

The Effects of Study Abroad: Methodological Approaches

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留学の効果：その研究方法の探求

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Abstract

A qualitative ethnographic approach towards understanding the influence of overseas study permits researchers to see how a sojourn affects the daily lives of participants. However, the structure imposed by a school's curriculum limits the opportunities for ethnographic observation of high school sojourners. Students have only a few free minutes between classes and short periods during lunch and after school. These times, while permitting conversation, severely restrict the variety of socially interactive opportunities available to students. Any behavioral changes induced by overseas study are thus difficult to observe.

This paper discusses these issues and the methodological solutions employed in actual fieldwork to avoid a potential dearth of information, namely utilizing additional methodologies to incorporate feedback from educators, parents, and other students to build a robust perspective of the participants. Examples from my own research into the influence of a one-year sojourn among a class of Japanese high school students are presented.

Key words: Study abroad, Research methods, Japanese high school students, Quantitative, Qualitative

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抄 録

留学がその経験者の日常生活にどんな影響を与えているかを理解することを目的とした研究には、観察などを中心としたエスノグラフィーを使った質的研究方法が適している。しかし、日本の高校生を研究対象にした場合、学校の構造やカリキュラムにより、生徒は学内ではごく限られた社会生活を送っており、従って研究者が観察できる生徒の社会的行動も限られてしまう。たとえば授業間の休み時間が短い為、他の生徒と交流することもあまりできず、また、昼食時、放課後も自由な会話はなされているが、時間、校則などの制限もあり、生徒の行動は完全に自由であるとは言えない。従って、留学から帰ってきた生徒たちの間で、留学によって受けた影響が日常生活にどのように反映しているかを観察だけで探るのは困難である。

この論文はこれらの問題点に触れ、どうすれば留学の効果に関して十分な情報が得られるのか、実際に私の研究で用いたフィールドワークでの研究方法を説明しながら解決策について述べる。私の研究では留学を経験した生徒のみならず、学校関係者、生徒の親、留学していない生徒にもインタビューをし、様々な視点から意見を集め、1年間留学した日本人高校生が日常の社会生活において、どのような影響を受け、変化をもたらしたかについて考えている。

キーワード： 海外留学、研究方法、日本人高校生、質的、量的

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Introduction

Research on the effects of study abroad has occupied professional anthropologists, psychologists, and others for decades (Akanke & Slawson, 2000; Bowen, 2000; Berry & Annis, 1974; Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Coelho, 1962; Enloe, 1986; Hoshino, 1982; Kauffmann et al., 1992; Kidder, 1992; Kinnel, 1990; Kohls, 1996; Nash, 1976; Opper et al., 1990; Ritchie & Goeldner, 1994; Sell, 1983; Storti, 1989). A range of issues, primarily dealing with the difficulties associated with cultural transitions but including other important areas such as language fluency and attitudinal changes, have been explored through both qualitative and quantitative methods, but the ratio of these methodologies applied to study abroad is overwhelming in favor of quantitative approaches, primarily because of the interest of psychologists in the adjustment processes of sojourners. The prevalence of quantitative research on the subject of study abroad is not due to any particular superiority of such methods but simply reflect the preferred methods of professional interest. Qualitative methods that emphasize observation, discussion, interviews, and narrative production augment our understanding of study abroad based on quantitative research. Indeed, while this paper focuses on the relationship between qualitative and quantitative approaches to study abroad, the relationship is much the same for any topic of interest. Methods do not compete with each other; they are simply tools that researchers use to analyze an issue from different vantage points.

This paper begins with a discussion of the nature and utility of different methodologies. The application of these methods in a real-world research setting, the exploration of the effects of a year long overseas sojourn to Canada, including a homestay for the entire duration, among a class of Japanese high school students, then illustrates the process researchers undergo in developing and choosing methodologies. This process shows what kind of issues are brought into the consideration of methodologies and the viability of particular methods in particular circumstances are highlighted. This examination of fundamental methodological issues is of critical importance to all field workers independent of their personal location on the quantitative/ qualitative spectrum. But beyond the intended utility of explaining the complementarity of qualitative and quantitative methods, this paper also presents elements of Japanese society and identifies previously hidden aspects of social life that should be of interest to all researchers interested in study abroad, youth culture (specifically the social and cultural lives of high school students), and Japanese culture and society.

