

# One

---

## The Multimethod Approach and Its Promise

---

**S**ocial research today is highly diverse in nearly every respect, including methodology. Researchers in different social scientific disciplines and subdisciplines now study a myriad of research problems—not only from a number of different theoretical perspectives but also with several quite different types of research methods. This diversity of methods implies rich opportunities for cross-validating and cross-fertilizing research procedures, findings, and theories. However, to exploit these opportunities, we must develop more cosmopolitan research strategies. What is needed are approaches that systematically explore the new avenues of research that methodological diversity affords. Multimethod research is one such approach.

### Four Imperfect But Useful Research Methods

The principal methods now employed by social researchers are fieldwork, survey research, experimentation, and nonreactive research. Each of these four methods, or styles, of research involves a different strategy for collecting data. Field-workers observe people and events firsthand in natural social

## 2 FOUNDATIONS OF MULTIMETHOD RESEARCH

---

settings. Survey researchers either interview or administer questionnaires to samples of respondents drawn statistically from the populations in which the phenomena of interest occur. And experimentalists study phenomena under controlled conditions deliberately established by the experimenter to test particular causal hypotheses. The strategy of nonreactive research (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 1966) requires a bit more explanation, however. Fieldwork, surveys, and experiments all involve social contact between researchers and their subjects, and often require considerable cooperation to generate data. To avoid reactive error (e.g., guinea pig effects) and the need for subjects' cooperation, nonreactive researchers either employ various unobtrusive observational techniques or study artifacts, archives, official statistics, and other natural by-products of past social life.

Each type of method, if it is well and appropriately applied, can lead to potentially valid empirical and theoretical generalizations about society and social life. But interpreting the findings of any of these methods is an uncertain task, at best. A major source of this uncertainty is that any study employing a single type of research method—and most studies still use only one method—leaves untested rival hypotheses (or alternative interpretations of data) that call the validity of the study's findings into question. Some of these rival hypotheses defy testing because they are beyond our current practical, theoretical, or methodological capabilities. But a good many others merely elude testing. They elude testing for two reasons; either because the particular method employed fails to provide the data needed to test them or because they stem from possible biases inherent in the study's single method. Each type of method, considered alone, is imperfect in this respect.

### Measuring Crime, for Example

Consider two of the methods that are now used to measure the frequency with which crimes are committed. One is an older method that employs naturally occurring data, which is one of the techniques of nonreactive research. The other is a relatively new survey method. In the past, crime rates were most often estimated with data borrowed from the police blotter, or "crimes known to the police."

These data include all offenses that come to the attention of the authorities and that are also confirmed, by official investigations, as having occurred. However, because the police usually act only after a formal complaint has

been lodged (except in the cases of vice and traffic offenses, their records exclude most crimes that are unreported by either the victims or other concerned parties. The sum of these unreported criminal acts (often referred to as the "dark figure of crime") is therefore a largely unknown quantity when official statistics are the only measuring instruments employed. Consequently, when crime is measured with police data alone, it is never clear whether crime rates vary from one time, place, or group to another because more offenses have actually been committed or merely because more have been formally reported.

To improve measurement and to dispel the shadow of uncertainty that the "dark figure of crime" casts over much research in criminology and the study of deviance, a different technique—the criminal victimization survey—has been increasingly used in recent years. In these surveys, people from carefully drawn samples of the population at large are interviewed about the crimes that may have been perpetrated against them in the recent past. Crime rates are then estimated from respondents' reports. Of course, it is possible that respondents will fail to mention crimes to a survey interviewer for the same reasons they did not report the crimes to the police (fear, embarrassment, oversight, etc.). But despite this possibility, the surveys have shown that a substantial number of the crimes that respondents describe to interviewers have not been previously reported to the police. These findings have called the uncritical use of official crime data seriously into question. As Skogan (1977) cautions: "It is now always necessary to refute systematically all plausible, error-based, rival interpretations of research findings based on reported crime data" (Skogan, 1977, p. 43).

