

theoretical inference and occur when many details suggest a clear interpretation. For example, a critical indicator of hostility between two nations is a formal declaration of war. A critical indicator of the rising political power of a social group is the formation of formal organizations with a large membership identified with the group and advocating its position. In contrast to a critical indicator is supporting evidence, evidence for less central parts of a model. It builds the overall background or context. The evidence is less abundant or weaker, and lacks a clear and unambiguous theoretical interpretation.

Writing a Report

The last step is to combine evidence, concepts, and synthesis into a research report. The way in which the report is written is key in H-C research. Assembling evidence, arguments, and conclusions into a report is always a crucial step; but more than in quantitative approaches. The careful crafting of evidence and explanation makes or breaks H-C research. A researcher distills mountains of evidence into exposition and prepares extensive footnotes. She or he weaves together evidence and arguments to communicate a coherent, convincing picture to readers (see Chapter 16).

DATA AND EVIDENCE IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Types of Historical Evidence

History means the events of the past (e.g., it is *history* that the French withdrew troops from Vietnam), a record of the past (e.g., a *history* of French involvement in Vietnam), and a discipline that studies the past (e.g., a department of *history*).²³ **Historiography** is the method of doing historical research or of gathering and analyzing historical evidence. Historical sociology is a part of historical-comparative research. It

is an approach to historical data, a style of historiography, that seeks to explain and understand the past in terms of sociological models and theories. . . . Alternatively, historical data may be used to illustrate and test the validity of sociological con-

Critical indicator A clear, unambiguous measure or indicator of a concept in a specific cultural or historical setting.

Historiography Approaches, with assumptions, emphases, and a theoretical point of view, that historians use when writing historical studies.

BOX 14.3 Using Archival Data

The archive is the main source for primary historical materials. Archives are accumulations of documentary materials (papers, photos, letters, etc.) in private collections, museums, libraries, or formal archives.

LOCATION AND ACCESS

Finding whether a collection exists on a topic, organization, or individual can be a long, frustrating task of many letters, phone calls, and referrals. If the material on a person or topic does exist, it may be scattered in multiple locations. Gaining access may depend on an appeal to a family member's kindness for private collections or traveling to distant libraries and verifying one's reason for examining many dusty boxes of old letters. Also, the researcher may discover limited hours (e.g., an archive is open only four days a week from 10 A.M. to 5 P.M., but the researcher needs to inspect the material for 40 hours).

SORTING AND ORGANIZATION

Archive material may be unsorted or organized in a variety of ways. The organization may reflect criteria that are unrelated to the researcher's interests. For example, letters and papers may be in chronological order, but the researcher is interested only in letters to four professional colleagues over three decades, not daily bills, family correspondence, and so on.

cepts, principles and theories. (Mariampolski and Hughes, 1978:104–105)

Researchers draw on four types of historical evidence: primary sources, secondary sources, running records, and recollections.²⁴ Traditional historians rely heavily on primary sources. H-C researchers often use secondary sources or the different data types in combination. For example, Quadagno (1984) examined the U.S. Social Security Act to evaluate theories of political power. Of the 47 sources she cited for evidence, 23 were primary sources (letters, memos, official reports, newspaper or magazine articles of the period), 3 were recollections (memoirs or oral histories), and 21 were secondary sources (books by historians and other researchers).

TECHNOLOGY AND CONTROL

Archival materials may be in their original form, on microforms, or, more rarely, in an electronic form. Researchers may be allowed only to take notes, not make copies, or they may be allowed only to see select parts of the whole collection. Researchers become frustrated with the limitations of having to read dusty papers in one specific room and being allowed only to take notes by pencil for the few hours a day the archive is open to the public.

TRACKING AND TRACING

One of the most difficult tasks in archival research is tracing common events or persons through the materials. Even if all material are in one location, the same event or relationship may appear in several places in many forms. Researchers sort through mounds of paper to find bits of evidence here and there.

DRUDGERY, LUCK, AND SERENDIPITY

Archival research is often painstaking slow. Spending many hours pouring over partially legible documents can be very tedious. Also, researchers will often discover holes in collections, gaps in a series of papers, or destroyed documents. Yet, careful reading and inspection of previously untouched material can yield startling new connections or ideas. The researcher may discover unexpected evidence that opens new lines of inquiry (see Elder et al., 1993, and Hill, 1993).

Primary Sources. The letters, diaries, newspapers, movies, novels, articles of clothing, photographs, and so forth of those who lived in the past and have survived to the present are **primary sources**. They are found in archives (a place where documents are stored), in private collections, in family closets, or in museums (see Box 14.3). Today's documents and objects (our letters, television programs, commercials, clothing, automobiles) will be primary sources for future historians. An example of a classic primary source is a bundle of yellowed

Primary sources Qualitative or quantitative data about past events or social life that were created and used in the past time period.

letters written by a husband away at war to his wife and found in an attic by a researcher. For example, in a book on poverty in one Kentucky community, Billings and Blee's (2000) data included manuscripts from a federal census (1850 to 1910) for both individuals and agriculture as well as tax rolls, deeds, wills, and court records; newspapers; state accounting board records; letters and reports by visiting preachers; and official data at the county and state level. They were able to link individuals, relationships, and households to create longitudinal files on individuals and families for a 60-year period.

Published and unpublished written documents are the most important types of primary source. Researchers find them in their original form or preserved in microfiche or on film. They are often the only surviving record of the words, thoughts, and feelings of people in the past. Written documents are helpful for studying societies and historical periods with writing and literate people. A frequent criticism of written sources is that they were largely written by elites or those in official organizations; thus, the views of the illiterate, the poor, or those outside official social institutions may be overlooked. For example, it was illegal for slaves in the United States to read or write, and thus written sources on the experience of slavery have been indirect or difficult to find.

The written word on paper was the main medium of communication prior to the widespread use of telecommunications, computers, and video

technology to record events and ideas. In fact, the spread of forms of communication that do not leave a permanent physical record (e.g., telephone conversations, computer records, and television or radio broadcasts), and that have largely replaced letters, written ledgers, and newspapers, may make the work of future historians more difficult.

Secondary Sources. Primary sources have realism and authenticity, but the practical limitation of time can restrict research on many primary sources to a narrow time frame or location. To get a broader picture, many H-C researchers use **secondary sources**, the writings of specialist historians who have spent years studying primary sources.

In his article on elites in early modern Europe, of Lachmann's (2003) 82 references, 72 were secondary historical sources and 10 were theoretical works. Emigh (2003) used 129 references for her 32-page journal article on fifteenth-century Tuscany. Of these references, 43 were works on theory or general history in early Europe. The remaining 86 references were secondary historical sources, 23 of which were written in Italian.

Running Records. **Running records** consist of files or existing statistical documents maintained by organizations. An example of a running record is a file in a country church that contains a record of every marriage and every death from 1910 to the present. Roy (1983) used running records when he studied the boards of directors of major U.S. corporations between 1886 and 1905. His evidence came from 150 primary documents, official reports and statistics, and annual business reference books, some of which are still being published.

Recollections. The statements or writings of individuals about their past lives or experiences based on memory are **recollections**. These can be in the form of memoirs, autobiographies, or interviews. Because memory is imperfect, recollections are often distorted in ways that primary sources are not. For example, Blee (1991) interviewed a woman in her late eighties about being in the Ku Klux Klan (see Box 14.1).

In gathering **oral history**, a type of recollection, a researcher conducts unstructured interviews

Secondary sources Qualitative data and quantitative data used in historical research. Information about events or settings are documented or written later by historians or others who did not directly participate in the events or setting.

Running records Existing statistics research based on files, records, or documents that are maintained in a relatively consistent manner over a long period of time.

Recollections Statements or writings about past experiences collected after time has passed and based on a memory or stimulated by a review of old objects, photos, or notes.

Oral history A recollection in which a person is interviewed about the events, beliefs, or feelings in the past that he or she experienced.

BOX 14.4 Seven Deadly Sins of Memory

Schacter (2001) observed that memory loss or mistaken memory takes several forms:

1. *Transience.* Experiencing the slow, continuous decay of memory over time, such that the more distance in the past an event occurred, the less detail is recalled about it
2. *Absent-mindedness.* Focusing on one idea or thing so much that it misdirects one's attention so that other, often simple things, are forgotten (e.g., focusing on a major project but forgetting to pick up the car keys)
3. *Blocking.* Searching unsuccessfully for information that the person possesses but cannot recall despite trying to do so at the moment (often phrased as "it is on the tip of my tongue")
4. *Misattribution.* Mistaking fantasy for reality, or what one heard from a friend or what one saw in a movie for one's own experience
5. *Suggestibility.* Being asked questions in such a way that a person begins to distort his or her memory and believe things happened that did not happen
6. *Bias.* Recalling things in a distorted way, often interjecting ideas, feelings, or beliefs that occurred later in time, or after the remembered event, into it
7. *Persistence.* Being unable to forget something despite trying

with people about their lives or events in the past. This approach is especially valuable for nonelite groups or the illiterate. The oral history technique began in the 1930s and now has a professional association and scholarly journal devoted to it.²⁵

Studies on memory suggest caution when a researcher uses oral history or recollections (see Box 14.4). As Schacter (2001:9) remarked,

We tend to think of memories as snapshots from family albums that, if stored properly, could be retrieved in precisely the same condition in which they were put away. But we now know that we do not record our experience in the way a camera records them. . . . We extract key elements of our experience and store them. We then recreate or reconstruct our experiences rather than retrieve copies of them. Sometimes, in the process of reconstructing we add

on feelings, beliefs, or even knowledge we have obtained after the experience.

Some people "rewrite" the past to make it more consistent with current beliefs or remember the past in a self-enhancing way (i.e., inaccurately recall themselves in a more positive way). Older adults (usually beginning sometime in their 50s) tend to lose the memory of specific details about past events more than do younger people. More highly educated, mentally active older adults show less memory loss, but some degree of individual or collective memory distortion is relatively frequent.²⁶

Research with Secondary Sources

Uses and Limitations. Social researchers often use secondary sources, the books and articles written by specialist historians, as evidence of past conditions.²⁷ As Skocpol (1984:382) remarked, the use of such materials is not systematized, and "comparative historical sociologists have not so far worked out clear, consensual rules and procedures for the valid use of secondary sources as evidence." Secondary sources have limitations and need to be used with caution.