The Relationship Between Quantitative and Qualitative Methods

The very nature of study abroad, what with participants from a variety of home

cultures journeying to, living in, and studying an even greater variety of host cultures, lends itself to the methodological advantages of quantitative research. Quantitative researchers rely on questionnaire surveys, typically administered prior to the sojourn as well as the obvious sampling of post-sojourn states (i.e., Opper, 1990). This approach facilitates accessing large numbers of students in diverse environments since the survey can be mailed to and returned by students living in home and host environments far removed from the headquarters of the researcher. Questionnaires are easier to analyze statistically, are easily translated, can be administered easily, and as a result make for relatively easy data collection and comparisons across any range of programs, participants, and locales. The appeal of such methods has lead many researchers to employ them, and much of our understanding of study abroad processes, the factors involved in learning, and what types of learning occur is based upon them.

In many ways, this corpus of well established facts, trends, and tendencies offered by legions of quantitative researchers can be thought of as a skeleton of sorts. Ignore, if you will, the negative ghastly images unfortunately associated with this strong and sturdy physical infrastructure shared almost identically among members of a species. Our knowledge of study abroad is well established and refined. This knowledge is culled from thousands of students and covers an incredible array of programs, situations, and cultures, both home and host. It is a foundation worth building on.

Just as a human skeleton represents an element of our biological humanity that is shared among all others, our quantitative understanding of study abroad is similarly broad. A skeleton offers very little in the way of individualistic characteristics and tells us nothing about an particular individual's features. It does tell us mounds about the fundamental nature of the human body, but it sacrifices the ability to tell us about specific bodies in the process. Quantitative analyses seeks to paint the bell curve at its highest point, giving us averages and tendencies that coalesce out of the numbers. Absolutely essential, by all means, but it doesn't tell the whole story. Qualitative research, by arming us with a narrow field that permits us to delve deeper into a particular area, seeks to augment our statistical understanding and flesh out the particularities and idiosyncrasies of experience that give experiences their unique value to the human mind and the person who owns it. To carry on with the biological metaphor, quantitative research established the bones and qualitative research's responsibility now is to put a face on the skull, flesh on the bones. Quantitative research tells us what an average or typical student is likely to experience when traversing cultures; qualitative research (at least as I see it) aims to tell us what specific students experienced. The general is refined by the specific.

My only reservation about using this biological metaphor is that it may appear to present the relationship between quantitative and qualitative research as dependent, akin

to a stage one/ stage two or parent/child relationship. Those who draw this conclusion from my metaphor suffer from personal misconceptions of the points I am trying to make or my failure to adequately present my ideas in a palatable and digestible (the biological metaphors are hard to resist!) form (most likely the latter, I agree). Quantitative and qualitative research each has inherent value endemic to itself, independent of the presence or absence of the other. I chose the flesh and bone image because of the complementarity of the elements, but although in this case the complementarity is portrayed in a foundation / facade sense, that is not the usual or even general case. Indeed, a brief contemplation of the elements as I have presented them reveals that were we to separate the two elements and consider them on their own merit, we find that neither subsumes or supercedes the other and both serve as adequate, interesting, and quite rational avenues for exploring the subject, in the example, the body. Were the case to have been that a majority of the studies on study abroad to this point had been qualitative “flesh,” I could just as easy be writing here about the need to look at the wider picture quantitatively, to get a sense of what are the “bones” that run through these fleshy understandings that tie them together.

Quantitative and qualitative research methods and findings are never contradictory or competitive; they each stand on their own merit and inherent value. Because they are two sides of a coin and can be used to explore different aspects of the same problem (or even the same aspect from a different angle), they are superbly suited for being brought to bear on the same problem. Anything that we can begin to understand by utilizing one of these approaches is likely to be only understood better when the light of the other shines up on it.

With a qualitative approach, the specific experiences of study abroad participants are discovered via discussions with them, providing opportunities for participants to formulate their own experiences in their own words, constructing narratives of their lives as seen from the present and past. While the emphasis is on bringing individual stories to light, this approach does not sacrifice the wider applicability of its findings. The ethnographic approaches employed generate a more robust picture of the study abroad experience, albeit based on a specific example. But just as the knowledge gained in the effort to land humans on the Moon can be used to send astronauts to other planets, so as well can the understanding of the dynamics and elements of particular sojourns be applied to other study abroad programs and opportunities.

