

SPECIAL SECTION

Researching poverty

Edited by

John R. Campbell and Jeremy Holland

Development research: convergent or divergent approaches and understandings of poverty? An introduction

John R. Campbell and Jeremy Holland

Abstract: Is it possible or indeed desirable to combine qualitative, participatory and quantitative research methods and approaches to better understand poverty? This special section of *Focaal* seeks to explore a number of contentious, inter-related issues that arise from multimethod research that is driven by growing international policy concerns to reduce global poverty. We seek to initiate an interdisciplinary dialog about the limits of methodological integration by examining existing research practice to better understand the strengths and limitations of combining methods which derive from different epistemological premises. We ask how methods might be combined to better address issues of causality, and whether the concept of triangulation offers a possible way forward. In examining existing research we find little in the way of shared understanding about poverty and, due to the dominance of econometrics and its insistence on using household surveys, very little middle ground where other disciplines might collaborate to rethink key conceptual and methodological issues.

Keywords: combined methods, methodology, poverty, theory, triangulation

There is a growing uneasiness on the part of development researchers today. First, we are worried about high levels of poverty, rising rates of mortality and morbidity, the expansion of regional conflicts with the attendant displacement of population, and the declining viability of rural livelihoods, etc. in developing societies. Second, and in the face of converging donor policies—whether in the form of sector-wide approaches (SWAPs) or poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs)—we are concerned about the status and utilization of our research by donors and policy

makers. The above concerns, together with a growing body of writing on the utility/futility of combining methods from different research ‘traditions’, prompted us to convene a conference¹ at the Center for Development Studies, University of Wales, Swansea (UK) to explore issues which have received limited attention in poverty research.²

Given the increasingly innovative ways in which poverty research seeks to combine qualitative, participatory, and quantitative research methods, we begin by exploring the limits of

methodological integration. Will the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods undermine the strengths of the other tradition? More fundamentally, are the epistemological underpinnings so irreconcilable that claims about commensurability and methodological triangulation become illusory?

A second and related concern is with issues of complementarity and causality. Thus, a case for ‘combined’ methods is commonly expressed in the notion that quantitative methods help identify ‘what’ and qualitative methods explain ‘why’; and that quantitative methods offer ‘breadth’ while qualitative methods provide ‘depth’. What else might combined methods offer? Third, to what extent does combining methods ‘add value’ to research findings? Since triangulation is a central tenet in qualitative and quantitative methodologies, how might methods be adapted to optimize this? A fourth concern is with the trade-off between narrative and number. Inevitably researchers have sought ways to integrate quantitative outputs into ‘participatory’ research methods and/or qualitative inputs into quantitative methods. It seems to us that many attempts encounter theoretical and methodological problems which undermine a search for explanation. Thus, while participatory research methods are associated with qualitative, non-numeric data, they are being increasingly used to yield quantitative data. What issues arise in aggregating participatory and quantitative data?

An overarching concern arises from the preoccupation with methodology at the expense of social theory, which suggests that poverty researchers might pursue ever more sophisticated methodologies without satisfactorily identifying and explaining the processes which create and sustain poverty. That such an outcome is possible arises from the fact that poverty research is multidisciplinary—there is little in the way of shared understandings about methodology—and because practitioners seldom talk to each other (Kanbur 2003: 3). In an effort to move beyond this disciplinary impasse this special section attempts to establish the basis for an interdisciplinary dialog on methodological and theoretical issues by defining a middle ground

where disciplinary differences can be temporarily set aside to discuss issues which underlie all forms of academic knowledge, namely the epistemological basis of knowledge about poverty and the social world.

The introduction to this special section is organized as follows. Firstly, we examine the polemical nature of academic debates surrounding quantitative and qualitative research. Secondly, we critically discuss the current impasse in poverty research dominated by econometrics which is primarily interested in adding a qualitative method to ‘enrich’ its findings. Thirdly, we examine the promise of triangulation, which is often held up as the way forward in combined methods research, and look at what this has meant in poverty research. We conclude by drawing on anthropological research to suggest ways of theorizing poverty—but not to argue for a specific method, theory, or approach—following which we introduce the articles in this special section.

Science and social science: the role of dichotomies in social research

One strand of the current debate about social research stems from differing perceptions of the relationship between ‘science’ and ‘social science’; the polarized nature of this debate reflects the deeply embedded character of disciplinary training (Kanbur 2002). At the heart of disciplinary training are social norms that define the manner in which “the human community is regulated” and which set out basic propositions that professionals internalize. The norms and expectations that underpin social science have been succinctly identified by Nuemann (2003: 10) who notes that certain norms are widely held partly because they define a general aspiration by researchers who seek recognition that their work conforms to the ‘scientific method’; i.e., the “ideas, rules, techniques, and approaches that the scientific community uses” (ibid.).

More specifically, Neumann identifies five ‘norms’ held by members of the ‘scientific community’. In no specific order, these are: universalism, which states that regardless of

who or where research is conducted, it is judged on its scientific merits; organized skepticism, which states that research should challenge and question all evidence and subject each study to intense scrutiny; disinterestedness, namely that scientists must be neutral, impartial, receptive, and open to unexpected observations and new ideas; communalism, meaning that scientific knowledge must be shared and belongs to everyone, that the way in which research is conducted is described in detail, and that new knowledge is not formally accepted until reviewed by others and made publicly available; and honesty, which is demanded in all research.

Most social scientists arguably see such norms as an ideal against which research should be assessed, though it is also true that the norm of disinterestedness is increasingly contested and that all researchers carry 'theoretical baggage' such that empirical findings seldom completely overturn our preheld theoretical beliefs. Nevertheless, many textbooks now argue that social science differs qualitatively from 'science'; in this view science is problematically defined as the opposite of social science on the basis of presumed differences in method and of opposed epistemological premises/views of the social world.