However, some people now also question the validity of the criminal victimization surveys. For example, Levine (1976) suggests that survey respondents might mistake for crime incidents that in a technical legal sense are only trivial personal annoyances, or respondents might recall *real* crimes as occurring more recently than they actually did, thereby artificially increasing current rates. Respondents might also exaggerate their experiences—or even lie outright—to make themselves appear more important, to dramatize the seriousness of crime as a social problem, or perhaps to placate a persistent interviewer by saying what they think the interviewer wants to hear. Furthermore, overly zealous survey researchers, eager to demonstrate that surveys are indeed more sensitive measuring instruments than official statistics, might be overly willing to accept respondents' reports at face value. More generally, Levine (1976) argues that "while police reports no doubt suffer from crime underreporting, surveys

## 4 FOUNDATIONS OF MULTIMETHOD RESEARCH

---

may be flawed by crime overreporting which leads to inflated crime rates" (Levine, 1976, pp. 309–310).

Measuring crime is an important matter in itself, but we introduce it here primarily as an illustration of a more general problem in social science research today: Two or more reasonably reliable methods are applied to a research question, and neither method produces an unambiguous answer. Instead, the characteristic weaknesses of each method are suspected of distorting social reality in a different direction.

### **A Broader Multimethod View**

To some critical consumers of social research, the admission that our methods are fallible might seem to "prove" the ultimate futility of empirical social science. However, a growing knowledge of the individual weaknesses of our methods has led many researchers to reach a different conclusion: Social science methods should not be treated as mutually exclusive alternatives among which we must choose and then passively pay the costs of our choices. Our individual methods might be flawed, but fortunately the flaws in each are not identical. A diversity of imperfection allows us to combine methods, not only to gain their individual strengths but also to compensate for their particular faults and limitations. The multimethod approach is largely built upon this insight. Its fundamental strategy is to *attack a research problem with an arsenal of methods that have nonoverlapping weaknesses in addition to their complementary strengths.*

This multimethod strategy is simple, but powerful. For if our various methods have weaknesses that are truly different, then their convergent findings can be accepted with far greater confidence than any single method's findings would warrant. Each new set of data increases our confidence that the research results reflect reality rather than methodological error. And divergent findings are equally important, but for another reason. They signal the need to analyze a research problem further and to be cautious in interpreting the significance of any one set of data.

### **Multiple Measurement (or Triangulation)**

When applied to problems of measurement (such as measuring crime), the multimethod strategy suggests the tactic of *triangulation* (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Webb et al., 1966; Denzin, 1978). Broadly speaking, *measurement* is the operation of assigning either qualitative or quantitative values

(that is, either names or numbers) to social phenomena. *Triangulated measurement* tries to pinpoint the values of a phenomenon more accurately by sighting in on it from different methodological viewpoints. To be useful, a measuring instrument must both give consistent results and measure the phenomenon that it purports to measure. When two reliable instruments yield conflicting results, then the validity of each is cast into doubt. When the findings of different methods agree, we are more confident. But experience has so often revealed serious contradictions that only rarely can agreement be assumed without actual empirical investigation.

We have seen, for instance, that official statistics and criminal victimization surveys frequently are at odds about the actual rate of crime in a society. The multimethod approach to such contradictions is to accept the fact that no method measures perfectly and to exploit the fact that multiple measurement offers the chance to assess each method's validity in the light of other methods. Levine's (1976) conclusion about the measurement of crime expresses the multimethod attitude well:

Only an omniscient deity would be capable of providing an exact tabulation of crime, and in lieu of such an authoritative accounting it is probably most sensible to develop a crime index based on various admittedly faulty measures than to pretend that any single source of data provides a perfect image of reality. (Levine, 1976, p. 326)

Crime is, of course, a subject of interest not only to scholars but also to the public and to the government. Since 1929, the U. S. Department of Justice has measured crime nationwide with data collected from local police agencies and collated by the FBI in its Uniform Crime Report (UCR). In 1972, recognizing the limitations of police data, the Justice Department initiated a new program conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics: the National Criminal Victimization Survey (NCVS). The Justice Department emphasizes that these two measurement programs are not interchangeable; they have "unique strengths" and are designed and conducted to complement one another. "The UCR provides a measure of the number of crimes reported to law enforcement agencies throughout the country. . . . The NCVS is the primary source of information on the characteristics of criminal victimization and on the number and types of crimes not reported to law enforcement authorities" (U. S. Department of Justice, 2003). One of the most important uses of official statistics on crime is to track trends in crime over time. The Justice Department stresses the value of these different programs for measuring such changes. Prior to the NCVS, it was impossible

## 6 FOUNDATIONS OF MULTIMETHOD RESEARCH

---

to determine whether nationwide changes in the rate of crime measured by the UCR were due to actual increases or decreases or instead to differences in the reporting and recording of crimes.