The ethnographic approach empowers us to see societies, cultures, interacting individuals, and other elements with greater resolution, granting us the ability to identify interactions and vectors among the aspects and elements of the sojourn that fall through the sifter in questionnaire based survey analyses. These new insights are site-specific, which means that we now can learn more about the participants and elements of the experience,

both the traveling student and the hosting country and their interactions. We can learn about the home country as represented by the student while abroad and again as it is reinterpreted within the perception of the student after arrival home at the end of the trip. We learn about the host culture, both in terms of the memories and beliefs retained and held by participants as well as in listening to and observing their emotional reactions to dealing with a foreign cultural environment. The dynamics of the experience are exposed in very real terms, as they apply to actual people. Qualitative research permits us to delve into the personality and background of individual participants to understand why they may have had the reactions they did. The reactions of home and host cultures, as embodied by the students, to the presence of the other illuminate important aspects of themselves that would not otherwise be visible. In the end, we are left with a deeper, more nuanced conception of the processes that students undergo when studying abroad as well as an enriched understanding of the cultures involved.

Qualitative research aims to explain the world in its messy splendor, absent neat categories and standard deviations. The classic qualitative project was the ethnography, an attempt to fully understand a culture by identifying and interpreting its beliefs, traditions, rituals, values, family and political structures, religious practices, and economic system . The resultant ethnographic tome laid out the culture under examination in glorious detail. Collections of ethnographies were then employed in meta-analyses that identified differences and similarities in neighboring and distant groups, a process that greatly enhanced our understanding of the robust nature of human cultural expression.

Other qualitative examples exist. Biographies are kin to ethnography, a sort of ethnography of the individual, an attempt to explain a person by examining their experiences and beliefs. Even without a biographer to concoct a tale worthy of the airport newsstand, everyone has a life story that they create and recreate in the course of talking about, reflecting upon, and projecting one's self in the arena of social interaction. Life stories are the discourses that represent us in cultural and linguistic terms, created and maintained by the self and others in active engagement with those around us (Linde, 1993).

To ask whether this paper considers qualitative research methods to be any particular one of these approaches is to miss the whole point of adopting a qualitative method in the first place. The goal is to deal with the issue under study in a flexible and robust manner so as to increase the likelihood that one can capture enough of the lives of the participants to render a comprehensible account of their experiences and perceptions. This involves using what is needed and discarding what isn't, be that observation in the sense of ethnography, questioning in the biographic sense, examinations of life stories, or the creation of narratives (and yes, as we will see below, even surveys and questionnaires may

have important roles to play within the larger qualitative scheme of things). The research with the Japanese high school students is all of these at once and none of these in particular, a broad assault on the issue at hand that combines investigative tools that, although not touting itself as an example of how to use any of these tools in and of itself, still shines as an example of what can be done with the whole toolbox.

This toolbox approach hopes to provide an understanding of the experiences of 40 Japanese high school students as a result of their embarkation on a 12 month sojourn to Canada where they live as regular teenage members of society, complete with families and classes at a local school. This understanding will be constituted by the students themselves, using their words and perspectives. The goal is to learn about how living abroad under these circumstances affects how students perceive themselves and the world they live in. How does living abroad affect their perceptions of the home and host cultures? What sort of impact does it have on their relationships with family and peers once they return? Do they think about themselves in any different ways? How has the sojourn affected their plans for the future, be it forcing them to change their college entrance plans or introducing them to new ideas that go on to influence their choice of career? Do these students become “Canadianized” in any ways? How do they react to the re-introduction to Japan? These and other questions drive the exploration into the effects of studying abroad among Japanese high school students. Once the different outcomes have been catalogued, it will be necessary to scrutinize specific interactions between students and hosts. How do particular elements of the program (travel times, duration, location abroad, types of host families, types of students) shape, perhaps in a negative limiting or a positive nurturing way, the outcomes? With 40 students traveling to 5 regions in Canada and a total of 17 high schools (1-4 students per host institution), the variation is there for the taking. The goal is complex; I am to describe what happened as well as understand why. The latter is imperative to provide hooks for others, be they educators, researchers, administrators, or sojourners, to grab a hold of and apply the information therein. It is an investigative, interpretative endeavor to identify what transpired, what impact such transpositions had on participants, and what that implies for their future and the future of study abroad.

