

Mixed Method Data Collection Strategies

Social scientists have long relied on a wide range of tools to collect information about the social world; but as individual fields have become more specialized, researchers are trained to use a narrow range of the possible data collection methods. This book draws on a broad range of available social data collection methods to formulate a new set of data collection approaches that combines elements of those existing methods. The new approaches described here are ideal for social science researchers who plan to collect new data about people, organizations, or social processes. The methods the authors present are designed to create a comprehensive empirical description of the subject being studied, with an emphasis on accumulating the information needed to understand causes and consequences with a minimum of error. In addition to providing methodological motivation and underlying principles, the book is filled with detailed instructions and concrete examples for those who wish to apply the methods to their own research.

WILLIAM G. AXINN is a sociologist, demographer, professor of sociology, and research professor at the Survey Research Center and Population Studies Center of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. He has directed the Population and Ecology Research Laboratory in Nepal for 13 years.

LISA D. PEARCE is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her research articles have appeared in such journals as the *American Sociological Review*, *Social Forces*, *Sociological Methodology*, and *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-67171-2 - Mixed Method Data Collection Strategies
William G. Axinn and Lisa D. Pearce
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

New Perspectives on Anthropological and Social Demography

Series editors:

David I. Kertzer and Dennis P. Hogan (Brown University)

Associate editors:

Jack Caldwell, Andrew Cherlin, Tom Fricke, Frances Goldscheider,
Susan Greenhalgh, and Richard Smith

Demography deals with issues of great social importance, and demographic research fuels some of the central current policy debates of our time. Yet, demographic theory has not changed much over the years, and old and sometimes inappropriate models are still being applied to new problems. Increasingly, however, demographers have become aware of the limitations of standard surveys and statistics and are moving to incorporate theoretical and methodological approaches from other disciplines, in particular anthropology. For their part, anthropologists have generally failed to take account of the advances in modern demography, but they are now beginning to take part in the central debates on questions of theory and policy in population research. A new wave of interdisciplinary research is emerging, combining the interests and approaches of demographers, anthropologists, and other social scientists. Some of the most interesting products of this new wave will be published in *New Perspectives on Anthropological and Social Demography*.

Books in this series include:

Census and Identity

The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses

edited by David Kertzer and Dominique Arel

ISBN 0 521 80823 5 HB / 0 521 00427 6 PB

Demography in the Age of the Postmodern

Nancy E. Riley and James McCarthy

ISBN 0 521 82626 8 HB / 0 521 53364 3 PB

Culture, Biology, and Anthropological Demography

Eric Abella Roth

ISBN 0 521 80905 3 HB / 0 521 00541 8 PB

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-67171-2 - Mixed Method Data Collection Strategies
William G. Axinn and Lisa D. Pearce
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Mixed Method Data Collection Strategies

William G. Axinn
University of Michigan

Lisa D. Pearce
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-67171-2 - Mixed Method Data Collection Strategies
William G. Axinn and Lisa D. Pearce
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA
www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521855686

© William G. Axinn and Lisa D. Pearce 2006

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2006

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Axinn, William G.

Mixed method data collection strategies / William G. Axinn, Lisa D. Pearce.

p. cm. – (New perspectives on anthropological and social demography)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-85568-3 (hardcover) – ISBN 0-521-67171-X (pbk.)

1. Population research. 2. Demography – Methodology. 3. Social sciences – Research – Methodology. I. Pearce, Lisa D. (Lisa Deanne), 1971– II. Title III. Series.

HB850.A95 2006

300.72'3 – dc22 2005031247

ISBN-13 978-0-521-85568-6 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-85568-3 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-67171-2 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-67171-X paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
1. Motivations for Mixed Method Social Research	1
Qualitative vs. Quantitative Approaches: Is This Distinction Useful?	
The Study of Cause and Consequence in the Social Sciences	
Introspection and Involvement	
Central Principles in the Creation of Mixed Method Approaches	
2. Fitting Data Collection Methods to Research Aims	28
Choices Among Research Designs	
Matching Measurement Strategy to Aims	
Special Measurement Problems	
Conclusion	
3. The Micro-Demographic Community Study Approach	54
Tamang Family Research Project	
Benefits from Researchers' Involvement in the Field	
Benefits from Obtaining Multiple Types of Evidence	
Benefits from Incorporating Flexibility in the Process	
Conclusion	
4. Systematic Anomalous Case Analysis	79
A Study of Religion and Family Size Preferences in Nepal	
Systematic Sampling of Anomalous Cases	
Implementing Less Structured Methods	
Using Ethnographic Insights to Revise Theories, Measures, and Methods	
Conclusion	
5. Neighborhood History Calendars	103
Contextual Event History Data	
Neighborhood History Calendar Design and Implementation	
Key Advantages of the Neighborhood History Calendar Design	
Other Contextual History Calendars	
Using Geographic Information System Technology to Enhance	
Contextual Data	
Conclusion	