The Justice Department reports that since the NCVS's inception, long-term trend lines for crimes measured by both the UCR and NCVS have tended to converge, thereby increasing confidence in each measure and in the trends. However, there have been exceptions. For example, in 2000 the FBI issued the news that after several years of steady decline, the incidence of violent crime as measured by the UCR had apparently stabilized. But two weeks later, the Bureau of Justice Statistics issued the much better news that the same violent crimes, when measured by the NCVS, had declined by about 15%. The news media reacted with dismay over this discrepancy and expressed doubt about the validity of the methods employed. Rand and Rennison (2002) attribute the media reaction to "confusion about the purposes, advantages, and disadvantages of the UCR and the NCVS" (Rand & Rennison, 2002, p. 47). They also show how detailed comparison of the two measures' findings could explain the divergence in this case. They conclude that "The steep 1999–2000 decline measured by the NCVS largely resulted from a decline in crimes victims said they did not report to the police. Violent crimes not reported to police fell by 20%, while violent crimes reported to police fell by 6%" (Rand & Rennison, 2002, p. 50). In other words, the previously declining trend in violent crime appears to have continued in that year but did not register in UCR measurements because more victims called the police than in the earlier year. Because estimates of crime trends in the United States derived from these two programs are now routinely compared and publicized for social policy purposes, the need for improved ability to interpret the convergence and divergence of multimethod findings is clearly a matter of public as well as academic importance.

### Interpreting Convergence and Divergence

Usually, evidence from two sources is intuitively more persuasive than evidence from only one. But intuition can be misleading. Even strongly agreeing multiple measurements can be wrong if undetected sources of error affect each method equally. Convergent findings are compelling only if it can be demonstrated empirically that when the methods err, they typically err in opposite ways. Successful triangulation requires careful analysis of each method in relation to other methods and also in relation to the demands of the research problem.

For example, surveys and official data combined may give a triangulated picture of a crime, such as rape, that the victim is reluctant to report. But survey research on traffic offenses would probably not provide very enlightening results when compared to police data for the same time and place. Citizens are too often unaware of one another's (or even their own) traffic violations to be reliable informants. (For instance, how often do you note whether the driver behind you at an intersection has obeyed the stop sign, or whether you have strayed across a double yellow line?) A comparison of data on traffic arrests with the results of a field study in which a trained observer systematically recorded motorists' behavior would be more informative in this instance.

The multimethod premise that no method is perfect underscores the need to study the sources of measurement error to determine precisely what it is that's being measured. If methods measure the same phenomenon, their findings will converge as errors are corrected. But if the methods measure different phenomena, then convergence will stop well short of complete agreement, even when sources of divergent error have been identified and eliminated. For example, in one of the earliest comparisons of survey and official crime data, Ennis (1967) employs a panel of police and attorneys to judge the 3400 "crimes" that survey respondents from a nationwide sample reported. This expert panel rejected 1300 of the victimization reports. Nonetheless, the 2,100 remaining incidents suggested that the actual rate of crime during the time period studied might be nearly twice as high as the officially reported rate.

Research findings that sharply and persistently diverge lead social scientists to rethink research problems. Thus, although official data are still used by many as an admittedly imperfect measure of actual crime, many others argue that these data really measure the amount of law enforcement more nearly than they do the amount of law violation. And some researchers have come to redefine the concept of crime altogether. They suggest that it is more useful and accurate to conceive of crime as a phenomenon composed of several empirical subtypes, which might vary independently of one another and which no single method purporting to measure the simpler idea of "actual crime" can adequately tap.

For example, Black (1970) defines deviance as any behavior for which there is a probability of punishment upon detection and further distinguishes four subtypes of criminal deviance. There are undetected crimes, which are measured by techniques such as the criminal victimization survey. There are crimes that have been detected but not yet, or perhaps ever,

## 8 FOUNDATIONS OF MULTIMETHOD RESEARCH

---

punished (measured by data such as “crimes known to the police”). There are crimes that have been both detected and punished (measured by official rates of arrest and conviction). The fourth type is crimes that are detected by the police through citizens’ complaints but not formally recorded. Because no formal action is taken, this last type of crime—like undetected crime—does not appear in the official statistics.