The limitations of secondary historical evidence include problems of inaccurate historical accounts and a lack of studies in areas of interest. Such sources cannot be used to test hypotheses. Post facto (after-the-fact) explanations cannot meet positivist criteria of falsifiability, because few statistical controls can be used and replication is impossible.²⁸ Yet, historical research by others plays an important role in developing general explanations, among its other uses. For example, such research substantiates the emergence and evolution of tendencies over time.²⁹

Potential Problems. The many volumes of secondary sources present a maze of details and interpretations for an H-C researcher. He or she must transform the mass of descriptive studies into an intelligible picture. This picture needs to be consistent with and reflective of the richness of the evidence. It also must bridge the many specific time periods or locales. The researcher faces potential problems with secondary sources.

One problem is in reading the works of historians.³⁰ Historians do not present theory-free, objective “facts.” They implicitly frame raw data, categorize information, and shape evidence using concepts. The historian’s concepts are often a mixture drawn from journalism, the language of historical actors, ideologies, philosophy, everyday language in the present, and social science. They may be vague, applied inconsistently, and not mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. For example, a historian describes a group of people in a nineteenth-century town as upper class. But he or she never defines the term and fails to link it to a theory of social classes. The methodological problem is that the historian’s implicit theories constrain the evidence. A social researcher tries to find evidence for explanations that may be contrary to ones implicitly used by historians in secondary sources by reading through a disorderly set of concepts to reach the evidence.

A second problem is that the historian’s selection procedure is not transparent. Historians select some information from all possible evidence. As Carr (1961:138) noted, “History therefore is a process of selection in terms of historical significance . . . from the infinite oceans of facts the historian selects those which are significant for his purpose.” Yet, the H-C researcher does not know how this was done. Without knowing the selection process, a historical-comparative researcher must rely on the historian’s judgments, which can contain biases.³¹ For example, a historian reads 10,000 pages of newspapers, letters, and diaries, then boils down this information into summaries and selected quotes in a 100-page book. An H-C researcher does not know whether information that the historian left out is relevant for his or her purposes.

The typical historian’s research practice also introduces an individualist bias. A heavy reliance on primary sources and surviving artifacts combines with an atheoretical orientation to produce a focus on the actions of specific people. This particularistic, micro-level view directs attention away from integrating themes or patterns. An emphasis on the activities of specific individuals is a type of theoretical orientation.³²

A third issue is in the organization of the evidence. Historians organize evidence as they write

narrative history (see Box 14.5). This compounds problems of undefined concepts and the selection of evidence.

In the historical narrative, the writer organizes material chronologically around a single coherent “story.” Each part of the story is connected to each other part by its place in the time order of events. Together, all the parts form a unity or whole. Conjunction and contingency are key elements of the narrative form—that is, if *X* (or *X* plus *Z*) occurred, then *Y* would occur, and if *X* (or *X* plus *Z*) had not occurred, something else would have followed. The contingency creates a logical interdependency between earlier and later events.

With its temporal logic, the narrative organization differs from quantitative explanation in which the researcher identifies statistical patterns to infer causes.

A difficulty of the narrative is that the organizing tool—time order or position in a sequence of events—does not alone denote theoretical or historical causality. In other words, the narrative meets only one of the three criteria for establishing causality (see Chapter 3)—that of temporal order. Narrative method can obscure underlying causal models or processes when a historian includes events in the narrative that have no causal significance. He or she adds them to enrich the background or context, to add color. Likewise, he or she presents events that have no immediate causal impact, events with a delayed causal impact, or events that are temporarily “on hold.”

Also, few narrative historians explicitly state how combination or interaction effects operate. For example, the historian discusses three conditions for an event. Yet, rarely do readers know whether all three conditions must operate together to have a causal impact, but no two conditions alone, or no single condition alone, creates the same impact.³³

The narrative organization can create conflicting findings. The H-C researcher must read though weak concepts, unknown selection criteria, and unclear casual logic. Beneath the narrative may reside the historian’s social theory, but it remains implicit and hidden.

A last problem is that a historian is influenced by historiographic schools, personal beliefs, social

BOX 14.5 The Narrative in History

Many historians write in the traditional narrative form, which can be a secondary source for the H-C researcher.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NARRATIVE FORM

1. It tells a story or tale, with a plot and subplots, water-sheds, and climaxes.
2. It follows a chronological order and sequence of events.
3. It focuses on specific individuals, not on structures or abstract ideas.
4. It is primarily particular and descriptive, not analytic and general.
5. It presents events as unique, unpredictable, and contingent.

STRENGTHS OF THE NARRATIVE FORM

1. It is colorful, interesting, and entertaining to read.
2. It gives an overall feel for life in a different era, so that readers get the sense that they were there.

3. It communicates the way people in the past subjectively experienced reality and helps readers identify emotionally with people in the past.
4. It surrounds individuals and specific events with a mix of many aspects of social reality.

WEAKNESSES OF THE NARRATIVE FORM

1. It hides causal theories and concepts or leaves them implicit.
2. It uses rhetoric, ordinary language, and common-sense logic to persuade, and therefore is subject to logical fallacies of semantic distortion and various rhetorical devices.
3. It tends to ignore the normal or ordinary for the unique, dramatic, extraordinary, or unusual.
4. It rarely builds on previous knowledge and does little to create general knowledge.
5. It tends to be overly individualistic, overstating the role of particular people and their ability to shape events voluntarily.

theories, and current events at the time the research is conducted.

Historians writing today examine primary materials differently from how those writing in the 1920s did. In addition, there are various schools of historiography (e.g., diplomatic, demographic, ecological, psychological, Marxist, intellectual, etc.) that have their own rules for seeking evidence and asking questions. Carr (1961:54) warned, “Before you study history, study the historian. . . . Before you study the historian, study his historical and social environment.”

Research with Primary Sources

The historian is a major issue when a researcher uses secondary sources. When using primary sources, a major issue is that only a fraction of everything written or used in the past has survived into the present. Moreover, what survived is a non-random sample of what once existed. Lowenthal (1985:191–192) observed, “The surviving residues of past thoughts and things represent a

tiny fraction of previous generations’ contemporary fabric.”

Historical-comparative researchers attempt to read primary sources with the eyes and assumptions of a contemporary who lived in the past. They “bracket” or hold back knowledge of subsequent events and modern values. Cantor and Schneider (1967:46) wrote, “If you do not read the primary sources with an open mind and an intention to get inside the minds of the writings and look at things the way *they* saw them, you are wasting your time.”

For example, when reading a source produced by a slaveholder, moralizing against slavery or faulting the author for not seeing its evil is not worthwhile. The H-C researcher holds back moral judgments and becomes a moral relativist while reading primary sources. He or she must “think and believe like his subjects, discover how they performed in their own eyes” (Shafer, 1980:165).

Another problem is that locating primary documents is a time-consuming task. A researcher must search through specialized indexes and travel to archives or specialized libraries. Primary sources

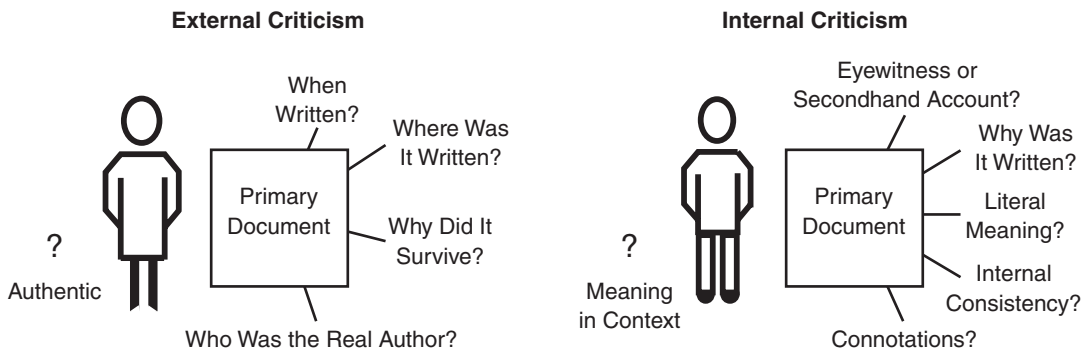


FIGURE 14.1 Internal and External Criticism

are often located in a dusty, out-of-the-way room full of stacked cardboard boxes containing masses of fading documents. These may be incomplete, unorganized, and in various stages of decay. Once the documents or other primary sources are located, the researcher evaluates them by subjecting them to external and internal criticism (see Figure 14.1).

External criticism means you evaluate the authenticity of a document itself to be certain that it is not a fake or a forgery. Criticism involves asking: Was the document created when it is claimed to have been, in the place where it was supposed to be, and by the person who claims to be its author? Why was the document produced to begin with, and how did it survive?

Once the document passes as being authentic, you use **internal criticism**, an examination of the document's contents to establish credibility. You

evaluate whether what is recorded was based on what the author directly witnessed or is secondhand information. This requires examining both the literal meaning of what is recorded and the subtle connotations or intentions. You note other events, sources, or people mentioned in the document and ask whether they can be verified. You examine implicit assumptions or value positions, and the relevant conditions under which the document was produced is noted (e.g., during wartime or under a totalitarian regime). Also consider language usage at the time and the context of statements within the document to distill a meaning.

Many types of distortions can appear in primary documents. One is **bowdlerization**—a deliberate distortion designed to protect moral standards or furnish a particular image. For example, a photograph is taken of the front of a building. Trash and beer cans are scattered all around this building, and the paint is faded. The photograph, however, is taken of the one part of the building that has little trash and is framed so that the trash does not show; darkroom techniques make the faded paint look new. Another example is the practice of including famous people who did not actually attend a party in newspaper society column reports of the parties of well-to-do people.³⁴

In addition to primary and secondary sources, historical researchers use what Topolski (1976) called **nonsource-based knowledge**. This is knowledge available to a researcher about the past that does not originate in a specific primary document or sec-

External criticism Checking the authenticity of primary historical sources by accurately locating the place and time of its creation (e.g., it is not a forgery).

Internal criticism A way to establish the authenticity and credibility of primary historical sources and determine its accuracy as an account of what occurred in the past.

Bowdlerization A deliberate distortion of the past designed to protect the appearance a particular (usually favorable) image.

Nonsource-based knowledge General knowledge available to a researcher based on reasoning or an in-depth awareness of historical circumstances.

ondary source. It can be based on logical reasoning. For example, persons A and B are a married couple in a monogamous society that values sexual fidelity. When B has an affair, A is likely to become jealous. It is also knowledge of previous significant events that shape the context of what is studied. For instance, a researcher studying France in the late 1920s is aware that a large proportion of French males in the 18- to 40-year-old age group were killed a few years earlier in World War I. Current knowledge, too, can help in understanding past events. For example, a researcher knows that the Black Plague was a disease spread by fleas carried by rats and due to poor sanitary conditions, but people in the past were unaware of the cause of this disease.

COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

Types of Comparative Research

A Comparative Method. Problems in other types of research are magnified in a comparative study.³⁵ Holt and Turner (1970:6) said, “In principle, there is no difference between comparative cross-cultural research and research conducted in a single society. The differences lie, rather, in the magnitude of certain types of problems.” Comparative research is more of a perspective or orientation than a separate research technique. In this section, we consider its strengths.

A comparative perspective exposes weaknesses in research design and helps you improve the quality of research. The focus of comparative research is on similarities and differences between units.

Comparative research reveals aspects of social life that are general across units (e.g., cultures), as opposed to being limited to one unit alone. All researchers want to generalize to some degree. Positivist researchers are interested in discovering general laws or patterns of social behavior that hold across societies. But most positivist research is not comparative. Ragin (1994a:107) observed:

Comparative researchers examine patterns of similarities and differences across cases and try to come to terms with their diversity. . . . Quantitative researchers also examine differences among cases,

but with a different emphasis, the goal is to explain the covariation of one variable with another, usually across many cases. . . . The quantitative researcher typically has only broad familiarity with the cases.

The comparative orientation improves measurement and conceptualization. Concepts developed by researchers who conduct research across several social units or settings are less likely to apply only to a specific culture or setting. It is difficult for a researcher to detect hidden biases, assumptions, and values until he or she applies a concept in different cultures or settings. Different social settings provide a wider range of events or behavior. The range in one culture is narrower than for human behavior in general, so research in a single culture focuses on a restricted range of possible social activity. For example, two researchers, Hsi-Ping and Abdul, examine the relationship between the age at which a child is weaned and the onset of emotional problems. Hsi-Ping looks only at U.S. data, which show a range from 5 to 15 months at weaning and indicate that emotional problems increase steadily as age of weaning increases. She concludes that late weaning causes emotional problems. Abdul looks at data from 10 cultures and discovers a range from 5 to 36 months at weaning. He finds that the rate of emotional problems rises with age of weaning until 18 months; it then peaks and falls to a lower level. Abdul arrives at more accurate conclusions: Emotional problems are likely for weaning between the ages of 6 and 24 months, but weaning either earlier or later reduces the chances of emotional problems. Hsi-Ping reached false conclusions about the relationship because of the narrow range of weaning age in the United States.

Comparative research can eliminate or offer alternative explanations for causal relationships. For example, Weil (1985) looked at the relationship between years of schooling and intolerance. Past research found such a relationship in the United States, and most researchers thought that education generally broadened perspectives and increased tolerance. Weil, who looked for the relationship in other nations (1985:470), concluded that the relationship “is weaker, nonexistent, or sometimes even reverse in nonliberal democracies or countries that

did not have liberal-democratic regime forms in earlier decades, compared to countries which have been liberal democratic for some time.” In other words, a certain type of government is a necessary condition for the relationship. Education does not have a universal effect of increasing tolerance; rather, education socializes people to their country’s official values. Where the official values are for tolerance, education increases tolerance; elsewhere, it does not have that effect.

Comparative research is more difficult, more costly, and more time consuming than research that is not comparative. The types of data that can be collected and problems with equivalence (to be discussed) are also frequent problems.

Comparative researchers can rarely use random sampling. Sufficient information is not available for all of the approximately 160 nations in the world. It is unavailable for a nonrandom subset (poor countries, nondemocratic countries, etc.). In addition, can a researcher treat all nations as equal units when some have over a billion people and others only 100,000? The small number of cases creates a tendency for researchers to particularize and see each case as unique, limiting generalization. For example, a researcher examines five cases (e.g., countries), but the units differ from each other in 20 ways. It is difficult to test theory or determine relationships when there are more different characteristics than units.

Comparative researchers can apply, not test, theory, and can make only limited generalizations. Despite the ability to use combinational theory and to consider cases as wholes in H-C research, rigor-

ous theory testing or experimental research is rarely possible. For example, a researcher interested in the effects of economic recessions cannot cause one group of countries to have a recession while others do not. Instead, the researcher waits until a recession occurs and then looks at other characteristics of the country or unit.

Four Types. Kohn (1987) has discussed four types of comparative research. The first two fit into a distinct H-C approach, the third uses a positivist approach, and the last is a unique approach.³⁶

When conducting **case-study comparative research**, you compare particular societies or cultural units and do not make broad generalizations. Examples of questions addressed by this type are as follows: How do Canada and the United States differ? How did people experience old age in Japan, Taiwan, and Korea? In what ways are the educational systems of the United States and Russia alike and different? A researcher intensively examines a limited number of cases, where the “case” is a culturally defined group. By examining in depth a small number of cases, or just one, there is relatively little need to be concerned about the equivalence of units (see Box 14.6). This method is helpful for identifying factors that are constant or that vary among a few cases.³⁷

When doing **cultural-context research** you study cases that are surrogates for types of societies or units. The study by Anthony Marx (1998) on race relations in the United States, South Africa, and Brazil mentioned in Chapter 2 is a good example of cultural-context research. He examined some common ideas, race relations, official policies, and laws related to race in three different cultural settings. He did not arbitrarily or randomly choose the three nations for study. He chose them because they represented three different types of racial regimes or systems for organizing relations among racial groups. Each provided a different kind of cultural context in which Marx could examine common themes, patterns, and processes.

In the third type of comparative research, the nation is the unit of analysis. In **cross-national research**, you measure variables across many nations.

Case-study comparative research Comparative research in which a researcher compares one or two particular cultures (or cultural units such as regions) in depth.

Cultural-context research Comparative research focused on a small number of societies or cultures that represents theoretical types that are compared to permit generalizations to other societies of those same types.

Cross-national research Comparative research with data (usually quantitative) for several variables is examined across many nations and statistically analyzed.

BOX 14.6 San'ya Blues: The Study of a Tokyo Slum

Classic anthropological studies often involve field research in another culture. One such study describes a neighborhood of day laborers in Tokyo (Fowler, 1996). In a city known for its clean, safe streets, high cost of living, and busy lifestyle, this is a neighborhood often overlooked by tourists as well as by most Japanese. Its population is overwhelming male, consisting of men who primarily work in low-wage, unstable construction jobs. The author was an American male who spoke fluent Japanese and was married to a Japanese woman. He came across the neighborhood accidentally and studied it for 16 months, using classic field research techniques. Except for one night, he lived outside the area, returning home at night by train. His book-length report includes numerous situations, conversations, quotes,

maps, and photographs. It is implicitly comparative, not only because the author was a foreigner writing in a different language for a foreign audience but also in how he explains the social relations, customs, and categories of the neighborhood using colorful details that place it in (and yet somewhat separate from) the rest of the larger culture in which it existed. The author conveys an empathetic understanding of the neighborhood men and their subculture by giving many concrete descriptions, but he situates the descriptions in the larger Japanese culture and the Tokyo urban culture. He presents historical and other contextual information and makes references to somewhat parallel places in other countries such as in the United States.

Nations are not mentioned by name, but you look at variation across nations, converting unique features of nations into variables. For statistical analysis, the cross-national researcher needs information on 40 to 50 nations. Although there are nearly 150 independent nation-states, data are rarely available for more than 50 nations.

Transnational research is a type of comparative research in which you use a multination unit (e.g., a region of the globe such as the Third World) and focus on the relations among blocs of nations as units. You do not see nations as isolated entities but as parts of an international system. Wallerstein's (1974) research on the long-term development of a "world system" since the 1400s illustrates this type of research. His writings spawned a new school of thought, world system theory, which has stimulated additional H-C research.

The Units Being Compared

Culture versus Nation. For convenience, comparative researchers often use the nation-state as a unit of analysis. The nation-state is the major unit used in thinking about the divisions of people across the globe today. Although it is a dominant unit in current times, it is neither an inevitable nor a per-

manent one; in fact, it has been around for only about 300 years.

The nation-state is a socially and politically defined unit. In it, one government has sovereignty (i.e., military control and political authority) over populated territory. Economic relations (e.g., currency, trade, etc.), transportation routes, and communication systems are integrated within territorial boundaries. The people of the territory usually share a common language and customs, and there is usually a common educational system, legal system, and set of political symbols (e.g., flag, national anthem, etc.). The government claims to represent the interests of all people in the territory under its control.

The nation-state is frequently a surrogate for culture, which is more difficult to define as a concrete, observable unit. *Culture* refers to a common identity among people based on shared social relations, beliefs, and technology. Cultural differences in language, custom, traditions, and norms often follow national lines. In fact, sharing a common culture is a major factor causing the formation of distinct nation-states.

Transnational research Comparative research that examines and compares multination units.

The boundaries of a nation-state may not match those of a culture. In some situations, a single culture is divided into several nations; in other cases, a nation-state contains more than one culture. Over the past centuries, boundaries between cultures and distinct vibrant cultures have been destroyed, rearranged, or diffused as territory around the world was carved into colonies or nation-states by wars and conquest. For example, European empires imposed arbitrary boundaries over several cultural groups in nations that were once colonies.³⁸ Likewise, new immigrants or ethnic minorities are not always assimilated into the dominant culture in a nation. For example, one region of a nation may have people with a distinct ethnic background, language, customs, religion, social institutions, and identity (e.g., the province of Quebec in Canada). Such intranational cultures can create regional conflict, because ethnic and cultural identities are the basis for nationalism.³⁹

The nation-state is not always the best unit for comparative research. You should ask: What is the relevant comparative unit for my research question—the nation, the culture, a small region, or a subculture? For example, a research question is: Are income level and divorce related (i.e., are higher income people less likely to divorce)? A group of people with a distinct culture, language, and religion live in one region of a nation. Among them, income and divorce are not related; elsewhere in the nation, however, where a different culture prevails, income and divorce are related. If you use the nation-state as the unit, the findings could be ambiguous and the explanation weak. Instead of assuming that each nation-state has a common culture, you may find that a unit smaller than the nation-state is more appropriate.

Nevertheless, boundaries between cultures or subcultures are difficult to operationalize. Cultures are hard to define, are constantly evolving, and have boundaries that blend into each other. Except for

Galton's problem The potential problem of finding correlations or associations among characteristics in multiple cases or units, when the characteristics diffused from a single source and the units (e.g., countries, cultures) are not really independent cases.

cases of border disputes, boundaries between nations are less ambiguous, but they, too, change over time. There is no easy answer. The issue of the appropriate unit to use remains a serious one.