Judging from the literature produced in the past decade, the dominant position on research method is that 'qualitative' research is the polar opposite of science. For example, many argue that a clear distinction can and should be drawn between research that adheres to an outmoded 'positivist' orientation, and that which is informed by 'critical' and/or feminist/poststructuralist forms of analysis. This is the position taken by Denzin and Lincoln in *The handbook of qualitative research* (1994). In the 1998 edition of *The handbook*, the editors redefine the history of qualitative research in terms that support their position and though they avow that "no specific method or practice can be privileged over any other, and none can be eliminated out of hand", their 'history' indicates a deep-seated opposition to 'positivist', quantitative research (Denzin and Lincoln 1998: 5).

Denzin and Lincoln argue that qualitative and quantitative research are differing research

'styles' that can be distinguished by the relative importance of positivism, acceptance of postmodern sensibilities, emphasis on capturing the individuals' point of view, ability to examine the constraints of everyday life, and the ability to secure rich descriptions. However, the very terms they use to describe qualitative research deftly sidestep fundamental issues concerning what all methods have in common.

Equally problematic is their argument that qualitative research emerged from a movement through five 'paradigmatic' stages: from positivism, to interpretativism, to blurred genres, the 'crisis of representation' and finally the postmodern moment. This classification fails to grasp the philosophic underpinnings of social research and it misrepresents and simplifies the history of social research (indeed the emergence of interdisciplinary research and evaluation is completely overlooked).

This argument can be traced to the 'paradigm wars' in which writers drew upon Thomas Kuhn's *The structure of scientific revolutions* (1970) to critique social science. Thus, different paradigms are said to represent distinctive world-views that embody divergent opinions on ontological, epistemological, and methodological issues. Accordingly, it is argued that the essential problem is that different paradigms, and the research which they support, are unable "to establish the ultimate truthfulness" of their claims (Guba and Lincoln 1998: 200).

However, as Hammersley has noted, the 'paradigmatic' approach to social research

"exaggerates the depth of empirical differences in view among social researchers and the scale of the impact of these on the practice of research. It also leads to far too restricted a characterization of the difficult methodological issues that face social research, and of the positions which can be taken towards them. Moreover, it gives the impression that these issues can and should be resolved simply by a choice of paradigms" (1995: 3).

The polemical nature of the claim that each research tradition is based on a divergent epistemology etc. can be seen in their insistence that

all paradigms are by definition human constructions, and that “the advocates of any particular construction must rely on *persuasiveness* and *utility* rather than on *proof* in arguing their position” (Guba and Lincoln 1998: 202; italics added). The approach is typically espoused by adherents of postmodernism who, in writing about disciplinary practices, focus on texts and writing strategies without having examined underlying theoretical and methodological issues (see Turner 2000).

One way of understanding the issues involved is to note that proponents of a specific approach to research argue on the basis of a ‘reconstructed logic’ (Kaplan 1964). That is to say, they ascribe certain characteristics to their opponents which creates a ‘straw man’ that embodies specific negative attributes which they disapprove of and which do not accurately describe the realities of social research. As Sechrist and Sidani argue, qualitative and quantitative methods are equally “empirical, [and] dependent on observation” (1995: 78). Indeed, both types of method depend upon the same tasks and aims, namely describing their data, constructing explanatory arguments from their data, “and speculating about why the outcomes they observed happened as they did” (ibid.).

Polemical accounts arise when a ‘dominant’ discipline is called to account for its apparent failings (Kanbur 2002). At such times, and whether or not the dominant discipline concedes the need to ‘broaden out’ its approach, the research community divides between those who defend core disciplinary elements (in part by denigrating other approaches as ‘less rigorous’) and those who attack the dominant discipline. Thus, White (2002) has responded to attacks against social research by demonstrating that the ‘opposition’ between qualitative and quantitative approaches is poorly drawn because: firstly, many noneconomic sciences utilize quantitative techniques; secondly, the real basis for rigor is the proper allocation of techniques; and thirdly, different techniques are appropriate to different settings and problems.

A further problem with polemical accounts concerns their reliance on *dichotomies*. While

useful in assisting us to think and write, dichotomies “inhibit understanding by implying a certain neatness that is never found in lived life” (Flyvbjerg 2001: 49). Research that relies upon neat distinctions—e.g., quantitative versus qualitative, objective versus subjective, micro versus macro, depth versus breadth, interpretative versus predictive, inductive versus deductive, contextual versus noncontextual, nonparticipatory versus participatory, etc.—tend to reflect a researcher’s personal preferences. Indeed we would argue that a failure to acknowledge and spell out key conceptual, philosophical, and methodological assumptions is especially problematic for research that seeks to integrate methods.

The work of Alan Bryman represents one of a very few attempts to move beyond sterile debates about the relation between epistemology and methodology by examining how research is actually conducted. In particular, he was concerned to identify whether “a clear symmetry existed between epistemological positions ... and associated techniques of social research” (1984: 75). Bryman concluded that most researchers oscillated back and forth between a rhetorical position that assumed that epistemology and method were congruent—i.e., that a particular method and the data it generated should pass as warrantable knowledge—and a ‘technical’ concern that a method should be appropriate to a particular problem. This oscillation meant that

“a great deal of research which is apparently either quantitative or qualitative in orientation is conducted with little, if any, recourse to such philosophical debates. At the technical level, researchers seek to achieve a degree of congruence between a research problem and a technique, or cluster of techniques, to answer the question at hand. Consequently, while the quantitative/qualitative distinction may be a useful device for ... text books about research methods, its use as an account of research practice is not without problems” (Bryman 1984: 170).

Bryman subsequently looked at studies that combined quantitative and qualitative methods to determine whether they yielded consistent

findings and whether they addressed the same issues (1988: chap. 7). Based on an analysis of specific fields of research in which there was a tradition of using both types of method, Bryman found that “clashes between the findings of different studies in a particular domain is a fairly common feature” (ibid.: 166). He argued that such clashes could be attributed to three factors: the use of different research designs and methods of collecting data (some of which exhibited a ‘systematic bias’); the use of different methods for different problems; and because of ‘publication bias’ (i.e., there were discrepancies between published and unpublished research). Far from rejecting attempts to integrate methods, Bryman argued that “by and large, the two research traditions can be viewed as contributing to the understanding of *different aspects* of the phenomenon in question” (ibid.: 170; italics added). Note, however, that Bryman has specified that combining different methods is fruitful to the extent that they are focused on the same phenomena/social domain, a point to which we will return in our discussion of triangulation.