To study this fourth type of crime (which is also measured by criminal victimization surveys), Black (1970) introduces yet another method that would allow him to identify the conditions under which crimes that have been reported go unattended by the police. He conducted field studies in which trained observers accompanied the police in three large American cities on their regular work shifts and recorded observations of the routine encounters between these officers and citizens who had telephoned complaints. Contrary to frequent charges, there was no evidence of racial discrimination. Crimes reported by blacks were as likely to be officially recorded by the police as crimes reported by whites. However, Black (1970) did discover that police were more likely to write an official report after investigating a complaint when the crime was a legally serious one, when the complainant clearly preferred the police to take action, when the suspected criminal was a stranger to the complainant (rather than a relative or an acquaintance), when the complainant acted in a deferent manner, and when the complainant was a white-collar rather than a blue-collar worker. Black (1970) concludes that the probability of a criminally deviant act being punished, even if detected, depended heavily upon who the victim was and how he (or she) presented a complaint to the police. Thus, the dark figure of unreported crime, to which we referred earlier, is accompanied by another equally dark figure comprised of crimes that victims report but the police choose to ignore.

### **Applying the Multimedia Approach to All Research Stages**

Empirical measurement is essential to determine the nature and frequency of social phenomena. Guesses and impressions obviously will not do. Important as it is, however, measurement is only one step, or stage, in the research process. To know what to measure and to choose the appropriate methods, one must both formulate a research problem to guide the investigation and develop a theoretical solution to that problem. To make actual measurements, data must be collected for appropriate samples of individuals, social settings, or groups. To see the measurements’ implications



for a problem and for the theories about it, the data must be assembled and analyzed in a systematic way. Finally, for the measurements and the conclusions they support to have an impact on knowledge, the research must be reported. Formulating research problems, building and testing theories, sampling, collecting and analyzing data, and reporting research results are—along with measurement—the major stages of the research process.

The decision to adopt a multimethod approach to measurement affects not only measurement but all stages of research. Indeed, multiple measurement is often introduced explicitly to solve problems at other stages of the research process as well as to answer more narrowly defined questions of measurement validity. These wider effects and uses of triangulation and other multimethod tactics need to be examined in detail, including the new challenges that the use of multiple methods poses for data analysis, for writing and evaluating research articles for publication, and for doing research in an ethical manner.

The promise of multimethod research, however, is far greater than its impact on any one stage of research. To apply the multimethod approach to any stage, it is usually necessary to analyze a social phenomenon's structure, setting, and constituent social processes far more fully than when only a single method is used. By enlarging the scope of the research to which it is applied, the multimethod perspective holds out the larger promises of more sociologically significant conclusions and greater opportunities for both verification and discovery. Moreover, we believe that the approach promises to alleviate some of the persistent dilemmas and conflicts in social research that now seem intractable and irremediable.

## **Finding Consensus in a House of Many Mansions**

It seems obvious that the point of research methods is to study substantive problems. But there is a strong tendency in all fields of social science for particular methods to be valued so highly by their users that they become ends in themselves, to be defended against rival methods and nourished by selecting only research problems for which they are well-suited. In 1957, in an exchange over the relative merits of participant observation and interviewing, Trow wrote an eloquent and frequently quoted exhortation against such methodological parochialism. We quote it again because it states the multimethod position well.

10 FOUNDATIONS OF MULTIMETHOD RESEARCH

---

Every cobbler thinks that leather is the only thing. Most social scientists, including the present writer, have their favorite methods with which they are familiar and have some skill in using. And I suspect we mostly choose to investigate problems that seem vulnerable to attack through these methods. But we should at least try to be less parochial than cobblers. Let us be done with the arguments of "participant observation" *versus* interviewing—as we have largely dispensed with the arguments for psychology *versus* sociology—and get on with the business of attacking our problems with the widest array of conceptual and methodological tools that we possess and they demand. (Trow, 1957, p. 35)

Today, as in 1957, there are deep methodological divisions within the social sciences. Over time the arguments have not subsided. Nor do we seem as individuals to be any less inclined to follow our favorite methods where they lead. But some things have changed. Since the 1950s, the social sciences have grown tremendously. And with that growth, there is now virtually no major problem area that is studied exclusively with one method. While the social sciences have remained largely single method in approach at the level of the individual investigator and the individual research project, the sum of individual efforts has resulted in a multimethod approach to problems. In most substantive areas, surveys, experiments, field studies, and analyses of naturally occurring data stand side by side in the literature. This advance is clearly in the direction that Trow pointed. But like most advances, this one has, in its turn, created difficulties.