Galton's Problem. The issue of the units of comparison is related to a problem named after Sir Francis Galton (1822–1911), who raised an issue at the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1889 regarding a paper by E. B. Taylor. When researchers compare units or their characteristics, they want the units to be distinct and separate from each other. If the units are not different but are actually the subparts of a single larger unit, then researchers will find spurious relationships. For example, the units are the states and provinces in Canada, France, and the United States; a researcher discovers a strong association between speaking English and having the dollar as currency, or speaking French and using the franc as currency. Obviously, the association exists because the units of analysis (i.e., states or provinces) are subparts of larger units (i.e., nations). The features of the units are due to their being parts of larger units and not to any relationship among the features. Social geographers also encounter this because many social and cultural features diffuse across geographic space.

Galton's problem is an important issue in comparative research because cultures rarely have fixed boundaries.⁴⁰ It is hard to say where one culture ends and another begins, whether one culture is distinct from another, or whether the features of one culture have diffused to another over time. Galton's problem occurs when the relationship between two variables in two different units is actually due to a common origin, and they are not truly distinct units (see Figure 14.2).

Galton's problem originated with regard to comparisons across cultures, but it applies to historical comparisons also. It arises when a researcher asks whether units are really the same or different in different historical periods. For example, is the Cuba of 1885 the same country as the Cuba of 1985? Do 100 years since the end of Spanish colonialism, the rise of U.S. influence, independence, dictatorship, and a communist revolution fundamentally change the unit?

Data in Cross-Cultural Research

Comparative Field Research. Many comparative researchers use field research and participant observation in cultures other than their own. Anthropologists are specially trained and prepared for this type of research. The exchange of methods between anthropological and field research suggests that there are small differences between field research in one's own society and in another culture. Field research in a different culture is usually more difficult and places more requirements on the researcher.

Existing Sources of Qualitative Data. Comparative researchers can use secondary sources. For example, a researcher who conducts a comparative study of the Brazilian, Canadian, and Japanese educational systems can read studies by researchers from many countries, including Brazil, Canada, and Japan, which describe the education systems in the three nations.

There may have been 5,000 different human cultures throughout human history; about 1,000 of them have been studied by social researchers. A valuable source of ethnographic data on different cultures is the **Human Relations Area Files (HRAF)** and the related *Ethnographic Atlas*.⁴¹ The HRAF is a collection of field research reports that anthropologist George Murdock began to gather and organize in 1938. It brings together information from ethnographic studies on various cultures, most of which are primitive or small tribal groupings. Extensive information on nearly 300 cultures has been organized by social characteristics or practices (e.g., infant feeding, suicide, childbirth, etc.). A study on a particular culture is divided up, and its information on a characteristic is grouped with that from other studies. This makes it easy to compare many cultures on the same characteristic. For example, a researcher interested in inheritance can learn that of 159 different cultures in which it has been studied, 119 have a patrilineal form (father to son), 27 matrilineal (mother to daughter), and 13 mixed inheritance.

Researchers can use the HRAF to study relationships among several characteristics of different cultures. For example, to find out whether sexual assault against women, or rape, is associated with

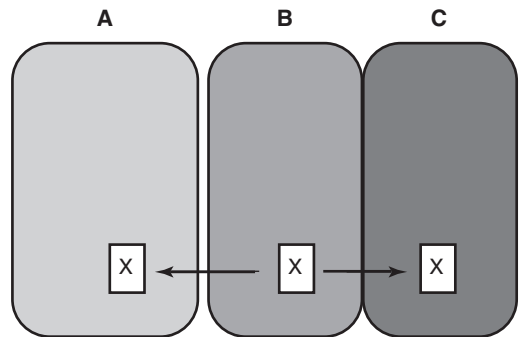


FIGURE 14.2 Galton's Problem. *Galton's problem* occurs when a researcher observes the same social relationship (represented by X) in different settings or societies (represented as A, B, and C) and falsely concludes that the social relationship arose independently in these different places. The researcher may believe he or she has discovered a relationship in three separate cases. But the actual reason for the occurrence of the social relation may be a shared or common origin that has diffused from one setting to others. This is a problem because the researcher who finds a relationship (e.g., a marriage pattern) in distinct settings or units of analysis (e.g., societies) may believe it arose independently in different units. This belief suggests that the relationship is a human universal. The researcher may be unaware that in fact it exists because people have shared the relationship across units.

patriarchy (i.e., the holding of power and authority by males), a researcher can examine the presence of sexual assault and the strength of patriarchy in many cultures.

Using the HRAF does have limitations, however. First, the quality of the original research reports depends on the initial researcher's length of time in the field, familiarity with the language, and prior experience, as well as on the explicitness of the research report. In addition, the range of behavior observed by the initial researcher and the depth of inquiry can

Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) An extensive catalog and comprehensive collection of ethnographies on many cultures (mostly preliterate) that permits a researcher to compare across cultural units.

vary. For example, a researcher may say that in culture X the children are not punished, when in fact children are punished, but in private, and it is the public punishment of children that is taboo. In addition, the categorization of characteristics in the HRAF can be crude. For example, the importance of sorcery in a culture could be coded on a scale from highly important to not very important. Another limitation involves the cultures that have been studied. Western researchers have made contact with and conducted field research on a limited number of cultures prior to these cultures' contact with the outside world. The cultures studied are not a representative sample of all the human cultures that existed. In addition, Galton's problem (discussed earlier) can be an issue.

Cross-National Survey Research. Survey research was discussed in Chapter 10. This section examines issues that arise when a researcher uses the survey technique in other cultures.⁴² The limitations of a cross-cultural survey are not different in principle from those of a survey within one culture. Nevertheless, they are usually so much greater in magnitude and severity that a researcher must carefully consider whether the survey is the best method in a setting.

Survey research in a different culture requires that the researcher possess an in-depth knowledge of its norms, practices, and customs. Without such an in-depth knowledge, it is easy to make serious errors in procedure and interpretation. Knowing another language is not enough. A researcher needs to be multicultural and thoroughly know the culture in addition to being familiar with the survey method. Substantial advance knowledge about the other culture is needed prior to entering it or planning the survey. Close cooperation with the native people of the other culture is also essential.

A researcher's choice of the cultures or nations to include in a cross-cultural survey should be made on both substantive (e.g., theoretical, research question) and practical grounds. Each step of survey research (question wording, data collection, sampling, interviewing, etc.) must be tailored to the culture in which it is conducted. One critical issue is how the people from the other culture experience the survey. In some cultures, the survey and interviewing itself

may be a strange, frightening experience, analogous to a police interrogation.

Sampling for a survey is also affected by the cultural context. Comparative survey researchers must consider whether accurate sampling frames are available, the quality of mail or telephone service, and transportation to remote rural areas. They need to be aware of such factors as how often people move, the types of dwellings in which people live, the number of people in a dwelling, the telephone coverage, or typical rates of refusal. Researchers must tailor the sampling unit to the culture and consider how basic units, such as the family, are defined in that culture. Special samples or methods for locating people for a sample may be required. For example, in his survey in India, Elder (1973) reported that he under-sampled people living in servant quarters located behind middle- and upper-income homes.

Although researchers have conducted surveys across cultures and languages for decades, and such surveys have been more frequent in the recent years, they are still learning about the complex methodological issues involved in cross-cultural survey design and question writing.⁴³ Problems or concerns encountered when conducting a survey in one's own culture are greatly magnified when two or more cultures are included. Direct language translation is rarely adequate, and many issues of equivalence are involved (equivalence is discussed later in this chapter).

First, the comparative survey researcher must be very culturally aware. One issue is topic sensitivity. Topics that are noncontroversial in one culture may be highly sensitive or even taboo in another. As Smith (2004) noted, topic sensitivity varies widely by culture. Alcohol use is more sensitive in Islamic than in Judeo-Christian cultures, political questions about the Communist Party are forbidden in China, and cohabitation is common in Sweden but still socially sensitive elsewhere. Cultural settings imply other differences. One can ask about the emperor in Japan or the queen in Great Britain but not in the United States or Germany. In some African and Islamic societies, asking about a man's wife should be phrased in the plural. The researcher needs to know regional variations, such as in Scottish law a person can be found guilty, not

proven, or innocent but in English law someone is guilty or not guilty. As Braun (2003) emphasized, respondents will interpret questions in their own known context, and fill in meaning using local knowledge, assumptions, and interpretations, even when the question originated in a different cultural-language setting. For example, asking, “If the mother works, does the child suffer?” can vary by culture. Respondents may envision the child as an infant or a 5-year-old. Their reaction can vary widely if their society has many part-time jobs with flexible hours near home widely available to mothers and there is an extensive system of free, high-quality child-care versus living where mothers must work full-time some distance away with few or very expensive child-care facilities. What may appear to be the same, even in the same language, may not have the same meaning. The English term *Social Security* is used in Australia, Britain, Canada, Ireland, and the United States but has a different meaning in each country and refers to different government programs.

Second, patterns and styles of communication vary by culture. The pace of talk and use of silence vary both culturally and linguistically. Social desirability (see Chapter 10), the response set or yes saying, and public willingness to answer survey questions vary significantly by culture.⁴⁴ In addition to the questions themselves, response scales (e.g., strongly agree, disagree, etc.) vary widely across languages and cultural settings. King and colleagues (2004) described a method of using short vignettes to anchor responses within a specific cultural setting. For example, asking about someone being elderly or middle aged may vary by societal context. In one society, middle aged may mean 30 years old and elderly may mean 45 because of high death rates, whereas in another people think of 50 years old as middle aged and 70 as elderly. Likewise, rather than ask a respondent whether the amount of political say he or she has is “None at all, A little, or A lot,” King and associates (2004) suggested that a researcher first provide a set of concrete stories, or vignettes, and ask a respondent to match his or her response to a vignette. For example, in the standard Likert-form question–response, Mexicans may say they have less political influence than do Chinese.

This may be even though Mexico has a far more open political system with voting that has thrown out the ruling party, while China is a one-party totalitarian state. When given five vignettes about their likely response to poor-quality local drinking water—from supporting opposition candidates, to initiating a petition, to feeling it is worthless to vote, to asking local leaders for help, to suffering in silence—the respondents in Mexico and China may answer in ways that better reflect their actual political influence. Researchers can statistically calibrate general responses with a few vignettes.

Interviewing requires special attention in cross-cultural situations. Selection and training of interviewers depends on the education, norms, and etiquette of the other culture. The interview situation raises issues such as norms of privacy, ways to gain trust, beliefs about confidentiality, and differences in dialect. For example, in some cultures, an interviewer must spend a day in informal discussion before achieving the rapport needed for a short formal interview.