viii	Contents	
6.	Life History Calendars	138
	Function and Design of Life History Calendars	
	Expanding the Age Range	
	Using Calendars Among Populations Who Don't Employ Time Records	
	New Life History Calendar Recording Strategies	
	Conclusion	
7.	Longitudinal Data Collection	161
	Longitudinal Studies of Individuals	
	Longitudinal Studies of Other Units of Observation	
	Tools for Continuous Measurement	
	Mixing Methods in Longitudinal Designs	
	Conclusion	
8.	Conclusion	183
	Principles of Mixed Method Data Collection	
	Role of Introspection	
	The Application of New Mixed Method Research	
	New Frontiers in Mixed Method Approaches	
	<i>Notes</i>	199
	<i>Bibliography</i>	203
	<i>Index</i>	223

Acknowledgments

Like most scholarly endeavors, this book rests on the contributions, guidance, and support of a large cast of characters. This book would not be possible were it not for the generous mentoring, collegiality, and support of many of our teachers and collaborators. We feel an immense intellectual debt to these people, having benefited greatly from the stimulation their conversations and ideas provided for this book. Here we take a few lines to thank them by name, hoping that the reflection of their contributions in this manuscript is a high compliment and that all who benefit from these ideas will honor their contributions as well. Of course, any errors, omissions, or indications of poor judgment are solely our responsibility.

William Axinn was initially put on the path toward mixed method strategies by his undergraduate mentors at Cornell University, Professors J. Mayone Stycos and Charles Hirschman. Their pioneering work in these areas and unfailing encouragement of young, impressionable minds were cornerstones of the methods described here. The other essential cornerstones were a pair of research projects at the University of Michigan: the Intergenerational Panel Study designed and conducted by Arland Thornton and his colleagues and the Tamang Family Research Project designed and conducted by Tom Fricke and his colleagues. Thornton and Fricke have been invaluable mentors and colleagues of ours. This book would not be possible without their many, many contributions. In fact, Chapter 3 is based on a journal article published jointly by Axinn, Fricke, and Thornton.¹ Many of the best ideas we have provided here developed directly from the advice and guidance of these two colleagues and friends.

Likewise, we owe much gratitude to our close, long-time collaborator Jennifer Barber. She has co-taught the University of Michigan's Summer Institute course on mixed method data collection with one or the other of us for the last four years. We are grateful for the ideas that have come out of this course. Both Barber and our many students have offered valuable advice and helped us refine our manuscript. Moreover, Barber collaborated in the design of many of the methods we describe here. In fact she is co-author, with Axinn and Dirgha Ghimire, of a paper that serves as the basis for our Chapter 5.² She deserves a

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-67171-2 - Mixed Method Data Collection Strategies
William G. Axinn and Lisa D. Pearce
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

x Acknowledgments

great deal of credit for many of the ideas and methods in this book – thank you Jennifer!

Next, we owe Dirgha Ghimire great appreciation and thanks. Ghimire collaborated closely with us on every aspect of the Chitwan Valley Family Study, which is referenced heavily in this book. For more than a decade he has managed every aspect of our fieldwork operations in Nepal, and for an equally long period he has been designing, revising, and refining the methods we use. In addition to his work on the paper that forms the basis of Chapter 5, Ghimire is a co-author with us on the paper that forms the basis of Chapter 6.³ He deserves a good deal of the credit for the ideas and approaches reported on throughout this book.

Many other colleagues have graciously assisted us in the development of this book. First and foremost are David Kertzer and Dennis Hogan, editors of the Anthropological Demography series for Cambridge University Press and themselves pioneers and advocates of mixed method strategies. Literally years of their mentoring, encouragement, and patience went into the production of this book. Their dual convictions that such a book could be done, and that we could produce it, never wavered. Next, several colleagues and friends provided careful reading and exceptionally helpful commentary on early versions of the manuscript. We would like to extend thanks for this to David Card, Robert Moffit, Susan Murphy, and Ronald Rindfuss. Their reactions and insights proved essential to the final form of the book. Finally, two anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press deserve significant credit for their careful reading and clear and useful suggestions for revision. Altogether, the feedback from these many sources proved essential to the refinement and completion of this book.