Poverty research: theoretically informed or methodologically driven?

Development research is comparatively recent and, in certain respects, is noticeably different from conventional social research. In the first place, it is characterized by short time frames and a pragmatic concern to produce information that fits into an inflexible project cycle (Cerneia 1991). As such, much development research is unpublished and is instrumental in focus (i.e., it is concerned with data gathering rather than explanation). For this reason, it exhibits a tendency to exclude serious consideration of “the reflexive analysis of goals, values and interests” that is a precondition for enlightened research (Flyvbjerg 2001: 53). Second, development researchers are drawn from many disciplines. Indeed ‘development studies’ is an eclectic mix of approaches and methods, and there are limited opportunities for researchers to obtain training in methods that traditionally fall outside his/her discipline.

Over the past thirty years research into poverty has undergone a decisive shift away from small-scale qualitative studies of specific groups or localities, to large quantitative surveys, and more recently to national-scale studies that seek to combine qualitative and quantitative methods. The latter type of study is supported by the World Bank and has taken the form of national poverty assessments intended to provide data for policy analysis/poverty reduction. Contemporary ‘multimethod’ poverty research provides many examples of the problems and limitations of development research and of a reliance on unstated, problematic assumptions.

D. Booth et al. (1998) provide the most complete overview of the methodological and conceptual issues involved in the first round of the World Bank poverty assessments (PAs). Though they focused primarily on novel ‘technical’ aspects of the research, the authors clearly identify the narrow, economic focus of the poverty assessments:

“Since the beginning of the 1990s, strategic thinking on poverty has been dominated by the policy consensus summed up in the Bank’s three-pronged formula: labor-intensive growth, priority to human capital investments, plus safety-nets ... the formula remains for many practitioners a serviceable instrument, concentrating on a few well-researched, easily-grasped and generally acknowledged focuses for intervention” (ibid.: 18).³

As is widely recognized, this formula has restricted the extent to which noneconomic issues have been addressed (e.g., Razavi 1999). Just as important, the primacy of ‘economic’ issues—specifically a concern with measuring household income/consumption—has consistently reinforced the importance of household surveys at the expense of qualitative research. In national PAs, surveys are separately designed and conducted from qualitative research. Indeed, the participatory assessment of poverty seldom constituted either “a substantial piece of fresh investigation” or “an integral constituent of the analysis” (D. Booth et al. 1998: 26).

Carvalho and White (1997) address the question of whether national poverty assessments provide evidence that quantitative and qualitative approaches are complementary, and whether they offer a significant potential for analyzing poverty. They argue that poverty research can and should be based principally upon methodological considerations—i.e., choice of method should be appropriate for a specific problem—and that the utility of a technical approach is demonstrated by World Bank poverty assessments. They conclude that “sole reliance on either only the quantitative approach or only the qualitative approach in measuring and analyzing poverty is often likely to be less desirable than combining the two approaches” (Carvalho and White 1997: v).

Such an argument is problematic. In the first place the ‘qualitative’ methods used in national poverty assessments—Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)/beneficiary assessment, structured direct observation, and participant observation (Carvalho and White 1997)—are not conventional methods in the sense that they have been carefully evaluated and standardized to produce data that are likely to be valid and credible.⁴

Though participant observation is listed by Carvalho and White as one of the methods used in PAs, in fact it is not utilized. The only methods used are PRA (or possibly Beneficiary Assessment; Salmen 1987) and surveys; little recognizable qualitative research is undertaken. Second, in the majority of PAs, surveys and PRA exercises are undertaken separately and no attempt is made to use PRA and surveys to research the same population/social group/problem. For this reason, the design of PA research does not allow different methods to ‘converge’ on the same problem/issue: surveys collect data on household income/expenditure while PRAs examine local perceptions and experiences of poverty. Thus, it cannot be said that PAs actually integrate different methods; the best that can be hoped for is that the methods generate data that can be used to examine common concerns.

Why this situation exists is unclear. Presumably the failure to integrate methods derives from the limited conceptual focus of the World

Bank (Yates and Okello 2002). Undoubtedly, tension also arises between Bank efforts to promote ‘national’ ownership of the exercise and the development of a comprehensive conceptual and methodological approach. Whatever the cause, the failure to integrate methods undermines a search for casual explanation and severely restricts the role and contribution of qualitative methods and data. Indeed, as indicated by a study of the second round of national poverty assessments, “there is a general lack of attention to causal explanations of specific dimensions of poverty, especially inequality and vulnerability” (ODI 2002: 2).

Independent research has identified three basic problems with World Bank poverty research. First, Bank poverty data exhibit gaps and blind spots that arise out of the level and unit of analysis, notably a concern with defining ‘households’ as units of consumption/production which has led to the signal neglect of gender relations, intrahousehold inequality, seasonality/time, etc. (Bevan and Joireman 1997; Whitehead and Lockwood 1999).

Second, in the first and quite possibly the second round of PPAs (Craig and Porter 2003), analysis has been overly dependent upon a money-metric approach at the expense of exploring other dimensions of poverty (Hulme and Shepherd 2003). This has led to an emphasis on defining ‘poverty lines’ which are insensitive to dynamic social and contextual factors (Hulme and Shepherd 2003; McKay and Lawson 2003). A related concern is that the focus has consistently been on household rather than individual poverty (Laderchi, Saith, and Stewart 2003), with the result that findings are primarily descriptive and have left out or ignored wider macroeconomic issues (Bevan and Joireman 1997; Hanmer, Pyatt, and White 1999). Indeed, some critics have gone so far as to argue that for the above reasons “the findings about the characteristics of poor households must be regarded as unproven and the method which generates them as unsound” (Hanmer, Pyatt, and White 1999: 819).