Comparative researchers need to be aware of a version of social desirability bias—the **courtesy bias**. It occurs when strong cultural norms cause respondents to hide anything unpleasant or give answers that the respondent thinks that the interviewer wants. Respondents may seriously understate or overstate some characteristics (e.g., income, accomplishments, education) because of cultural norms. In addition, the manner in which answers are given (e.g., tone of voice, situation, etc.) may change their meaning (see Box 14.7).

Access can be a serious issue in cultures in which cultural norms limit openness or protect privacy. In addition, the researcher’s origin from another country or culture may be a significant barrier in itself. Specific problems involve knowing what agencies and individuals to contact, the appropriate procedures for making contacts (e.g., a formal letter of introduction), how to maintain goodwill (e.g., gift giving), and the effects of such arrangements

Courtesy bias When very strong cultural norms exist to “maintain face” or hide unpleasant information from others, including social researchers.

BOX 14.7 Cross-Cultural Answers to Survey Questions

The meaning of a statement or answer to a question often depends on the customs of a culture, the social situation, and the manner in which the answer is spoken. The manner of answering can reverse the different meanings of the same answer based on the manner in which the answer was spoken.

MANNER IN WHICH ANSWER SPOKEN	ANSWER TO QUESTION	
	Yes	No
Polite	No	Yes
Emphatic	Yes	No

Source: Adapted from Hymes (1970:329).

on the quality and comparability of research. In some cultures, bribery, family connections, or the approval of local political authorities are required for access to sampling frames, certain sections of a town, or specific respondents. In addition, a researcher may have to take special precautions to protect the confidentiality and integrity of data once they have been collected.

Survey Questionnaires and Multiple Languages. Most survey researchers use an “ask-the-same-question” approach, in which they use an existing question or develop a question in one language and then translate or adopt it into another language. An alternative is to design new questions for multiple languages from the beginning. There is a trade-off between adopting existing questions and creating new ones (see Chart 14.1) that suggests developing new questions is preferred for better quality survey research.

Adapting questions appears straightforward without changes in meaning, such as making minor adjustments as in changing the word *stomach* to *tummy* when a question is adapted to children. However, there are many possible pitfalls. Ideally, translators are familiar with survey questionnaire design and the concepts a researcher is attempting to measure. Beyond words, a researcher must be

CHART 14.1 Cross-Cultural Survey Question Design

QUESTION SOURCE	ADVANTAGE	DISADVANTAGE
Adapt or adopt existing question	Easy, inexpensive, and fast	Often language and cultural suitability problems
New question methods	High cultural suitability, few language problems	High development cost, more time required

Source: Adapted from Harkness, van de Vijver, and Johnson, (2003:25).

aware of what is left unstated or implied. For example, the question, “Can you open the door?” can mean an ability, or it can be a request, depending on the language and context in which it appears. Grammatical gender is an issue in many languages. German has three, whereas French, Italian, and Spanish have two. In some languages gendered grammar marks the speaker’s gender; in others it indicates the target about whom one is speaking. For example, you might not be able to ask about a “friend” without specifying gender. The English question, “Who is your best friend?” requires asking two questions, “Who is your best male friend?” “Who is your best female friend?” Certain occupations, such as secretary, may be so strongly gendered that asking about whether a male or female has the job is very awkward. Other statuses are embedded in terms. In some languages, such as Japanese, you cannot ask about someone’s brother or sister without specifying whether it is an older or younger brother or sister.

Even what appears to be the same word (e.g., friend, *Freund*, *amigo*) carries different connotations and cultural meanings. For example, *liberty* in English and *liberté* in French translate as being the same, but they have different meanings because of historical context and political-ideational context. Language and cultural differences may exist within

the same country. The English word *education* in the United States primarily refers to academic subjects, whereas the similar word *educación* used among Spanish-speaking immigrants includes learning social skills not normally included in the content of the English use of the term *education*.

Comparative researchers often use a technique called **back translation** to achieve lexicon equivalence.⁴⁵ In back translation, a phrase or question is translated from one language to another and then back again. For example, a phrase in English is translated into Korean and then independently translated from Korean back into English. A researcher then compares the first and second English versions. For example, in a study to compare knowledge of international issues by U.S. and Japanese college students, the researchers developed a questionnaire in English. They next had a team of Japanese college faculty translate the questionnaire into Japanese. Some changes were made in the questionnaire. When they used back translation, they discovered “30 translating errors, including some major ones” (Cogan et al., 1988:285).

Back translation does not help when words for a concept do not exist in a different language (e.g., there is no word for *trust* in Hindi, for *loyalty* in Turkish, or for *good quarrel* in Thai). Thus, translation may require complex explanations, or a researcher may not be able to use certain concepts.

Increasingly, researchers advise against simple translation including back translation because it cannot catch all problems. Harkness (2003:42) noted that the German phrase, *Das Leben in vollen Zügen genießen*, was translated into English as “Enjoy life in full trains.” This was accurate and not caught by back translation techniques. The actual meaning in English is, “Live life to the full” (British English) or “Live life to the fullest” (American English). This is because the word *Zügen* has two meanings, one of which is trains. She argues (Harkness 2003:35), “Whenever possible, translation should be integrated into the study design. In practice, however, translation rarely is seen as part of questionnaire design and usually is treated as an addendum.” Modern cross-cultural communication and translation theory suggests using an intergrated approach, with a team of

translators checking survey wording with techniques, such as cognitive interviews and focus groups, to discuss the actual meanings of survey questions. Researchers should avoid **safari research**—the tendency of a research team from one culture to develop a project and measures in its own cultural-language context, then impose them onto another culture. The alternative is joint research with a multicultural research team.

Back translation is one of several sequential methods that starts with a questionnaire that was written in one language and created from a single cultural perspective.⁴⁶ It is then translated into a new language for use in different cultural setting (see Box 14.8 and Figure 14.3). Newer methods involve parallel or simultaneous survey development. From the beginning, a team of researchers and translators writes questions in multiple languages and designs questionnaires for use in multiple cultural settings. Such new methods are likely to avoid many past questionnaire translation problems.

Western Cultural Bias

Most social research is conducted by people who live, work, or have been educated in any one of a handful of societies in which advanced Western culture is dominant. This creates a danger of a **Western cultural bias** and ethnocentrism. As Myrdal (1973:89) concluded, “A Western approach must be regarded as a biased approach.”

Each culture has its own assumptions, modes of thought, orientation toward time, and fundamental

Back translation Written material is translated into a second language, translated back to the original language by a different translator, then the original writing and the translated versions are compared.

Safari research When researchers from one culture impose their perspectives, ideas, and issues onto another culture and treat the studied culture as only an exotic object to be studied.

Western cultural bias A bias in comparative research that is organized around the outlook and perspective of advanced Western societies that is largely insensitive to local, non-Western cultural issues, values, or perspectives.

BOX 14.8 Approaches to Cross-Cultural Survey Translation

1. *Translation-on-the-fly.* Researchers develop and pilot test a questionnaire in one language. Bilingual interviewers are employed and translate each question and response during interviews.
2. *Single translation.* Researchers develop and pilot test a questionnaire in one language. A skilled translator converts it from the original language to a target language.
3. *Back translation.* Researchers develop and pilot test a questionnaire in one language. A translator takes it from the original language to a target language. The translated questionnaire is next translated back to the original language by a second translator. The results are compared with the original questionnaire and adjustments made.
4. *Parallel translation.* A multicultural group develops a questionnaire with two or more translators independently translating a questionnaire. Each translator incorporates input from multiple target cultural-language sources. Later, the questionnaires are coordinated and adjusted based on a review and adjudication by a multicultural/lingual team. The questionnaires are then pilot tested in multiple cultural-language contexts.
5. *Simultaneous development.* A team of translators and researchers from different languages/cultures work together, discussing the meanings of concepts and terms in the several languages with alternative translations. The questionnaire items are created for multiple languages/cultural contexts through a decentering process sensitive to *emic/etic* distinctions, with culturally specific and multiple-culture ideas/terms. An independent multicultural/lingual team reviews and adjudicates questionnaires in multiple languages. The questionnaires are pilot tested with bilingual-cultural and monolingual-cultural respondents.

Sources: See Smith (2004), Harkness, van de Vijver, and Johnson (2003), Harkness, Pennell, and Schoua-Glusberg (2004).

values about human life. All these influence thinking and social relations. If social researchers were totally free of culture or had a unique professional culture apart from any specific culture, then cultural bias would not be an issue. But this is unrealistic. It is too easy for researchers to believe that their assumptions, concepts, findings, and values—which are colored by Western culture—apply universally to all people in the world.

A comparative approach encourages researchers to ask questions that challenge their own cultural tradition.⁴⁷ In addition, a comparative perspective stimulates researchers to look beyond surface appearances. They may just be symptoms of deeper beliefs, values, and relationships. By becoming multicultural, a researcher gains a better awareness of problems in doing social research and of Western bias, and can produce improved social research as a result.

An Inverted Focus. Researchers outside the United States, and some within it, criticize U.S. social science for being “inverted” or too self-

centered. American theories and ways to conduct social research became dominant during the years following World War II, and many Americans arrogantly assumed this was natural because their methods and theories were the best. This problem is compounded by the U.S. global economic, military, and political dominance and by the international strength of popular and commercial U.S. culture.

Unfortunately, many researchers only see concerns from the viewpoint of their own cultural values and beliefs, citing only research that was conducted in the United States. Too often, they ignore concerns relevant to the rest of the world and overlook studies conducted by scholars outside the United States (Connell, 1990).

