

[Re Routine Cross-Cultural Research, excerpt]

How to Nurture Creativity and Progress in the Social Sciences:

Comment on the National Science Board's Draft Report (2003)

by

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[...]

A.) Partnership Centers for Cross-Cultural Research

Serious and reflective social scientists have been concerned for several decades that NSF-funded research with American subjects is a limited and potentially biased foundation for social science. (This may be especially true of fields like social psychology, which are based almost exclusively on experiments conducted with convenient subjects - i.e., American college undergraduates who are required to participate as part of their enrollment in introductory psychology courses).<sup>2</sup>

However, right now, organizing basic multi-cultural/international comparisons is almost

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<sup>2</sup> E.g., Kenneth Gergen, "Social Psychology as History," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 26, 1973, pp. 309-320.

impossibly difficult for individual researchers.

A simple solution to the problem that would enrich almost any research design is to invest in NSF Partnership Centers for Social Research in a selected group of foreign countries. These Centers would have open (“call”) contracts to provide research services at pre-negotiated prices. A simple checkbox for cross-cultural replications could be a standard feature of NSF grant applications. The basic step for cross-cultural data would be as simple as a physician ordering laboratory tests. The Principal Investigator’s grant would, if approved, automatically receive additional funding for replication by these international contractors; the Principal Investigator also would receive funds for international travel to supervise the work.

For rapid scientific progress, the options should assure maximum discrepancy - e.g., cultures and sub-populations with the greatest distance from standard American subjects. NSF Partnership Centers might be established in India; in the former Soviet Union; in Africa; in the Arab Middle East; in China. Given the low research costs (e.g., for survey research; or for paid adult subjects) in many underdeveloped and mid-tier foreign countries, and favorable exchange rates, a great deal might be learned at small cost.<sup>3</sup> (It may surprise

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<sup>3</sup> For securing adult subjects from advanced English-speaking countries the current exchange rates with New Zealand, Australia, and Canada provide an almost 2:1 multiple for NSF funds.

the National Science Board to learn that it is almost impossible to read any American psychology or economics or voting behavior textbook and learn if leading theories are universally valid - i.e., if peoples in the Arab Middle East, or China, or India, essentially think, or feel, behave economically, or vote in any way that is much different from Americans.<sup>4</sup> They may - or may not. It would be a wise investment to make it easy to acquire relevant data and learn the answer.

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<sup>4</sup> In the long run, the greatest threats to American national security are likely to arise from countries with the greatest cultural distance.