A third concern arises from unsuccessful attempts in PAs to reconcile objective and subjective concerns and data. There are four strands to

this argument. First, and as noted above, since surveys and PRAs are undertaken separately, PAs have not achieved methodological triangulation (see below). Second, PRA techniques have not undergone a process of critical development to identify their strengths and weaknesses that would allow researchers to integrate them with other methods to offset possible bias/limitation (Campbell 2001; Shaffer this volume). Third, since participatory methods have primarily been used to ascertain local perceptions of poverty, their value in apprehending underlying patterns, processes or behavior is disputed (D. Booth, Leach, and Tierney 1999; Razavi 1999: 421–2).⁵ Finally, PRA—and other qualitative methods—tend to produce localized, context-specific data⁶ that are difficult to aggregate and generalize across localities (D. Booth and Appleton 2001; Moser 2003).

Seemingly oblivious to the above problems, Bank poverty research and policy analysis (e.g., in Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper documents) has continued much as it began (see Narayan 2003). This inflexibility stems from a limited conceptual approach to poverty,⁷ which in turn reflects an unquestioned belief in the value of household survey data, the search for a universal definition of poverty, and commitment to an unexamined belief that survey research represents an ‘objective’ approach to poverty (Laderchi, Saith, and Stewart 2003).

This combination of factors severely hampers interdisciplinary research. With respect to gender research, for example, Jackson argues that

“the problems for inter-disciplinary research stem largely from the social costs for researchers of movement beyond disciplinary boundaries, and the apparently incompatible theories and methods. The political economy of academic research ... works forcefully against those with interests in combining disciplines” (2002: 497).

Citing contradictions in concepts and methods which allows research “of the lowest common denominator”, Jackson argues for multidisciplinary as opposed to interdisciplinary research in which each discipline is accorded equal resources and

recognition, and where “the value of distinctive and different disciplines is brought together” (ibid.: 499) to create a critical tension and hybrid vigor.

A pertinent example of multidisciplinary work is Haswell’s (1975) study of a Gambian village that focused on the link between food consumption, agricultural work and poverty between 1949 and 1973. Research was initiated by an interdisciplinary team of researchers that included medical staff, sociologists, agriculturalists, and nutritionists. The research is remarkable due, in part, to the long-term commitment of local and national staff and to the extent to which different disciplines played an integral role in analyzing changes in poverty/prosperity. In particular, the astute use of survey instruments combined with in-depth knowledge of informants derived in part via participant observation produced a nuanced analysis of poverty at village, compound, and household level. Unfortunately research of this kind is rare.

Triangulation and social research

The argument for multimethod, national scale research is premised on general and often conflicting arguments about triangulation. Denzin was among the first to introduce the idea of triangulation when he argued that “the sociologist should examine his problem from as many different methodological perspectives as possible” (1970: 297). He identified four types of triangulation (for a discussion of validity criteria, see Shaffer). Thus, *data* triangulation involves explicitly searching “for as many different data sources as possible which bear upon the same events under analysis. Data sources, in this sense, are to be distinguished from methods of generating data” (Denzin 1970: 301). More specifically, different types and sources of data need to be sought to help explain events that took place at different times, different socio-spatial settings, with respect to different persons, and on different groups.

A second form is *investigator* triangulation in which multiple, skilled/trained observers help to

overcome the limitations or bias that arise from a single observer. *Methodological* triangulation involves an explicit attempt to integrate different research methods to investigate the same problem, setting, group, etc. in such a way that the limitations/problems of one method are *explicitly* offset by the strengths of a second method. This is necessary because “every data-gathering class—interviews, questionnaires, observation, performance records, physical evidence—is potentially biased and has specific to it certain validity threats” (Denzin 1970: 307). Finally, *theoretical* triangulation involves formulating a research strategy/design that is capable of testing different theories to explain a common problem on the basis that one theory will provide a more adequate explanation than another.⁸

The first three forms of triangulation identified above have been attempted in the evaluation of US government programs (Cook and Reichardt 1979; Smith and Louis 1982). Curiously, and despite its preference for methodologically sophisticated approaches, the Bank seems unaware of this work.

In an overview of triangulation in multimethod research, Jick notes that while the stated belief is that qualitative and quantitative methods “should be viewed as complementary”, nevertheless, “*those who most strongly advocate triangulation fail to indicate how this prescribed triangulation is actually performed and accomplished*” (1979: 602; italics added). A propos of claims made about triangulation, Jick points out that “triangulation may be used not only to examine the same phenomenon from multiple perspectives but also to enrich our understanding by allowing for new or deeper dimensions to emerge” (ibid.: 603–4).⁹ However, Jick warns:

“In all the various triangulation designs one basic assumption is buried. The effectiveness of triangulation rests on the *premise* that the weakness in each single method will be compensated by the counter-balancing strengths of another. That is, it is *assumed* that multiple and independent measures do not share the same weakness or potential for bias” (ibid.: 604; italics added).

Nevertheless, Bank poverty research relies precisely on this assumption in as much as it attempts to use methods separately instead of devising research in which each method is carefully designed and used to offset the possible limitation/bias of the other methods. Only when methods are integrated in this way can “the same phenomenon’ be examined from different angles” (*pace* Bryman 1988; Madey 1982; Sieber 1973).¹⁰

Jick’s call for researchers to indicate how they conducted their research has a direct bearing on the validity and reliability of research. Thus, Kirk and Miller remind us that “[t]ruth’ (or what provisionally passes for truth at a particular time) is thus bounded both by the tolerance of empirical reality and by the consensus of the scholarly community” (1986: 12). They argue that social theory should have a central role in establishing the methodological and inferential steps to define the link between a researchers concepts, their research design, and the ability to measure/understand social phenomena. In general terms, “reliability is the degree to which the finding is independent of accidental circumstances of the research, and validity is the degree to which the finding is interpreted in a correct way” (ibid.: 20).

