MISSIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Interdisciplinary Foundations, Methods, and Integration

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

Marvin Gilbert, Alan R. Johnson, and Paul W. Lewis
EDITORS

Missiological Research: Interdisciplinary Foundations, Methods, and Integration
Copyright © 2018 by Assemblies of God Theological Seminary

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with reviews in magazines or newspapers.

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, New International Version, NIV Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

Published by William Carey Library, an imprint of William Carey Publishing
10 W. Dry Creek Circle
Littleton, CO 80120 | www.missionbooks.org
Melissa Hicks, copyeditor
Joanne Liang, interior design

William Carey Library is a ministry of Frontier Ventures
Pasadena, CA 91104 | www.frontierventures.org

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Gilbert, Marvin, editor. | Johnson, Alan R., editor. | Lewis, Paul W., PhD, editor.
Title: Missiological research : interdisciplinary foundations, methods, and integration / Marvin Gilbert, Alan R. Johnson, and Paul W. Lewis, editors.
Description: Pasadena, CA : William Carey Library, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references. |
Identifiers: LCCN 2017048389 (print) | LCCN 2017048851 (ebook) | ISBN 9780878086528 (ebook) | ISBN 9780878086337 (pbk.)
Subjects: LCSH: Missions--Research.
Classification: LCC BV2063 (ebook) | LCC BV2063 .M545 2018 (print) | DDC
266.0072--dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017048389

23 22 21 20 19 Printed for Worldwide Distribution

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

1
INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH[1]
An Epistemological Framework

Marvin Gilbert, EdD

Research in any discipline follows established procedures, utilizes reliable tools and resources, and advances within a defined epistemological framework. Historians see the world through a historiographer's "lenses." Theologians conduct research within an exegetical and hermeneutical worldview. And both social and natural scientists embrace principles and procedures that form a scientific epistemological framework.

Missiological and applied-ministry researchers face a unique challenge. They must utilize more than one epistemological framework—exegetical/hermeneutical and empirical/scientific—while mastering a variety of otherwise disparate investigative methodologies. This challenge extends to the process of analyzing the results, which must be integrated and synthesized in a credible interdisciplinary manner. Such adroit, flexible researchers can contribute much to both the Church and the academy by overcoming the natural tendency to value one research domain over the other.

This chapter introduces the essence of an epistemological framework designed to facilitate interdisciplinary research. For theologians without a strong background in social science research (SSr), this framework may be uncomfortable initially, in that empirical research methodologies are

1. The term "interdisciplinary" is preferred to the term "multidisciplinary" in this text. Within a *multidisciplinary* relationship, cooperation between the relevant disciplines "may be mutual and cumulative, but not interactive" (Augsburg 2005, 56). Augsburg's quotation describes fairly well the actual practice of investigation within each discipline involved in a given missiological study (e.g., theological reflection and anthropological case study). Nonetheless, both the content and (to some extent) the methodology used in each discipline must be influenced by the other. The creative, integrative conclusions reached at the end of the study must draw upon the findings produced by research within each discipline. For these reasons, the term "interdisciplinary" is the preferred descriptor.

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

placed on par with methods of biblical exegesis and theological reflection (B/Tr). This integrative framework in *no way* implies that empirical findings are as important as God's Word. It *does* imply, however, that the Truth of the Word rightly divided and the truth of empirical research credibly executed can be effectively integrated to challenge, empower, and guide the Church in the pursuit of God's mission.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF RESEARCH

As its title implies, this text focuses on the social science domain of interdisciplinary research. Before discussing the epistemological framework itself, a quick review of four basic SSr principles may be helpful to the reader.

Best practice. Best practice is a discipline-specific benchmark for credible research (and other professional activities). A best-practice commitment to research within each discipline is essential, though the specific expression of best-practice varies considerably from one discipline to another (e.g., best-practice in Old Testament exegesis differs sharply from best practice in ethnographic research).

Objective. The data generated by social science research, either words or numbers,[2] are characterized by their objectivity. Uncontrolled bias and prejudice *cannot* be allowed to influence the findings. Conclusions reached in best-practice SSr are fact-driven; empirical findings, not preconceived ideas, inform those conclusions.

Observable (empirical). Observation is foundational to all SSr. This dependence on careful, systematic observation is captured by the term "empirical": the "positivist" tradition in social science research (Bernard 2011a). Empirical research is, thus, limited to what can be observed and measured by the researcher. In the data-gathering stage, guesswork and pre-existing beliefs play little, if any, role.[3]

2. See chapter 22 titled, "The Nature of Data."

3. Intuition and guesswork do play a role in some stages of grounded-theory and other types of qualitative research, in which the methodology emerges over time during the study.