The development of multimethod social science disciplines within which individual researchers largely engage in single-method research poses serious problems of intellectual and social integration. As Wrong (1978) comments: "Never has social science seemed to be such a house of many mansions . . . past aspirations toward a single methodological canon or even toward unity of theory and research have dwindled" (Wrong, 1978, p. 28). Diversity can give a discipline varied strength, but it also can lead to incoherence, confusion, and fruitless controversy. For this reason, many social scientists feel the need to seek greater consensus. For example, Blalock (1978), a sociologist, writes the following:

Somehow we must . . . reach a much greater degree of *consensus* on our terminology and research operations. To some, this will seem to stifle innovation and impose orthodoxy. But an agreement on concepts or research operations does not by any stretch of the imagination imply agreement on empirical assumptions, nor does it restrict to any great extent the propositions we use to relate these variables. It seems that we already have enough concepts,

variables, research topics, orientations, and theoretical positions to satisfy nearly everyone . . . A lack of diversity is not our problem, nor need we fear it will become so in the near future. But in order for this diversity to result in genuine culmination of useful knowledge, some greater semblance of order must—in one way or another—be created. (Blalock, 1978, p. 22)

## Order Without Orthodoxy

Few researchers, we think, would deny the need for greater coherence. The more pressing questions are how to achieve that coherence and how to do so without imposing an unwelcome orthodoxy? At present, the integration of the different and often conflicting views and empirical findings that result from diverse methods is undertaken mainly after the fact of research and usually at a very high level of abstraction. Only much more rarely is integration undertaken in the design of individual pieces of research. For the most part, we each seem to do and to publish our work in the faith and hope that somebody else will create a synthesis. We look to theoreticians to construct umbrellas of ideas broad enough to explain—or at least make comprehensible—all that our research has discovered and suggested. And we call upon methodologists both to trace logical pathways between our different roads of inquiry and to reassure us that these roads all lead in the same direction and may someday meet to produce more comprehensive knowledge of the social world.

The writings of theoretical and methodological synthesizers are among the most widely read and frequently cited works in the social science literature. Yet their proposed syntheses are as often as not rejected in favor of continued diversity. Their work often comes to be highly regarded in its own right, but only as an eloquent expression of still another school of thought. As a result, we now have so many orientations, viewpoints, and perspectives that the uninitiated might easily lose sight of the subject matter of the social sciences while laboring to distinguish correctly between the various approaches to that subject matter.

A major benefit of adopting the multimethod approach is that the approach begins the task of integration from the ground up by calling upon individual social scientists to integrate methods throughout the course of their individual investigations. In multimethod research, one must confront diversity and try to resolve contradictions from the outset. The challenge to state new problems (or restate old ones) in terms that make them susceptible to study by different methods, to find common ways of comparing and evaluating the results of different methods, and to

## 12 FOUNDATIONS OF MULTIMETHOD RESEARCH

---

reconcile the contradictions that the application of different methods might produce appears to us to be a very promising way to begin creating order without orthodoxy.

By emphasizing the value of individual multimethod research, we do not mean to deny that great benefits may also be gained by synthesizing a multitude of diverse single-method studies. Nor do we mean to imply that all individual research must be multimethod to make our knowledge about social life more coherent. The pressing need to coordinate methods by whatever means is the keynote of the multimethod perspective. It is immaterial whether coordination is achieved in one multimethod study or by comparing the findings of several independently conducted, single-method projects. Individual investigators using favored single methods and hoping to show the unique values of their methods can certainly reach multimethod conclusions by carefully building upon and correcting each others' work.

Interaction between colleagues—even colleagues of quite different methodological persuasions—can be a powerful integrative force. Examination of many scientific disciplines clearly shows that diverse single-method research does not preclude either a strong common focus on well-recognized research problems or efficient communication between scientists using different methods. For example, in epidemiological research, the results of experiments with human and animal subjects, clinical case studies, health surveys, and statistical analyses of medical records are often effectively coordinated to solve important medical puzzles, such as the relationship between cigarette smoking and lung cancer. However, when extensive cooperation among colleagues working independently is hard to attain (as appears to be the case in much of contemporary social science), then individual multimethod research has the great advantage of requiring only one investigator's will and ability to integrate the results of different methods.