The “inverted” focus causes two problems. First, the vast research establishment in the United States produces a large majority of the world’s empirical social science research. An inverted focus distorts understanding about social relations around the planet. It shows conditions or events only through the lens of U.S. culture, which can create

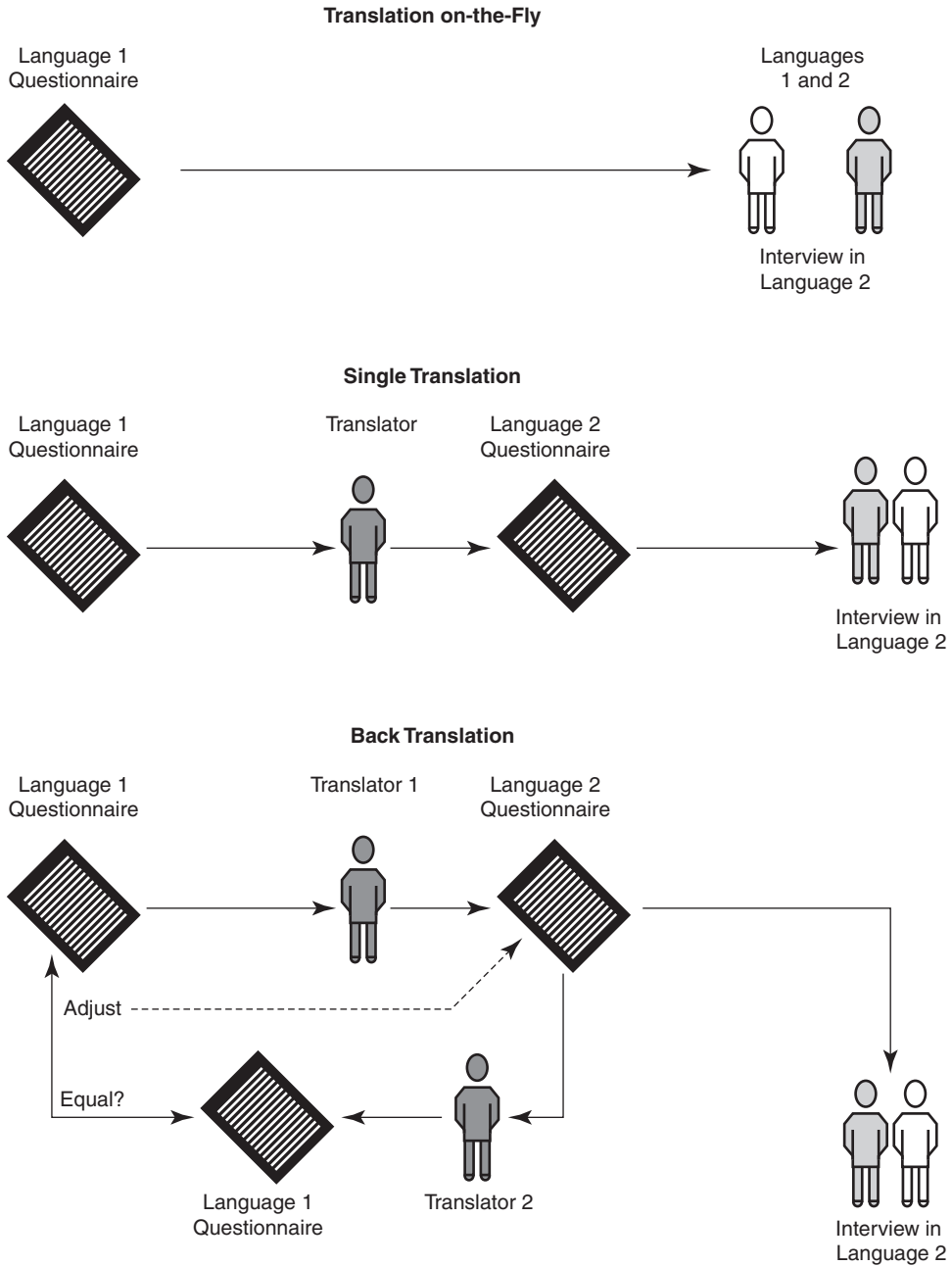


FIGURE 14.3 Cross-Cultural Survey Translation

(continued)

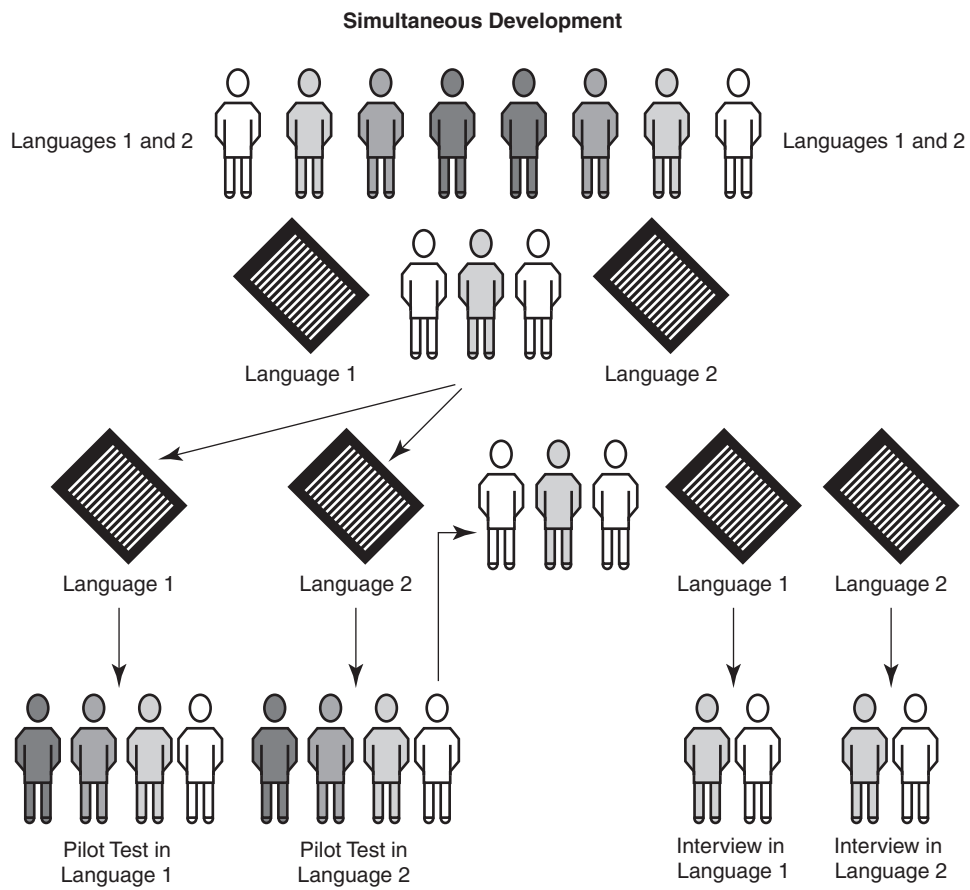
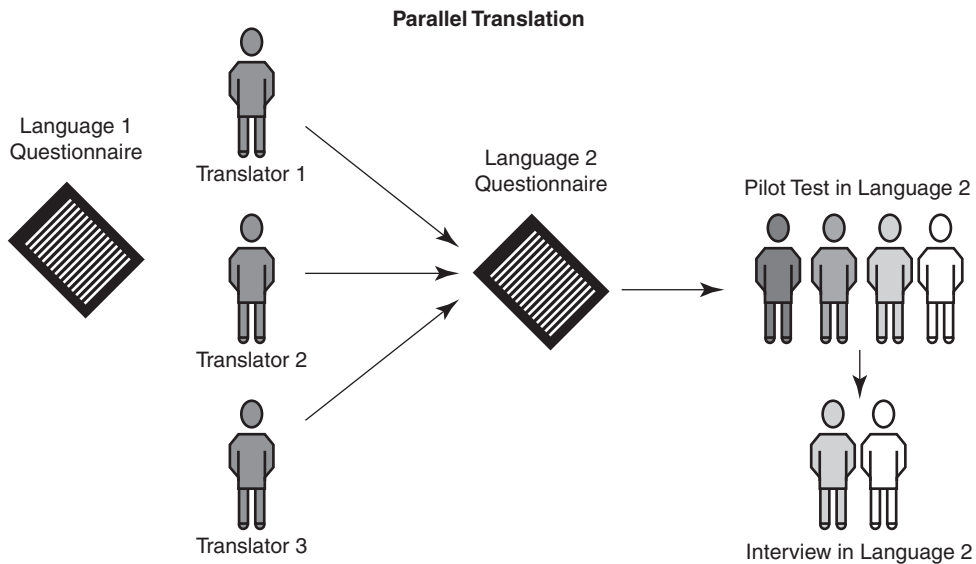


FIGURE 14.3 (Continued)

misinterpretations or misunderstanding of larger global issues as well as the concerns of people in different cultural settings. Second, many researchers, especially those who adopt a positivist approach, believe they are discovering universal laws of human behavior. If they formulate research questions based on the views of only one culture, study only one culture, and cite studies conducted in only one culture, their results are not universal. They are building a national rather than a global social science. U.S. researchers cannot generalize beyond the national context except when justified by comparative research, and they need to guard against ethnocentrism.⁴⁸

Certain issues, methods, or theories may be limited and apply to one nation or a very few nations, whereas other issues, methods, and theories may be truly universal to all humanity. Thus, it may be beneficial to think in terms of having both national and universal social sciences.⁴⁹ The claim that sociology and other fields are universal sciences that discover principles for all people is often overstated. This claim is true only to the extent that researchers regularly use cross-national methods and ideas and make cross-cultural comparisons an integral part of their research designs.

Anthropologists distinguish emic from etic concepts and approaches.⁵⁰ Although it is an overly simple dichotomy, it helps to clarify comparative research issues. An **emic** approach analyzes cultural elements in terms of a native's explicit or implicit categories and meaning system. It is the "insider's" or "native's" interpretation of customs or beliefs. Emic concepts are ones developed and used within a specific cultural setting, and they may not exist elsewhere. They are perceptions and understandings appropriate by the insider's culture. An **etic** approach analyzes cultural elements in terms of cultural-neutral, comparative categories and principles. It applies the external researcher's interpretation of events, customs, or beliefs and focuses on meaning from a decontextualized perspective. Etic concepts are universal in the international scientific community or are widely shared across many cultures. Comparative social researchers recognize and apply both the emic and etic approaches. They try not only to understand and see the world from the insider's view

of a specific cultural setting but also to be able to transcend that setting to establish linkages among and communicate across diverse cultural settings.

EQUIVALENCE IN HISTORICAL-COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

The Importance of Equivalence

Equivalence is a critical issue in all research.⁵¹ It is the issue of making comparisons across divergent contexts, or whether a researcher, living in a specific time period and culture, correctly reads, understands, or conceptualizes data about people from a different historical era or culture. Without equivalence, a researcher cannot use the same concepts or measures in different cultures or historical periods, and this makes comparison difficult, if not impossible. It is similar to the problems that arise with measurement validity in quantitative research.

The equivalence issue varies on a continuum. At one extreme, a researcher discovers something that is totally foreign to his or her experience (e.g., head-hunting and cannibalism) or that is unique to a particular time or culture. At the opposite extreme, there are subtle differences, which are easily overlooked but could affect comparisons. For example, Elder (1973:127) noted this problem when translating the term *friend* across three European languages:

Take friend in English, Freund in German, and amigo in Spanish. Technically, they translate identically. Yet the German Freund refers to a few deep, personal associates; the English friend refers to a somewhat less intense and wider range of acquaintances; and the Spanish amigo refers to a very wide range of persons, some of whom might have been met only that day. Thus, the question, "How many friends do you have?" is asking something different in all three languages.