Only by providing a transparent account of research is it possible to evaluate the ‘claims’—i.e., their validity and reliability—made by a researcher.¹¹ In short, not all accounts of the social world stand up to careful scrutiny. For this reason Hammersley (1998: 67) has suggested three essential steps for scrutinizing research accounts: (a) the need to assess the plausibility of the claim, given our existing knowledge; (b) the need to assess the credibility of the claim, given the nature of the phenomena, circumstances of the research and characteristics of the researcher; and (c) where we have doubts about either (a) or (b), the need to be convinced by the plausibility and credibility of the evidence.

It is clear that if development research wishes to adequately understand poverty it must move beyond arguments that promote a specific approach, method, or form of data. Careful attention to theoretical issues provides the most

fruitful way for researchers to triangulate viewpoints, methods, and data as they describe and explain social phenomena.

This special section

Our inquiry into the limits of methodological integration has found that many writers take a polemical position by arguing that qualitative and quantitative methods are based upon divergent ontological and epistemological assumptions. However, careful analysis of actual research practice undermines such arguments by demonstrating that researchers oscillate between a rhetorical position which argues that epistemology and method are congruent *and* a tendency to choose a method that is appropriate to examine a specific issue.

When we examined poverty research we found that the dominance of econometrics has foreclosed debate on epistemology, and that insistence on the 'gold standard' of the household survey for collecting poverty data is blocking attempts to reconceptualize poverty (see Laderchi, Saith, and Stewart 2003: 4). We were forced to conclude that adherence to the 'money-metric' approach is incompatible with attempts to 'add' a component that examines socio-cultural 'dimensions' of well-/ill-being, primarily because there is no agreed methodology for generating, much less aggregating, qualitative and quantitative data. The net effect is that there are few examples of a genuine integration of methods, instead most poverty research has simply added a separate and quite distinct participatory exercise.

Most poverty researchers have narrowly focused on methodological issues and have failed to engage with the most basic theoretical concerns, for instance there is little discussion of how they established the methodological and inferential steps linking key concepts, research design, and issues of 'measurement' to problems of interpretation. The 'gaps and blind spots' apparent in poverty research arise, therefore, from a failure to theorize the object of study (poverty) and a failure to conceptualize the relation between, and value of, different methods and how

they could usefully be deployed to understand a common research problem, setting, group, or social phenomenon.

How might poverty be reconceptualized such that different methods could be integrated to allow for causal explanation? First, as Bevan and Joireman (1997) have argued, the concept of poverty does not simply translate into measures. Not only are contextual issues significant in the choice and use of a measure, it is also necessary to address the complex issues involved in making judgments about other peoples lives, about the complex nature of livelihoods, and about the purpose of measurement.

Anthropology offers a useful starting point by reminding us of the need to carefully interrogate the assumptions and conceptual categories that underpin development discourse on e.g., 'poverty' (Goldman 2001; Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Pansters et al. 2000), policy (Gardner and Lewis 2000), and the operation of development institutions (Eyben 2000; Mosse 2005). Thus, it is important to ask, from whose point of view is poverty to be considered? For whom is poverty a problem, and why? The issue of perspective is critical in defining the attributes of poverty that are seen as significant—is income/consumption more important than hunger, suffering, etc.?—and it draws attention to the importance of social relations through which people organize their lives and livelihoods and through which individuals access different kinds of assets. The most basic conceptualization of poverty must address questions about the organization and composition of different kinds of households, and the relation between individuals, households, and the wider 'community' from whom support may be obtained.

As D. Booth, Leach, and Tierney (1999: 8) argue, anthropology's principal contribution to poverty research is its ability to document "the variable, fluid, complex and contested categorizations and relationships that constitute" the lived experience of real people in their struggle to cope with life and the effects of poverty-reduction policies. At its best, anthropology analyzes the diverse strategies that individuals, households and communities pursue in response to

structural change. Finally, anthropological research, with its grounding in real communities, reminds us that the supposed beneficiaries of antipoverty policies are “active participants in constructing their own future” and that the “activities of states and development agencies are not always empowering” (*ibid.*: 39–40). In short, far from being an absolute condition, poverty is a product of quite specific social, political-economic relations and processes which connect different localities to the state and to global economic processes.

To the extent that anthropology provides insight into the relevance of social theory, it also provides an instructive lesson regarding the relation between innovative research methodology and liberal complacency. The sociologist Burawoy (2000) has provided a compelling critique of a dominant ‘school’ of British social anthropology, the Rhodes Livingstone Institute/Manchester school who pioneered the extended case method. Building on the advances offered by this method, and in the interest of advancing comparative analysis, these anthropologists overstretched the limits of their method by overlooking/misperceiving local-level processes. Burawoy warns against “the complacency of academic objectivity” which, he argues, can blind social scientists from seeing the limitations of our methods and thus how we are implicated in the world we study.

This is a timely warning given the increasingly autonomous role of researchers, policy makers, states and donors in defining who is poor and when poverty is (and is not) a policy issue. A failure to be concerned about how poverty is defined and represented in policy debates, though obviously linked to methodological issues, has implications for disciplinary knowledge and practice and the entire edifice of development, most especially for the objects of development policy, namely the ‘poor’.

The essays in this special section address the problems identified above in different ways. Thus, Paul Shaffer begins by reviewing the ‘qual/quant’ workshop at Cornell University in March 2001. Ravi Kanbur (2003), the convenor of the workshop, summarized the key issues in the

form of a typology of differences—in essence a complex set of dichotomies—between qualitative and quantitative research: type of information on population (non-numerical to numerical); type of population coverage (specific to general); type of population involvement (active to passive); type of inference methodology (inductive to deductive); and type of disciplinary framework (broad social sciences to neoclassical economics).