When students go abroad, they can be impacted on different levels. Students' experiences impart specific conscious knowledge upon students, empowering them with knowledge of language, local customs, intimate knowledge of areas lived in (where the store is, for example, or how and where to ride the bus), and a plethora of other facts, trivia, and tidbits. Students are also affected psychologically by living in a foreign culture. The conscious knowledge that they acquire can change how they think about themselves, their home and host cultures, and the world at large. It is not controversial to suggest that knowing more about the world affects our opinions, perceptions, and decisions. There are

also other psychological dimensions that can be affected by study abroad, namely the self itself. The self is a psychological construct that constitutes a person by providing a foundation for meaning and values when interacting with others in society (Benson, 2001, Taylor, 1989). When we talk about how Americans or Japanese think, we are talking about aggregate expressions of self. When we discuss the degree to which someone has become Americanized or Japanese with respect to how they think and act, we are discussing changes in their self (Heine, 2003). Self is the locus of interaction between people and culture; cultures are the environments from which the values that flavor selves are drawn while at the same time selves are the source of the values that define a culture (Kitayama, 2002). Thus the choice of methodology should be one that best enables us to access the self.

Types of Methods within the Quantitative/Qualitative Workspace

Within the larger arena typically divided into two units (the perhaps overly mentioned quantitative and qualitative approaches), there are three methodological categories researchers choose from in dealing with cultural exploration. The qualitative group consists of ethnographical methods of observation, participation, interview, and discussions with participants and is favored by much of the anthropological community. More quantitative minded researchers may choose the questionnaire survey as their avenue of access to the hearts and minds of the group under study. Cultural psychologists, typically from quantitative backgrounds, hone their scalpel in the research laboratory, offering opportunities to control situations in order to examine specific aspects of social life and cultural behavior.

Each of these approaches' value lies in the reality that no one approach is capable of accomplishing everything. Each has its particular merit, its preeminent ability to access the data pool (people and their beliefs and actions in this case) in a specific way to gather specific data for specific analysis. When choosing a particular method, one must consider their objectives and the effectiveness of a particular method in achieving that. Objectives of the research alone do not dictate the choice of method, of course. Other considerations factor in the decision as well. How much time and money a researcher has, what kind of training and experience with particular methods one has, are others working on the project as well, have other projects looked at similar problems, issues, or data and if so, what methods they used, and a host of other issues apply.

Methods in the Field: What Worked, What Didn't

For the rest of the paper, I will discuss the utility and applicability of each of these methods to the problem at hand of understanding the effects of study abroad. I hope that

this discussion of methodological application to a real-world problem can illustrate the process one goes through in deciding what methods to employ. It should also highlight my belief that precisely because no method can accomplish all things, the best understandings accrue from approaches that integrate multiple methods, each putting forth its best face that serves to fill in the weakness inherent in the others (see Nisbett and Cohen, 1996, for an excellent example of multi-methodological research). Kitayama (2002) details many ways that particular methods are ill suited for particular explorations of human psychology and culture and reports that survey attempts to further explore based on the findings of Nisbett and Cohen's (1996) multi-methodological investigation of the culture of honor and violence in the American South failed to identify the behavior patterns, nicely illustrating the discrepancy between what people say and what they do. Surveys are good for some things, but not for all. Of course, surveys are but one kind of quantitative methodological resource.

Ethnographic methods are excellent for capturing people's worlds as narrative. The goal of ethnography is thick description (Geertz, 1973). An ethnographical approach entails spending considerable time with the participants of the project in order to document, understand, analyze and eventually translate and present their world of beliefs, actions, values, and concepts. Ethnography traditionally was used to explore new cultural groups, but that is no longer the exclusive application of such work (Kondo, 1990; Jacobs, 1999).