Emic Concepts or approaches are ones developed and used within a specific cultural setting, and they may not exist elsewhere.

Etic Concepts or approaches that are universal in the international scientific community or widely shared across multiple cultural settings.

Types of Equivalence

The equivalence issue has implications for H-C research. A researcher might misunderstand or misinterpret events in a different era or culture. Assuming that the (emic) interpretation is correct, a researcher may find it difficult to conceptualize and organize the events to make comparisons across times or places (etic). If he or she fully grasps another time or culture (emic), a researcher may still find it difficult to communicate with others from his or her own time and culture (emic). The equivalence issue can be divided into four subtypes: lexicon equivalence, contextual equivalence, conceptual equivalence, and measurement equivalence.

Lexicon Equivalence. Lexicon equivalence is the correct translation of words and phrases, or finding a word that means the same thing as another word. This is clearest between two languages. For example, in many languages and cultures there are different forms of address and pronouns for intimates (e.g., close friends and family members) and subordinates (e.g., younger persons and lower-status people) from those used in unknown or public settings or for persons of higher social status. There are no directly equal linguistic forms of speech in English, although the idea of close personal versus public relations exists in English-speaking cultures. In such languages, switching pronouns when saying “How are you today?” might indicate a change in status or in the social relationship. One would have to indicate it in another, perhaps nonverbal, way if speaking in English.

Lexicon equivalence can be significant in historical research because the meaning of words changes over time, even in the same language. The greater the distance in time, the greater the chance that an expression will have a different meaning or

connotation. For example, today the word *weed* refers to unwanted plants or to marijuana, but in Shakespeare’s era, the word meant clothing.

A sensitivity to subtle changes in language use can be crucial when a researcher tries to understand the perspective of other people. For example, Sewell (1980) found that differences in how people living about a century and a half ago used certain terms helped him to understand changes in their consciousness and social experiences. However, Jones (1983:24) noted, “Harnessing elementary insights derived from theories of language to problems of substantive historical interpretation is in . . . an extremely primitive state.”

Contextual Equivalence. Contextual equivalence is the correct application of terms or concepts in different social or historical contexts. It is an attempt to achieve equivalence within specific contexts. For example, in cultures with different dominant religions, a religious leader (e.g., priest, minister, or rabbi) can have different roles, training, and authority. In some contexts, priests are full-time male professionals who are wealthy, highly esteemed, well-educated community leaders and also wield political power. In other contexts, a priest is anyone who rises above others in a congregation on a temporary basis but is without power or standing in the community. Priests in such a context may be less well educated, have low incomes, and be viewed as sincere spiritual people. A researcher who asks about “priests” without noticing the context could make serious errors in interpretations.

Context also applies across historical eras. For example, *attending college* has a different meaning today than in a historical context in which only the richest one percent of the population attended college, most colleges had fewer than 500 students, all were private all-male institutions that did not require a high school diploma for entry, and a college curriculum consisted of classical languages and moral training. Attending college 100 years ago was not the same as it is today; the historical context has altered the meaning of attending college.

Conceptual Equivalence. The ability to use the same concept across divergent cultures or historical

Lexicon equivalence Finding equivalent words or phrases to express the identical meaning in different languages or in the translation from one language to another.

Contextual equivalence The issue of whether social roles, norms, or situations across different cultures or historical periods are equivalent or can be compared.

eras is **conceptual equivalence**. Researchers live within specific cultures and historical eras. Their concepts are based on their experiences and knowledge from their own culture and era. Researchers may try to stretch their concepts by learning about other cultures or eras, but their views of other cultures or eras are colored by their current life situations. This creates a persistent tension and raises the question: Can a researcher create concepts that are simultaneously true reflections of life experiences in different cultures or eras and that also make sense to him or her?

The issue of a researcher's concept is a special case of larger emic and etic issues, because concepts can be incompatible across different time periods or cultures. Is it possible to create concepts that are true, accurate, and valid representations of social life in two or more cultural or historical settings that are very different? For example, Thompson (1967) argued that the subjective experience of time and its measurement were radically different in the preindustrial period. The concept of punctuality or of the workday had a very different meaning or did not exist at all. The researcher interested in comparing work in the late twentieth and the early sixteenth centuries is comparing apples and oranges. For example, the word *class* exists in many societies, but the system of classes (i.e., the role of income, wealth, job, education, status, relation to means of production), the number of classes, the connotations of being in a particular class, and class categories or boundaries differ across societies. This makes the study of social class across societies difficult.⁵²

At times, the same or a similar concept exists across cultures but in different forms or degrees of strength. For example, in many Asian societies, there is a marked difference between the outward, public presentation and definition of self and the private, personal presentation and the definition of self. What one reveals and shows externally is often culturally detached from true, internal feelings. Some languages mark this linguistically, as well. The idea of a distinct self for public, nonfamily, or nonprivate situations exists in Western cultures, as well, but it is much weaker and less socially significant. In addition, many Western cultures assume that the inner self is "real" and should be revealed, an assumption that is not always shared cross-culturally.

At other times, there is no direct cultural equivalent. For example, there is no direct Western conceptual equivalent for the Japanese *ie*. It is translated as family system, but as Hendry (2003:26) explained, "The whole notion of 'family system' was a concept created in the face of outside influence to explain Japanese behavior in a comparative context." The *ie* includes a continuing line of familial descent going back generations and continuing into the future. Its meaning is closer to a European lineage "house" among the feudal nobility than the modern household or even an extended family. It includes ancestors, going back many generations, and future descendants, with branches created by noninheriting male offspring (or adopted sons). It can also include a religious identity and property-holding dimensions (as land or a business passed down for generations). It can include feelings of obligation to one's ancestors and feelings to uphold any commitments they may have made. The *ie* is also embedded in a web of hierarchical relationships with other *ie* and suggests social position or status in a community. For various reasons, the U.S. occupation forces in Japan after World War II legally abolished the *ie* and tried to impose a very different, alien cultural concept, that of the nuclear family.

Conceptual equivalence also applies to the study of different historical eras. For example, income is very different in a historical era with a largely noncash society in which most people grow their own food, make their own furniture and clothing, or barter goods. Where money is rarely used, it makes no sense to think of income as the number of dollars earned. Counting hogs, acres of land, pairs of shoes, servants, horse carriages, and the like may be more appropriate. Likewise, poor people today may have finished eight years of school; may own a black-and-white television; may live in a small, run-down house; and may own a rusted, battered, 15-year-old automobile. Being poor in a past era may have meant sleeping in barns with animals, begging on the streets, being near starvation, never attending

Conceptual equivalence The issue of whether the same ideas or concepts occur across divergent cultural or historical settings.

school, and owning only the clothing on one's back. Yet, despite the material differences, in terms of the specific societies and the concept of poverty, the poor of today and yesterday may be equivalent.

Measurement Equivalence. **Measurement equivalence** means equal measures of the same concept in different settings. If a researcher develops a concept appropriate to different contexts, the question remains: Are different measures necessary in different contexts for the same concept? Armer (1973:52) defined this idea as follows: "equivalence with respect to measurement refers to whether the instruments used in separate societies in fact measure the same concept, regardless of whether the manifest content and procedures are identical or not." He argued that it may be necessary to use different indicators in different contexts. A researcher might measure the same concept using an attitude survey in one culture but field research in another. The issue then becomes: Can a researcher compare results based on different indicators?

The measurement equivalence issue suggests that an H-C researcher must examine many sources of partial evidence in order to measure or identify a theoretical construct. When evidence exists in fragmentary forms, he or she must examine extensive quantities of indirect evidence in order to identify constructs. Noting this type of process in his study of early nineteenth-century French works, Sewell (1980:9) remarked:

The ideas we were pursuing were stated partially and in fragments, written down in the heat of the action, often by an unknown person or by groups of persons, and are available only in the most heterogeneous forms—in manifestations, records of debates at meetings, posts, satirical prints, statutes of associations, pamphlets, and so on. In such situations the coherence of the thought lies not in particular texts . . . but in the entire ideological discourse constituted by a large number of individually fragmentary and incomplete statements, gestures, images and actions.

Measurement equivalence Creating or locating measures that will accurately represent the same construct or variable in divergent cultural or historical settings.

ETHICS

Historical-comparative research shares many of the ethical concerns found in nonreactive research techniques.

The use of primary historical sources occasionally raises special ethical issues. First, it is difficult to replicate research based on primary material. The researcher's selection criteria for use of evidence and external criticism of documents places a burden on the integrity of the individual researcher. Novick (1988:220) suggested:

The historian has seen, at first hand, a great mass of evidence, often unpublished. The historian develops an interpretation of this evidence based on years of immersion in the material—together, of course, with the perception apparatus and assumptions he or she brings to it. Historians employ devices, the footnote being the most obvious example, to attain for their work something approaching "replicability," but the resemblance is not all that close.

Errors in documentation or the failure to document primary sources sufficiently may create an accusation of fraud against historians, especially from opposing historiographic schools.⁵³

Second, the right to protect privacy may interfere with the right to gather evidence. A person's descendants may want to destroy or hide private papers or evidence of scandalous behavior. Major political figures (e.g., presidents and top administrators) may want to hide embarrassing official documents.⁵⁴

Comparative researchers must be sensitive to cultural and political issues of cross-cultural interaction. They need to learn what is considered offensive within a culture. Sensitivity means showing respect for the traditions, customs, and meaning of privacy in a host country. For example, it may be taboo for a man to interview a married woman without her husband present.

In general, a researcher who visits another culture wants to establish good relations with the host country's government. It is unwise to take data out of the country without giving something (e.g., results) in return. At times, the military or political interests of the researcher's home nation or the researcher's personal values may conflict with official policy in the host nation. A researcher may be suspected of being a spy or may be under

pressure from his or her home country to gather covert information.

Sometimes, the researcher's presence or findings may cause diplomatic problems. For example, a researcher who examines abortion practices in a country, then declares that official government policy is to force many women to have abortions, can expect serious controversy. Likewise, a researcher who is sympathetic to the cause of groups who oppose the government may be imprisoned or asked to leave the country. Social researchers who conduct research in another country should be aware of such issues and the potential consequences of their actions.