Paul argues that Kanbur, as indeed most poverty researchers, overlooks important epistemological differences and associated types of validity claims/criteria involved in social research (*cf.* Baulch 1996; Shaffer 1996). He explores this problem by examining the two principal approaches used in conventional poverty research, namely the consumption (quantitative) approach which defines poverty in terms of the nonfulfillment of basic preferences and the participatory (qualitative) approach which sees poverty as multidimensional and determined by participants in a dialog.¹² The two approaches can be further contrasted in terms of the types of data they generate, namely empirical ‘brute data’ of consumption-based approaches (which lend themselves to scaling or ranking) as against hermeneutic, intersubjective understandings (which rely upon a discourse-based model) produced in participatory exercises; each approach rests on quite different validity claims which in turn rest upon radically different relations between the subject and object of inquiry and on distinctive conceptions of ‘poverty’. In short, a concern with epistemology undermines Kanbur’s neat dichotomies.

Paul is concerned to tease out a range of philosophical and epistemological issues that are central to, but frequently left out of, poverty research. Part of the problem lies with current conceptualizations of poverty and a failure to integrate qualitative and quantitative methods. However, Paul argues too little attention has been given to how social data are transformed via aggregation and ranking techniques, and with a lack of concern to devise appropriate validity criteria with which to assess research findings. Paul provides a useful corrective to

the implicit assumption that a participatory element can be 'added' to conventional economic analysis to 'enrich' data and findings, and he challenges all researchers to rethink the criteria by which they claim validity for their research, notably by paying greater attention to standardizing techniques designed to generate a 'participatory' dialog.

While criticism of econometric approaches is becoming more common, there are relatively few critiques of qualitative poverty research (cf. Green 2000). In this vein, Alan Rew and Martin Rew, while also taking issue with Kanbur's typology, are more concerned about his support for combining household surveys with participatory poverty analysis. In the context of a development project in eastern India, their understanding of poverty emerged out of a series of disagreements regarding the purpose of a particular method—household surveys and participatory assessments—rather than from potentially conflicting disciplinary/inference frameworks. Participatory methods tended to pick up and emphasize only one of a number of livelihood strands (and by implication, one of several constraints) at the expense of other livelihoods and concerns. They trace this problem to problematic assumptions by researchers who fail to distinguish between communicative action, as occurs in public PRAs, and the strategic interests of actors who are adept at 'pseudocommunication'. PRA was eventually discarded as 'downright misleading' because it failed to grasp complex social and economic relations and because it tended to facilitate public statements without at the same time achieving consent and 'buy-in' to the project.

After a number of false starts, research focused on the dynamics of longer-term choices facing rural households through the use of surveys that examined household assets and food security issues (with a strong numerical component), and by pursuing open-ended in-depth case studies. Alan and Martin argue that Kanbur's typology—specifically the distinction between numerical and non-numeric data and contextual and noncontextual methods—is unhelpful and it wrongly endorses current methodological

orthodoxy which relies on the need for household survey data to be enriched by problematic participatory data.

While some economists acknowledge the problems of measurement and the weak correlation between money-metric and other measures of poverty (Sahn 2003), they have been reluctant to step back from their preferred method in order to take a small step toward integrating (rather than adding) qualitative research (Kanbur 2003: 15f.). While there is also resistance on the part of many qualitative researchers to embrace quantitative methods, there are nevertheless clear advantages for doing so.

Thus somewhat atypically for an anthropologist, Paul Spencer draws on his extensive knowledge of east African pastoralists to demonstrate the kind of insights that can be obtained by combining statistical analysis and participant observation. In his article he focuses on developing key social indicators—polygyny, livestock ownership, and marriage—to advance our understanding of the processes underlying socio-economic inequality (not poverty). At the same time he demonstrates how it is possible to address the lack of comparability between studies.

Furthermore, by re-analyzing and comparing household expenditure data for six societies, Paul is able to demonstrate the significance of historical change for the impoverishment of contemporary pastoralists. Indeed, he argues that the process in eastern Africa is similar to that experienced by pastoralists in west Africa and reflects the degree to which a society has been exposed to trade and markets. Paul provides an excellent example of how a knowledge of basic statistics enhances anthropological fieldwork, and he provides a more credible analysis of poverty than could be achieved by a household survey or a Participatory Poverty Assessment (cf. Campbell this volume; Kandiyoti 1999). As such he refutes Kanbur's typology with its explicit assumptions about the irreconcilability of disciplinary training and of numeric/non-numeric data. In contrast to Kanbur, Paul argues that disciplinary boundaries should not be a barrier to good social research; rather social scientists should become

more numerate, and economists should acquire training in social and cultural analysis.

In the final article John Campbell reviews three quite different poverty studies conducted in east Africa to examine the relation between theory and method. He argues that while the studies were methodologically innovative in the sense of attempting to combine different methods, the results were problematic. A central problem in re-analyzing such studies was that researchers often failed to provide an explicit account of the research process that explained the inevitable trade-offs they made in the course of fieldwork and data analysis between theory and method, and did not consider how such trade-offs might have affected their findings.

While the different approaches—a deductive economic focus, a numerate anthropological approach, and a participatory poverty analysis—exhibited distinctive strengths and limitations, overall there was a tendency for research to be ‘methodologically wise’, in the sense of being innovative, without at the same time being theoretically and historically informed. Echoing Robert Merton (1968), Campbell argues that the sophisticated and methodologically innovative research that characterizes contemporary work on poverty is in danger of producing a mountain of untheorized empirical data which may be invalid and unreliable.

In recent years the academic community has become increasingly aware of many of the issues raised in this special section. However, the hegemonic role of economics together with the dominant role of the World Bank in defining development policy has contributed to an impasse in development research characterized by a failure to conceptualize poverty. It is not merely the preferential status that policy makers/donors attach to household consumption/expenditure data which compounds the problem. The underlying issues, as Jackson (2002) has made clear, are the social costs to researchers who attempt to engage in interdisciplinary research which block the development of new theoretical and methodological approaches.

A related concern is the need to grasp the significance of macro-economic factors for different

units of analysis (community, household, individual). While there is growing evidence that ‘poverty’ at different social levels is poorly understood by using the same methods (Bevan and Joireman 1997), and that intrahousehold inequality needs to be directly addressed, nevertheless these issues are consistently sidelined.