Ethnographic methods generally consist of careful observation of, regular interaction with, and in-depth interviews and discussions with participants. These qualitative modes of data collection are not the only options for ethnographers and many times it is useful and essential to collect questionnaire and survey data (Bernard, 2002). However, most anthropological work is qualitative; that is usually sufficient to keep someone busy (up to 90 minutes a day and 10,000 words a week (Ibid.)) and provides more than ample data for a comprehensive analysis of the subject. Qualitative researchers spend their time observing people, interacting with them in their lives, and talking with them about what they are doing, thinking, feeling, and why.

In my research into the effects of a year long study abroad sojourn on the lives and selves of Japanese high school students, I devised a plan that included pre-departure and post-return observation and interviews. The option to travel to Canada to visit the students during their sojourn was considered but abandoned due to the expense involved in visiting 17 high schools in 5 regions over several million square kilometers.

Other factors influenced the decision against interventions with students during their sojourn. My initial concern was that my investigation itself could be a primary mover in any changes the students went through. My questioning may have lead some students on a path of introspection they would not have otherwise embarked upon. Should I ever find

myself in a chaperone or administrative role for a study abroad program, this type of stimulating intervention would be warranted, expected even, but as a researcher, I wanted to minimize the potential for unintended researcher bias. It is unavoidable, even in the form I settled on, but I sought to minimize it by taking a hands-off approach while the students were gone from Japan.

These factors brought me to the brink of decision, but it was a matter of personal courtesy that pushed me over the edge. I am a physical and emotional intrusion on these students' lives, occupying a seat in the classroom, lurking around the halls after school, eating lunch with them, pestering them for interviews and then probing them for personal opinions and emotional descriptions of their lives when they acquiesce. Of course this is a bearable intrusion and I am careful to ensure that I am not endangering or seriously disturbing students; participation always remains voluntary. But when it comes to potentially marring their sojourn, their *raison d'etre* so to speak, I drew the line, including lesser invasive methods such as questionnaires. This is not to suggest that researchers should avoid research on students during their sojourn; each decision in this regard must be chosen based on local circumstances and regional merit. I chose not to for the culmination of these reasons.

In the end, I did have a couple brief email exchange with some students and the single phone-call interview I conducted confirmed my suspicion that it was best to wait for the students to return. The student I talked to on the phone ended up asking me many questions about living abroad, including advice and recommendations for dealing with friends and family and school. I had to negotiate a fine line that entailed avoiding giving answers while not appearing to be standoffish. The questions were asked by someone truly seeking answers and our relationship could have been damaged had I simply refused to hear the requests. I avoided any problems there, but didn't want to bring the rain upon my head by continuing the tentatively planned phone interviews. The choice to conduct the first one was to prove to myself that I wasn't making the decision not to contact students when they were abroad based on my own personal desire to avoid any extra commitments and responsibilities. It turned out I wasn't being lazy after all; it really was a better option to wait for their return.

So wait I did. I was left with my pre-departure observations and interviews and my post-return observations and interviews. I had expected my observational data to bear the brunt of my analysis, but once I began observing classes I quickly realized some things about the nature of high school that I had been missing. The first thing I discovered was that in spite of the common-sense notion that the more time I spent at the school, the better the data I would gather, I found that there was a law of diminishing returns with regard to time spent. My field location entailed a 2 hour commute (both ways!) and the

only time available for interviews was after school, from 3–6 P. M. In order to arrive at the school in time for beginning classes, I had to begin my day extremely early. By the time I had gone through a day of classes, in the interviews I found my language skills of a diminished capacity according to my degree of tiredness. The students had a clear advantage here; they could sleep in class. I did have the option of skipping particular classes to nap in the library, but this defeated my purpose of being at the school in the first place. There were some classes that I did not observe (gym, music, art, biology lab, etc) that offered pre-arranged breaks in my days, but I had to take advantage of these to write up notes to avoid spending too much time at home after the day had ended (which was needed in order to be able to get up early enough to get back to school the next day).

Fortunately, I was able to create a blessing from a curse. I soon discovered that high school is actually a pretty staid place with a surprising lack of social interaction between students. The majority of their time is spent in class lectures. The social interactions I had hoped to document were confined to inter-class periods, lunch, and after school. Yes, there was in-class whispering and horseplay and the ever-present class-clown (or three, as the case may be) but much of that depended on the teacher, not the students. I was disappointed to find that my opportunities for observing Japanese high school kids being Japanese people in a cultural and psychological sense were much more frail than initially expected, but I was relieved to realize that it wasn't necessary for me to attend all classes for observation. I adjusted my schedule whereby I arrived at school prior to lunch hour, preserving my ability to conduct the after school interviews that had now gained in prominence.