### Styles of Research

Throughout this book we have very consciously referred to the general types of methods as *styles* of research. *Orientations, perspectives, strategies,* and other labels all similarly communicate the idea of differentiated ways of viewing the world and of going about the business of empirically investigating it. In addition, however, the term *styles* connotes an aesthetic dimension. Researchers' methodological preferences are not necessarily

based entirely upon shared scientific criteria, nor upon a linear disciplinary development from more primitive classificatory and qualitative methods to more modern analytic and quantitative techniques. Instead, selection of methods is more likely to reflect researchers' different conceptions of what constitutes a *good* piece of finished social research—and although one might admire and praise the techniques of a different practitioner—the responsive inner smile to a *good* piece of research is more likely to be evoked by those styles that resonate with one's own methodological predilections.

To be *good*, it is not enough that a piece of research be done competently. It must also be considered important. "Moderns" might appreciate "primitive" techniques, and *vice versa*, but each might view the other's skills and efforts as wasted because the initial conceptions, questions, or problems to which the techniques were applied might appear trivial or obscure. Methodological styles reflect not just differences in technique, (such as qualitative versus quantitative procedures), but also different views of the epistemology of science and its ultimate goals and contributions to human thought and endeavor.

These are not issues that are debated fully with every new piece of research. Training, socialization, role models, the structure of reward systems, and other aspects of the social organization of social science lead us to make different decisions as to which theoretical problems are important and which methodological styles are appropriate. Research styles are not simply the result of individual choice or idiosyncratic aesthetics. Rather, they are socially embedded in intellectual communities, networks of like-minded practitioners. The selective socialization, training, and proselytizing within these communities gives mutual support, but at the same time it perpetuates structural cleavages and conflicts among practitioners of different styles; or, at best, differentiated indifference.

## A Systematic Approach

There have, of course, always been a good many social scientists for whom Trow's earlier quoted exhortation was unnecessary—men and women who innovatively tailored their methods to their problems without undue regard for habit and convention. Some have formally identified their work as multimethod; others have not, but have obviously made full use of various methods. There are also a great many social scientists who have

## 14 FOUNDATIONS OF MULTIMETHOD RESEARCH

---

perhaps made more limited and certainly less self-conscious use of multiple methods at one or more stages of their ostensibly single-method projects. For example, one reader of an early draft of this book remarked: "I was surprised to learn that I was using the MMP [the multimethod perspective] in my mailed questionnaire studies, not only when I pretested and interviewed nonrespondents but also when talking with officials in the target populations when designing the surveys."

Such researchers may be unaware of the general methodological perspective that their customary practices imply, but they do nonetheless use scientific common sense and readily employ supplementary methods to get information and insights that their primary method cannot provide. In other words, many social scientists are already (albeit implicitly) using the multimethod approach in their work. This is an important observation about current research practice, because it means that the promise of multimethod research does not depend upon the risky business of doing something that has never, or only rarely, been done before. Instead, the promise is in doing more regularly, fully, and systematically what in the past we may have done only intermittently, partially, and perhaps haphazardly.

### Multimethod Projects

Multimethod research, considered in the broadest sense, includes any research that contributes in any way to gaining a multimethod view of social phenomena. However, actual multimethod projects are of special interest. They are either single studies or more complex programs of continuing research, which systematically employ various combinations of field, survey, experimental, and nonreactive methods to address their research questions. This type of investigation is rapidly coming to be regarded as a research style in its own right—one as distinctive in its way as the more conventional styles upon which it builds. The application of different research methods to the same research problem in a single project is sometimes characterized, particularly in introductory methods textbooks, as either an extraordinary achievement or a mere ideal. For example, according to Babbie, "In the best of all possible worlds, your own research design should bring more than one research method to bear on the topic" (Babbie, 1979, p. 110). But the fact is that multimethod research is now discussed, planned, and conducted as a routine matter, part and parcel of normal social science.

Project-level multimethod research offers the distinct advantage of quick, close coordination and comparison of different methods and their findings. This approach is especially important in research areas with low social and intellectual integration. But we do not rashly assume either that the benefits of studying problems with multiple methods can only be gotten at the level of the individual project or that such projects are in any sense substitutes for a discipline's collective inquiry. Quite the contrary, we think that the multimethod project has emerged as a research style precisely because the multimethod nature of contemporary social science has convinced many researchers that solutions to their research problems require more and different kinds of information than any single method can provide, and also that solutions based upon multimethod findings are likely to be better solutions—that is, to have a firmer empirical base and greater theoretical scope because they are grounded in different ways of observing social reality. Multimethod research is thus (in our view at least) an attempt to apply to our individual work lessons learned at the level of the discipline as a whole and thereby to enrich the collective effort to which we each contribute.