Finally, the central concern of this special section has been to encourage debate on epistemological, theoretical, and methodological issues particularly where the intention is to integrate (and not merely add or combine) different research methods. All the contributors to this special section support integrated research provided that careful attention is paid to epistemological, theoretical, and methodological issues of the kind identified above. There are limits to integration, but these are created when insufficient attention is given to epistemological and theoretical issues, by researchers who seek to be methodologically wise, and by poorly conceived efforts to combine, aggregate, and analyze data generated by different approaches and methods.

John R. Campbell is an anthropologist at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He has worked in Ghana, Tanzania, and Ethiopia, and has undertaken development consultancy in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Botswana.

E-mail: jc58@soas.adc.uk

Jeremy Holland is a lecturer at the Centre for Development Studies, University of Wales, Swansea. A geographer by training, he has worked on poverty analysis, rights-based approaches, urban development, gender and development, participatory methodologies, and combined methods. His regional interests are the Caribbean, West Africa, and the Middle East.

E-mail: J.D.Holland@swansea.ac.uk

Notes

1. The conference also produced a second volume which looked at how research methods could be used in designing and managing development projects (Holland and Campbell 2005). During the conference the 'party numbers' discussion group—hosted by the Statistical Services Center, University of Reading and the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex University—also met and a third volume which looks at the issue of quantifying/aggregating participatory data is also being published (Holland and Abeyasekera forthcoming).
2. The exception is Kanbur (2003).
3. For a recent analysis of the relation between the Bank's new formula and poverty research, see A. Booth and Mosley (2003).
4. A further complicating issue is that 'direct observation' and participant observation both require a standard approach and considerable time to yield useful information and that neither method on their own produces valid or credible data (Altheide and Johnson 1994; Bryman 2001).
5. Findings rest on problematic assumptions about the homogeneity of the community in which PRA is conducted, such assumptions are contradicted by evidence regarding the significance of divisions based on gender, age, ethnicity and differential power which tend to exclude certain voices/social categories from participating in public events like PRA (Mosse 1994, 2001).
6. This problem is due in large measure to the failure to conceptualize poverty, and to design multimethod research in a way that can put qualitative methods to a better use in analyzing specific dimensions of poverty and/or that might generate appropriate data that would allow for aggregation and generalization.
7. White and Killick's review of research on African poverty concluded: 'There is no established theory of poverty, a conceptual framework that allows the identification of the major causal factors in a particular setting' (2001: xvii).
8. There are few examples of research conducted to test competing theories. Perhaps the most useful way into this issue is to undertake a review of research, see D. Booth et al. (1998) and Campbell this volume.
9. An insistence on viewing the 'same phenomenon' requires a clear theoretical formulation of the problem that makes it possible for different

perspectives and methods to be deployed on the same time period, space, group, etc.

10. See Narayan and Nyamwaya (1996) for an example of Bank poverty research that relied on combined methods and triangulation, and see Campbell's critique in this volume.
11. Validity also entails that care in the utilization of methods has been found to be reliable, which in turn produces valid data (Campbell 2001; Neuman 2003: chap. 7).
12. See Laderchi, Saith, and Stewart's (2003: 8–9) discussion of wider problems arising from quantitative research including the implicit bias in their policy recommendations in favor of "the generation of private income as against public goods provision, and similarly, a bias in the identification of the poor for targeting purposes towards those lacking private income".

References

- Altheide, David, and John Johnson 1994. Criteria for assessing interpretative validity in qualitative research. In: Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (eds.): pp. 485–99.
- Baulch, Bob 1996. Neglected trade-offs in poverty measurement. *IDS Bulletin*, 27(1): pp. 36–42.
- Bevan, Philippa, and Sandra Joireman 1997. The perils of measuring poverty: identifying the poor in rural Ethiopia. *Oxford Development Studies*, 25(3): pp. 315–44.
- Booth, Anne, and Paul Mosley (eds.) 2003. *The new poverty strategies. What have they achieved? What have we learned?* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Booth, David, Jeremy Holland, Jesko Hentschel, Peter Lanjouw, and Alicia Herbert 1998. *Participation and combined methods in African poverty assessment: renewing the agenda*. London: Department for International Development. Social Development Division.
- Booth, David, Melissa Leach, and Alison Tierney 1999. Experiencing poverty in Africa: perspectives from anthropology. Background paper no. 1(b) for the World Bank Poverty Status Report (unpublished).
- Booth, David, and Simon Appleton 2001. Combining participatory and survey-based approaches to poverty monitoring and analysis. Background paper for the workshop to be held in Entebbe,