My pre-departure interviews and observations were conducted over a four month period leading up to the day of departure. The return schedule took slightly longer. The students were busy catching up with life in Japan (family, friends, sports, homework, etc.) and didn't have as much time for interviewing. The students returned to Japan in two waves, one roughly two weeks after the other; one student returned to Canada for an extra five months as well. Observations began the moment the students arrived (I went to the airport) and interviews commenced about two weeks afterwards, when all the students had arrived and classes had resumed. The last interview and day of observation was one week shy of five months to the day after the students arrived.

This schedule left me with an enormous amount of data to be transcribed, translated, and analyzed. Even with this investment, only 3/4 of the students were interviewed. Most of those who weren't interviewed had declined, but persistent scheduling problems pushed some students over the deadline for when I had to leave the field and begin to focus on the analysis and write-up (I fear I should have chosen an earlier deadline though, as it would have reduced my more-than-sufficient data set and provided more time to fully work

with what I had).

Clearly my qualitative approach to this study was more than ample, but when I began the study I was not sure of just how successful a solitary method would be. Thus I developed some questionnaires that were intended to sample the entire class as well as provide points of direct comparison with the mass of literature on study abroad based on research with these methods. My ambitious plan was to conduct pre-, multiple during-, and post-surveys of all students to establish a quantitative skeleton of my own to use for hanging my qualitative meat on. The demands of the qualitative work alone proved overwhelming for such a policy and the attempt was shelved after the first questionnaires had been administered.

I did however, take advantage of a parental group at the high school composed of parents of the students. I attended some of their monthly (or so) meetings for updates on their children and the progression of the program as well as administered a brief parental questionnaire of open-ended questions dealing with the family and familial expectations of change. One of my concerns at this point was that I would have difficulty observing differences or changes in the social behavior of students after their return because of the paucity of social interactions on campus. I thus considered expanding my research to include parents and teachers, hopefully to find additional sources of awareness about the students' changes.

Again, my efforts to quantitatively augment my project proved too ambitious once the students returned and the participant observation and interviews began anew. Nevertheless, the motivation and justification for such adjunct data were pure and worthy and perhaps a more experienced or just plain wiser researcher would be able to handle it all. There are always follow-up studies, I suppose.

The last methodological approach that must be mentioned if only briefly is the psychological manipulation or experiment. This method is a combination of observation and measurement. It is very powerful because researchers are able to distill behavior and value-laden conceptions and manipulate the environment, thus permitting the observation and measurement of a specific aspect of perception, emotion, cognition, motivation, and a host of other aspects. Experiments are difficult to conduct though, as they are subject to experimenter error and bias during the actual conducting and execution of the experiment itself as well as the difficulty in designing a manipulation that will accurately measure a particular behavior or thought. But when they are done correctly (see Kitayama and Markus, 1998), they are extremely powerful tools for understanding how people function. These tools were not employed in the study of the high school students because of these difficulties. My lack of expertise in conducting experiments and a lack of time to do them preclude their inclusion. Although the three general methods covered here are

complementary, they each exist in their own right as a complete research paradigm; thus their inclusion as elements in a multi-methodological or multidisciplinary project usually require teams of researchers or much longer research periods.

Conclusion

This paper presented a discussion of the relation between different methodologies available to cultural researchers. This conception of the complementary relationship between qualitative and quantitative methods was enhanced with a presentation of the application of these ideas (or reasons for the lack of) in a real-world research field setting. The non-confrontational, non-competitive relationship between quantitative and qualitative methods was firmly established and the power of each method to do what it does best was shown to be complementary rather than combative. This paper emphasized the appropriateness of qualitative methods for data collection, but did not discuss the interpretive analytic stages of qualitative research. The interpretive, writing stage is considered by many to be the true essence of ethnography (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1973), but a discussion of this aspect is not appropriate here. The discussion of the application of different methods to the study of the effects of study abroad provides awareness of the types of issues and problems that researchers must address when building a research project, and hopefully illustrates the ability of a single paradigm to produce worthwhile findings while making a case for continued integration of methods and disciplines.

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