Many comparative researchers from "rich," highly industrialized nations who conduct applied economic development research in "poor" industrializing nations emphasize using participatory action research (see Chapter 2). This is as much for practical as ethical reasons. Development researchers learned that unless they work closely with local people, incorporate their popular beliefs, and gain their cooperation and support, the applied research projects are unlikely to be successful or sustained.⁵⁵ In addition to usual issues with applied research and learning to respect local customs and culture, this often means the researcher, as part of doing the research project, must include teaching local people elements of research design. The researcher needs to demonstrate in very basic, visual terms the logic of research and the impact of a project (e.g., use new food-storage methods, eliminate

parasites, improve drinking water, etc.) on local living conditions.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, you have learned methodological principles for an inquiry into historical and comparative materials. The H-C approach is appropriate when asking big questions about macro-level change, or for understanding social processes that operate across time or across several societies. Historical-comparative research can be carried out in several ways, but a distinct qualitative H-C approach is similar to that of field research in important respects.

Historical-comparative research involves a different orientation toward research more than it means applying specialized techniques. Some specialized techniques are used, such as the external criticism of primary documents or back translation. Nevertheless, the most vital feature is how a researcher approaches a question, probes data, and moves toward explanations.

Historical-comparative research is more difficult to conduct than research that is neither historical nor comparative, but the difficulties are present to a lesser degree in other types of social research. For example, issues of equivalence exist to some degree in all social research. In H-C research, however, the problems cannot be treated as secondary concerns. They are at the forefront of how research is conducted and determine whether a research question can be answered.

KEY TERMS

anachronism	cultural-context research	mentalities
Annales school	emic	nonsource-based knowledge
back translation	etic	oral history
Baconian fallacy	external criticism	primary sources
bowdlerization	Galton's problem	recollections
case-study comparative research	historiography	running records
conceptual equivalence	Human Relations Area Files (HRAF)	safari research
contextual equivalence	internal criticism	secondary sources
courtesy bias	lexicon equivalence	transnational research
critical indicator	longue durée	Western cultural bias
cross-national research	measurement equivalence	

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the unique features of historical-comparative research?
2. What are the similarities between field research and H-C research?
3. What is the Annales school, and what are three characteristics or terms in its orientation toward studying the past?
4. What is the difference between a critical indicator and supporting evidence?
5. What questions are asked by a researcher using external criticism?
6. What are the limitations of using secondary sources?
7. What was Galton's problem and why is it important in comparative research?
8. What strengths or advantages are there to using a comparative method in social research?
9. In what ways is cross-national survey research different from survey research within one's own culture?
10. What is the importance of equivalence in H-C research, and what are the four types of equivalence?

NOTES

1. The early works include the following: Marc Bloch, *Feudal society*, transl. L. A. Manyon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961; original 1939–1940); George Homans, *English villagers of the thirteenth century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941); Robert K. Merton, *Science, technology and society in seventeenth century England* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970; originally published in 1938); and Karl Polanyi, *The great transformation*, revised ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1957; originally published in 1957).

2. They included Robert Bellah's *Tokugawa Religion* (1957), Reinhard Bendix's *Work and Authority in Industry* (1956), and Neil Smelser's *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution* (1959).

3. Three such works include Charles Tilly's *The Vendee* (1964), Barrington Moore Jr.'s *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966), and E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). Tilly's study of France in the 1790s combined quantitative logic and new historical data. Moore's study of England, India, Japan, Germany, the United States, and the former Soviet Union traced how combinations of events and coalitions of social groups caused some nations to develop democratic and others nondemocratic governments. Thompson's study on England prior to 1840 examined the lives, words, and actions of ordinary people. "The inspiration for a good deal of the new social history came from E. P. Thompson's (1963) *The Making of the English Working*

Class. Surely, no work in European history ever so profoundly and so rapidly influenced American historians" (Novick, 1988:440).

4. Some influential works of this period include Anderson (1974a, 1974b), Hector (1975), Paige (1975), Skocpol (1979), Tilly and colleagues (1975), and Wallerstein (1974).

5. This is a large increase over the previous period (1985–1989) when it was about 28 percent. By contrast, the percentage of historical or comparative articles in the journals between 1976 and 1978 was about 18 percent. Additional information on the history of historical-comparative research can be found in Calhoun (1996), Johnson (1982), Kohn (1987, especially footnote 1), Lipset (1968), Novick (1988), Roy (1984), Skocpol (1984), Dennis Smith (1991), Warwick and Osherson (1973), and Zaret (1978).

6. See Mahoney (1999) for major works of historical-comparative research.

7. For a discussion of differences between generalizations and analysis across temporal units and cultural units, see Firebaugh (1980) and Smelser (1976).

8. See Calhoun (1996), McDaniel (1978), Przeworski and Teune (1970), and Stinchcombe (1978) for additional discussion.

9. Brown (1978), Johnson (1982), Lloyd (1986), McLennan (1981:66–71), and Nowak (1989) provided discussions of the relationship between positivist and

nonpositivist approaches to historical-comparative research, and the turn toward a realist philosophy of science. See Murphey (1973) with regard to historical research. For comparative research, see Hymes (1970) and Mehan (1973).

10. See Goldthorpe (1991, 1997), Lieberson (1991), and Treiman (1977). Counterarguments are made by Bura-woy (1977), Goldstone (1997), Mahoney (1999), and Rueschemeyer and Stephens (1997).

11. For more on borrowing from anthropology, see Bier-sack (1989), Desan (1989), Johnson (1982), Sewell (1980), Stone (1987), and Walters (1980).

12. See also Desan (1989), Griswold (1983), and Ryan (1989) for discussions of ritual and cultural symbolism. 13. Also see Carr (1961:35, 69), McDaniel (1978), Novick (1988:604), and Ragin (1987:164–166) on the dialogue metaphor.

14. For additional discussion, see Sewell (1987).

15. See Roth and Schluchter (1979:205).

16. See Kalberg (1994).

17. For an additional discussion of the penetration of surface events, see Bloch (1953:13), Lloyd (1986), McLennan (1981:42–44), and Sewell (1987).

18. See Naroll (1968) for a discussion of difficulties in creating distinctions. Also see Whiting (1968).

19. See the discussion on periodization in Chapter 15.

20. Transhistorical concepts are discussed by others, such as Bendix (1963), Przeworski and Teune (1970), and Smelser (1976).

21. For more on the Annales school, see Braudel (1980), Darnton (1978), Hunt (1989), Lloyd (1986), and McLennan (1981).

22. Orientation reading is discussed in Shafer (1980:46–48).

23. Shafer (1980:2) discussed this in greater depth.

24. See Lowenthal (1985:187).

25. For additional information on oral history, see Dun-away and Baum (1984), Sitton and colleagues (1983), and P. Thompson (1978). Also see Prucha (1987:78–80) for a guide to major collections of oral histories in the United States.

26. See Schacter (1995) and Schacter (2001:20–21).

27. Bendix (1978:16) distinguished between the *judgments* of historians and the *selections* of sociologists.

28. Merton (1957:93–94) discussed the limitation of post facto interpretations.

29. For a discussion of law versus tendency in historical social theory, see Applebaum (1978b) and McLennan (1981:75). Murphey (1973:86) provided a useful discussion of the issues.

30. The word *read*, as used here, means to bring a theo-retical framework and analytic purpose to the text. Spe-

cific details and the historian's interpretations are read "through" (i.e., passed, but not without notice) in order to discover patterns of relations in underlying structures. See Sumner (1979) for discussion. This relates to the ob-jectivity question in historiography in Novick (1988) and Winkler (1989).

31. Bonnell (1980:161), Finley (1977:132), and Goldthorpe (1977:189–190) discussed how historians use concepts. Selection in this context is discussed by Abrams (1982:194) and Ben-Yehuda (1983).

32. See Barzun and Graff (1970), Braudel (1980), Can-tor and Schneider (1967), Novick (1988), or Shafer (1980). Most focus on the assembly of historical details that are documented in artifacts, including those of col-lective biography. This focuses attention on specific his-torical actors, their actions and motives, so it takes on an individualistic-voluntaristic slant, and studies become ideographic accounts of micro behavior. See also Block (1977), Laslett (1980), and MacIver (1968).

33. The narrative is discussed in Abbott (1992), Gallie (1963), Gotham and Staples (1996), Griffin (1993), McLennan (1981:76–87), Runciman (1980), and Stone (1987:74–96).

34. For more on the use and evaluation of primary sources, see Barzun and Graff (1970:63–128). Cantor and Schneider (1967:22–91), Dibble (1963), Mari-ampolski and Hughes (1978), Milligan (1979), Platt (1981), Shafer (1980:127–170), and Topolski (1976). Bloch's (1953:79–137) discussion of historical criticism is still valuable today.

35. For more on the strengths and limitations of com-parative research, see Anderson (1973), Holt and Turner (1970), Kohn (1987), Ragin (1987), Smelser (1976), Val-lier (1971a, 1971b), Walton (1973), and Whiting (1968).

36. Similar classifications are provided in Bollen and associates (1993), Chase-Dunn (1989:309–333), and Ragin (1994a). Also see Ragin (1989) for a critique of Kohn's typology.

37. See Ragin (1987:49–50).

38. For example, Eric Wolf's (1982) study of the cul-tures or civilizations around the world between 1400 and 1900 illustrates the existence of many separate cultures and civilizations prior to European colonization and the rise of nation-states.

39. For examples, see Hector (1975) and See (1986).

40. See Elder (1973) and Whiting (1968) on Galton's problem.

41. For more on the *Human Relations Area Files* and the *Ethnographic Atlas*, see Murdock (1967, 1971) and Whiting (1968).

42. For more on comparative survey research, see Bur-ton and White (1987), Elder (1973), Frey (1970), Verba

(1971), Warwick and Lininger (1975), and Williamson and colleagues (1982:315–319). For an additional discussion of access issues, see Armer (1973:59) and Form (1973).

43. See Harkness, van de Vijver, and Johnson (2003) and Smith (2003, 2004).

44. Couper and de Leeuw (2003) discuss nonresponse, and Johnson and van de Vijver (2003) describe social desirability issues.

45. For more on back translation, see Anderson (1973), Grimshaw (1973), and Hymes (1970).

46. See Harkness, van de Vijver, and Johnson (2003).

47. See Frey (1970), Grimshaw (1973), and McDaniel (1978).

48. See also Bradshaw and Wallace (1996).

49. See Hiller (1979).

50. See Ember (1977), Harris (1976), and Headland and associates (1990).

51. For additional discussions of equivalence, see Anderson (1973), Armer (1973), Frey (1970), Holt and Turner (1970), Przeworski and Teune (1970, 1973), and Warwick and Osherson (1973).

52. See Hazelrigg (1973).

53. See Novick (1988:612–622) for an extensive discussion of the David Abraham case.

54. For a discussion of archived data, see Odette and Mautner (2004) and Richardson and Godfrey (2003).

55. See Mikkelsen (1995).