- Uganda. May. Overseas Development Institute and University of Nottingham (unpublished).
- Bryman, Alan 1984. The debate about quantitative and qualitative research: a question of method or epistemology? *The British Journal of Sociology*, 35(1): pp. 75–92.
- 1988. *Quality and quantity in social research*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- 2001. *Social research methods*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Burawoy, Michael (ed.) 2000. *Global ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Campbell, John 2001. Participatory Rural Appraisal as qualitative research: distinguishing methodological issues from participatory claims. *Human Organization*, 60(4): pp. 380–89.
- Carvalho, Sonya, and Howard White 1997. Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to poverty measurement and analysis: the practice and potential. Washington, DC: World Bank Technical Paper no. 366.
- Cernea, Michael 1991. *Putting people first*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cook, Thomas, and Charles Reichardt (eds.) 1979. *Qualitative and quantitative methods in evaluation research*. Vol. 1 of *Sage Research Progress Series in Evaluation*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Craig, David, and Doug Porter 2003. Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers: a new convergence. *World Development*, 31(1): pp. 53–69.
- Denzin, Norman 1970. *The research act in sociology*. London: Butterworths.
- Denzin, Norman, and Yvonna Lincoln 1994. *The handbook of qualitative research*. New York: Sage.
- 1998. *The handbook of qualitative research*. 2nd ed. New York: Sage.
- Eyben, Rosalind 2000. Development and anthropology: a view from inside the agency. *Critique of Anthropology*, 20(1): pp. 7–14.
- Flyvbjerg, Bent 2001. *Making social science matter*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gardner, Katy, and David Lewis 2000. Dominant paradigms or overturned ‘business as usual’? Development discourse and the White Paper on International Development. *Critique of Anthropology*, 20(1): pp. 15–30.
- Goldman, Michael 2001. The birth of a discipline: producing authoritative green knowledge, World Bank style. *Ethnography*, 2(2): pp. 191–217.
- Green, Maia 2000. Participatory development and the appropriation of agency in southern Tanzania. *Critique of Anthropology*, 20(1): pp. 67–89.
- Grillo, Ralph, and R. L. Stirrat (eds.) 1997. *Discourses of development*. Oxford: Berg.
- Guba, Egon, and Yvonna Lincoln 1998. Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In: N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds.) *The landscape of qualitative research*. London: Sage: pp. 195–221.
- Hammersley, Martyn 1998. *Reading ethnographic research*. London: Longman (orig. 1991).
- 1995. *The politics of social research*. London: Sage.
- Hanmer, Lucia, Graham Pyatt, and Howard White 1999. What do the World Bank’s poverty assessments teach us about poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa? *Development and Change*, 30: pp. 795–823.
- Haswell, Margaret 1975. *The nature of poverty: a case history of the first quarter-century after WW II*. London: MacMillan.
- Holland, Jeremy, and Savitri Abeyasekera (eds.) Forthcoming. *Who counts? Participation, numbers and power*. London: IT Publications.
- Holland, Jeremy, and John Campbell (eds.) 2005. *Methods, knowledge and power: combining qualitative and quantitative development research*. London: IT Publications.
- Hulme, David, and Andrew Shepherd 2003. Conceptualizing chronic poverty. *World Development*, 31(3): pp. 403–23.
- Jackson, Cecile 2002. Disciplining Gender. *World Development*, 30(3): pp. 497–509.
- Jick, Todd 1979. Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods: triangulation in action. *Administrative science quarterly*, 224: pp. 602–11.
- Kanbur, Ravi (ed.) 2002. Economics, social science and development. *World Development*, 30(3): pp. 477–86.
- 2003. *Q-Squared: qualitative and quantitative poverty appraisal*. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- Kandiyoti, Deniz 1999. Poverty in transition: an ethnographic critique of household surveys in post-Soviet Central Asia. *Development and Change*, 30(3): pp. 499–524.
- Kaplan, Abraham 1964. *The conduct of inquiry: methodology for behavioural science*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Kirk, Jerome, and Marc Miller 1986. *Reliability and validity in qualitative research*. New York: Sage.
- Kuhn, Thomas 1970. *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Laderchi, Catarina Ruggeri, Ruhi Saith, and Frances Stewart 2003. Does it matter that we don’t agree on the definition of poverty? A comparison of four approaches. Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford. Working Paper no. 107.

- Mckay, Andrew, and David Lawson 2003. Assessing the extent and nature of chronic poverty in low income countries: issues and evidence. *World Development*, 31(3): pp. 425–39.
- Madey, Doreen 1982. Some benefits of integrating qualitative and quantitative methods in program evaluation, with illustrations. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 4(2): pp. 223–36.
- Merton, Robert 1968. *Social theory and social structure*. New York: Free Press.
- Moser, Caroline 2003. Apt illustration or anecdotal information? Can qualitative data be representative or robust? In: Ravi Kanbur (ed.): 79–89.
- Mosse, David 1994. Authority, gender and knowledge: theoretical reflections on the practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal. *Development and Change*, 25(3): pp. 497–525.
- 2001. ‘People’s knowledge’, participation and patronage: operations and representations in rural development. In: Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (eds.) *Participation: the new tyranny*. London: Zed Books: pp. 16–35.
- 2005. *Cultivating development*. Pluto Press: London.
- Narayan, Deepa 2003. Moving out of poverty: understanding growth and freedom from the bottom up. Washington, DC: World Bank (briefing note for research workshop).
- Narayan, Deepa, and David Nyamwaya 1996. *Learning from the poor: a participatory poverty assessment of Kenya*. Social Policy and Resettlement Division. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Neuman, W. Lawrence 2003. *Social research methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- ODI 2002. *PRSP Synthesis Notes 1. Key Findings on PRSPs to date*. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Pansters, Wil, Geske Dijkstra, Paul Hoebink, and Erik Snel (eds.) 2000. *Rethinking poverty: comparative perspectives from below*. Assen: van Gorcum.
- Razavi, Shahra 1999. Gendered poverty and well-being: introduction. *Development and Change*, 30: pp. 409–33.
- Sahn, David 2003. Strengthening quantitative methods through incorporating qualitative information. In: Ravi Kanbur (ed.): pp. 73–8.
- Salmen, Lawrence 1987. *Listen to the people: participant-observer evaluation of development projects*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sechrist, Lee, and Souraya Sidani 1995. Quantitative and qualitative methods: is there an alternative? *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 18(1): pp. 77–87.
- Shaffer, Paul 1996. Beneath the poverty debate. *IDS Bulletin*, 27(1): pp. 23–35.
- Sieber, Sam 1973. The integration of fieldwork and survey methods. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6): pp. 1335–59.
- Smith, Allen, and Karen Louis (eds.) 1982. Multi-method policy research: issues and applications. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 26(1): pp. 1–144.
- Turner, Bryan 2000. *The Blackwell companion to social theory*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell.
- White, Howard 2002. Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches in poverty analysis. *World Development*, 30(3): pp. 511–22.
- White, Howard, and Tony Killick 2001. *African poverty at the millennium. Causes, complexities, and challenges*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Whitehead, Anne, and Mathew Lockwood 1999. Gendering poverty: a review of six World Bank African poverty assessments. *Development and Change*, 30: pp. 525–55.
- Yates, Jenny, and Leonard Okello 2002. Learning from Uganda’s efforts to learn from the poor: reflections and lessons from the Uganda participatory poverty assessment project. In: Karen Brock and Rosemary McGee (eds.) *Knowing poverty*. London: Earthscan: pp. 69–98.