We have also benefited greatly from the intellectual environments in which we have been fortunate enough to work, and this book would not be the same without input from the many faculty, staff, and students of these organizations. These environments include the Population Research Institute and Department of Sociology at the Pennsylvania State University, where we first began to work together and where Pearce's dissertation and the paper that forms the basis of Chapter 4 evolved.⁴ There are also the Population Studies Center, Survey Research Center, and Sociology Department at the University of Michigan, where Pearce was a postdoc and Axinn continues to be appointed. Thank you to everyone in those organizations for their many contributions to our work. Thank you also to the Carolina Population Center and Department of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where Pearce is appointed now and Axinn has been a visitor as we worked to complete this book. Pearce is especially grateful to her colleagues Christian Smith and Melinda Denton for involving her in the mixed method National Study of Youth and Religion. A

great deal of what she's learned from helping to direct this study is reflected in these chapters.

Special thanks to the faculty and staff of the Institute for Social and Environmental Research and the Population and Ecology Research Laboratory in Nepal for all of their dedication and hard work in helping us implement the methods described in this book. Much credit is also due the faculty, staff, and students of the Michigan Survey Methodology Program, who provided immense stimulation for this book and a great deal of mentoring, though often unknowingly. And many thanks to the faculty, staff, and students of Michigan's Family and Demography Program, who provided a great deal of mentoring, all too knowingly. We are especially grateful to Heather Gatny for helping us manage all phases of referencing, formatting, and indexing for the manuscript.

Many of the projects on which specific examples presented in this book are based, and the authors' time to write this book, were made possible by generous grants from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Fogarty International Center of NIH, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Lilly Endowment, Inc. Specifically, this support includes two NICHD-funded research projects, "Changing Social Contexts and Family Formation" (R01-HD32912) and "Reciprocal Relations between Population and Environment" (R01-HD33551), and two Lilly Endowment Inc.-funded projects, "The Religious Practices of American Youth" and "Continuity and Change in the Religious Lives of American Youth." Support also came from Research Infrastructure grants to the University of Michigan (R24-HD041028) and the University of North Carolina (P30HD005798-30). The book also benefited from training grants to the University of Michigan from the Fogarty International Center of NIH (D43-TW000657) and the Mellon Foundation (40200685).

Finally, we wish to acknowledge the support of our families, Jennifer and Elena and Thomas, who have been endlessly encouraging, loving, and patient through the development and refinement of this manuscript. You keep us balanced, mostly sane, and happy. We could not have done this without you!

Preface

This is a book about data collection methods for the social sciences. Our focus is on mixed method data collection. Our purpose is to provide detailed documentation of many of the most useful mixed method data collection approaches in the social sciences. We provide concrete operational examples so that those interested in using these methods have a clear starting point. We also identify several of the principles at the foundation of these methods. We hope this will stimulate the continued creation of new mixed method data collection approaches.

We do this within the context of research aimed at advancing the understanding of cause and consequence in the social world. Although data collection cannot itself resolve the questions of cause and consequence, we argue that the data collection methods described here are particularly powerful tools for advancing our understanding of cause and consequence. The methods we describe are also useful for social research that is not focused on causal questions. In fact, the mixed method approaches we describe are extremely useful for reducing measurement errors in social research no matter what the topic. We present them in the context of research on causal processes because we argue that they are particularly useful for that purpose.

This is *not* a book about survey methods, ethnographic methods, focus group methods, archival methods, quantitative methods, or qualitative methods. It is a book about data collection methods that combine elements of survey methods, unstructured interview methods, observational methods, focus group methods, and archival methods. We assume that readers already have familiarity with these methods. They form the building blocks of the mixed method approaches we describe, so readers may want to review descriptions of those methods before using this book. We provide a number of helpful references to resource materials covering those methods in Chapter 1.

Empirical social research includes research design, data collection, data coding, and data analysis. Although this book touches on each of these dimensions of the research process, our primary focus is on data collection. We also explore issues of the intersection between research design and data collection methods. The book does not provide a review of data coding or data analysis issues.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-67171-2 - Mixed Method Data Collection Strategies
William G. Axinn and Lisa D. Pearce
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

xiv Preface

The authors have substantial data collection experience employing mixed method approaches in sociological and demographic research in Nepal and the United States. The vast majority of the specific examples used in the book come from research projects the authors direct in either Nepal or the United States. In every case, however, the examples are designed to illuminate a research strategy that can be used in many different settings to study many different topics. Our presentation specifically addresses issues involved in applying these methods to data collection in a broad range of settings and about a wide range of topics. We hope you find it a useful collection of tools for your research.