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

Replicable. Replicability proposes that the findings presented in a given research report[4] should be found again (within some chance fluctuations) if the original study was repeated—replicated—by another researcher. A true replication requires the second researcher to use the same methodology and to follow exactly the same procedures under the same conditions, that is, using the same "operational definitions" (Bernard 2011b).

Epistemological Principles:

The following epistemological principles compose the essence of a workable interdisciplinary epistemological framework.

Sequential operations. SSr and B/Tr cannot be conducted simultaneously. While the results of B/Tr can inform the content of a SSr questionnaire, administering the resultant questionnaire cannot be done while exegeting a New Testament passage.

Mutually exclusive (i.e., discipline-specific) **methodologies**. A given SSr study can employ multiple methods (e.g., a mixed qualitative and quantitative design), yet a given research method cannot be effectively applied to both B/Tr and SSr.

Mutually exclusive data sets. SSr and B/Tr cannot be conducted on the same data set.[5]

Mutually exclusive analyses. SSr methods cannot be used to analyze data gathered by B/Tr methods (and vice versa). For example, principles of exegesis cannot be used to analyze interview transcripts.

Revelatory Truth. B/Tr yields revelatory data (RD): this is the domain of Truth.

Empirical facts. SSr yields empirical data/findings (ED/F): this is the domain of fact.[6] SSr offers empirically justified, fact-based conclusions, but not Truth. All SSr conclusions are to some extent relative and tentatively held because of the inescapable influences of bias and chance fluctuation in the data.

4. Often presented in scholarly journal articles, monographs, and papers presented at professional meetings.

5. With the possible exceptions of higher criticism and linguistic analysis of the biblical text.

6. At best, truth with lower-case "t".

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

Location of primary SS data. With some exceptions,[7] a missiological researcher cannot capture original (i.e., primary) data in the social science collection of an academic library. That collection contains two types of secondary data: (a) previously published ED/F, and (b) guidelines for best-practice SSr methodology.[8] Primary social science data are located in the "field"; the term "field research" is often used in the social science literature.[9]

Evidence of high-quality research. The evidence of credible, high-quality research in the social science collection cannot be directly applied to the B/Tr collection, and vice versa:

1. The quality of SSr is benchmarked against best-practice reliability and validity standards (Bernard 2011b).
2. The quality of B/Tr is benchmarked against best-practice trust and truth standards.

SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS

This chapter concludes with a symbolic presentation of key statements in the epistemological framework. (The legend at the end of the table explains two unusual symbols.)

SSr ≠ B/Tr	These two broadly defined approaches are neither identical nor interchangeable in a given study.
SSr + B/Tr = interdisciplinary research framework	Missiological research IS interdisciplinary.
SSr —►I RD SSr —►I Truth	Social science research *cannot* yield revelatory data (RD) or Truth.
SSr —► factually, apparently true, findings (at best)	The "apparently true" characteristic is established by validity and reliability evidence.

7. For example, library science research may focus on library-user behavior, historical documents and artifacts, demographic databases, and meta-analysis of published findings for future theory-building efforts.

8. Published articles from credible academic journals utilize best-practice methodology; if they did not, the articles would not be accepted for publication.

9. Data located in the field are "dirty" data; they must be located and extracted from real-life contexts.

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

B/Tr →| ED/F	Biblical/Theological research cannot yield ED/F.
RD + ED/F integrative conclusions (and theoretical implications)	The goals of credible missiological research include the development of integrative conclusions and either (a) the application of an existing theory, or (b) the development of a new theory.
Theory → Truth	Theory is not Truth; future studies can lead to the rejection of seemingly irreproachable theories.

Legend: ≠ not equal to; cannot be equated
→| a blocked process: impossible connection or linkage

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL READING

Augsburg, Tanya. 2010. *Becoming Interdisciplinary: An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies.* 2nd ed. Sunnyvale, CA: Kendall/Hunt.

Bernard, H. Russell. 2011a. "Anthropology and the Social Sciences." In *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches,* 1–22. 5th ed. Alta Mira, CA: AltaMira Press.

———. 2011b. "The Foundations of Social Research." In *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches,* 23–53.5th ed. Alta Mira, CA: AltaMira Press.

Craib, Ian, and Ted Benton. 2010. *Philosophy of Social Science: The Philosophical Foundations of Social Thought*. 2nd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Repko, Allen F., ed. 2008. *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Strober, Myra. 2010. *Interdisciplinary Conversations: Challenging Habits of Thought.* Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

WEBSITES OF INTEREST

National Institute of Health—Common Fund
https://commonfund.nih.gov/interdisciplinary/

The National Academies Press—Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research
http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=11153

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

Thank you for reading this preview.
To purchase a copy of this book, visit:

https://missionbooks.org/products/missiological-research

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.