

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research concern is Why are African Americans under-represented among intercultural missionaries? The operative research question is What reasons do AFAM mission executives and AFAM IC missionaries give for this problem?

Descriptive Research

This research is descriptive. Because no current, research-based hypotheses are known to be in print¹, the aim has been to conceptualize factors, or independent variables, which explain the lack of AFAM IC missionaries (Babbie 1990, 43). These variables are the basis for the survey questions.

Population

As was mentioned in chapter 1, the research population was comprised of both seasoned AFAM mission executives and

¹The work of Harr and Hughley and part of Roesler's work focused upon hindrances within White mission organizations. Roesler also investigated problems within AFAM and White undergraduate schools and AFAM mission organizations. Much has improved in the intervening forty-plus years since his study.

AFAM IC missionaries with at least one cumulative year of service.

Five mission executives helped to refine the survey instrument. Although it would have been helpful to enlist more AFAM mission executives as a stronger preliminary expert panel, not enough of these persons were either known to exist or chose to cooperate. Seven AFAM mission executives were contacted twice, but did not participate. All of these executives were male, and a survey that was sent to a female executive was undeliverable. Three of those executives who completed a paper survey indicated the number of years they served in IC mission, the mean of which was 19.67 years.

The standard of one year of IC service to qualify as an IC missionary was arbitrary. It was long enough to exclude many that have taken a few short-term trips. In fact, the mean of IC years served was considerably longer, 10.49 (N=93). This group comprised the presumed expert panel of insiders.

AFAM IC missionaries, both current and former, were included. No attempt was made to limit the AFAM IC population by gender, age, denominational affiliation, whether or not they raised their own financial support, or whether or not their views might diverge from a literal reading of the Bible. Referrals, primarily from AFAM missionaries, to those not

previously contacted were pursued in close approximation to the order received, until 100 qualifying surveys were obtained.

The best source of contacts was AFAM IC missionaries. Other sources were the Internet Brigada Today newsletter (<http://www.brigada.org/>), missions organizations, AFAM churches with strong missions committees, and personal friends. The most fruitful means of obtaining addresses of AFAM missionaries from mission organizations was by telephone, using the name of a person known to them, and the next most fruitful means was by e-mail, specifically addressed to someone in the organization. Some larger missions do not divulge such information.

Sampling Method

Since most AFAM missionaries were scattered in the U.S. and abroad, a survey was the most feasible data collection instrument, and it provided a place for respondents to list other potential respondents.

Phase One: Survey Development

The operative assumption is that we can know what people are thinking by what they say, despite racial

hindrances (Fetterman 1989, 16). As has been mentioned, the goal was to gain an insider's perspective upon the problems of AFAM under-representation in mission. The survey was designed with particular attention to its usefulness to mission recruiters, both AFAM and White.

Phase One, Stage One

The purpose of the first stage was to test a primarily Likert-style survey instrument, which had been developed primarily from a literature review, and narrowed in dialogue with the author's dissertation committee and a statistical advisor. The test of the survey instrument was against an AFAM emic perspective, preparatory to distribution of the survey to AFAM intercultural missionaries.

Crawford Loritts, Jr., Executive Director of "Legacy," a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ, granted an initial interview and agreed to serve as a reader on the dissertation committee. The credibility of his name within the AFAM community opened many doors to this research effort.

For example, one AFAM missionary, with a deep interest for the subject of the research, hesitated to provide help beyond a certain point, since the responses were so sensitive. The author responded to her concerns at some length, but she

said that she wished that she had realized that Loritts was involved in the research, since she knew and trusted both him and his wife. She had not seen the cover letter to AFAM IC missionaries on Legacy stationery provided by Loritts. She went on to provide the fullest response of any missionary to a key question of the survey (number one).

The sensitivity and clarity of questions were improved through interaction with Loritts and an unknown person on his staff. Open-ended questions were asked at the beginning, to avoid bias from later closed-ended questions. Names of other AFAM mission executives were suggested by him, and permission granted for cover letters approved by him, on Legacy letterhead, to be sent to those executives. Another letter was composed asking AFAM mission executives to request the cooperation of AFAM IC missionaries within their organizations in completing a survey. Such letters, according to Fetterman, help raise the level of trust of the researcher (Fetterman 1989, 44). Those letters were not forthcoming from the other AFAM mission executives, but two of them provided a list of AFAM missionaries serving in their organizations. The third and final cover letter was addressed to AFAM IC missionaries and was sent on Legacy letterhead to the AFAM IC missionaries

contacted. A few photocopies were sent when the supply of letterhead stationery was exhausted.

With Loritts' permission, a verbatim transcript of his interview was made and analyzed. Survey questions were refined, faxed back to him, and then edited by at least one person within his staff. Virtually all suggestions offered by Loritts and his staff were incorporated into the next survey revision. The survey was then given to Douglas Sizemore, a statistician, who facilitated shortening the form so that the instrument could fit on two pages, both sides. Various questions were also turned into a Likert format with his help. The questionnaire was again presented to Loritts. His staff made further suggestions, and that instrument was sent to the other four AFAM mission executives.

Phase One: Stage Two

The second part of the survey development was to gain the editorial comments of other AFAM mission executives. Due to the distances involved, hard copies of the surveys were sent to these AFAM executives. The chief executives of three independent AFAM missions, including Donald Canty, Director of Carver Foreign Missions, Joseph Jetter, President of Have Christ Will Travel Ministries and David Cornelius, Director of

African American Church Relations, International Board, Southern Baptist Convention and an anonymous mission executive received and returned revised surveys. Another seven surveys were not returned by AFAM mission executives, and an additional three could not be reached.

The executives did not so much edit as to raise concerns about some of the survey questions that they answered. This appeared to be a good sign, since the instrument became secondary to the survey content. Their insights were quite valuable, as will be seen. Comments upon closed-ended questions were seriously considered, and their responses to open-ended questions were studied for common domains, then used as the basis for adding seven new questions to the survey. Three of these questions (15, 29, 33) dealt with ever-lingering questions concerning White mission organizations, another dealt with language requirements of missions (25), two concerned AFAM pastors and missions (20, 28) and the last with exposing AFAM churches to global missions (24). Several questions were eliminated and others modified. When answers failed to discriminate by bunching in the middle, those questions were eliminated (Monette 1990, 373). Finally, the closed-ended questions were scattered in

no particular order. The final revision of this survey instrument is included in this report as appendix A.

Phase Two: AFAM IC Missionary Survey

Contacting a sufficient number of AFAM missionaries in person was not feasible, since they reside around the globe. Hard copies of the survey were sent to at least 281 such missionaries. A self-addressed stamped envelope was enclosed for domestic addresses, and a self-addressed envelope with a U.S. Postal Service "International Reply Coupon" enclosed was sent to international addresses. This coupon could then be redeemed for sufficient return airmail postage of the missionary's country.

Those receiving surveys were encouraged to duplicate the survey for others who qualified to take it. Domestic follow-up of non-respondents was by phone, if known, and by postcard if not. Telephone communication with AFAMs seems to be a more respected form of communication than the mail. International follow-up was by e-mail if possible, and by postcard if not. An effort was made not to badger those who chose not to respond. Almost never was a second follow-up contact initiated, and those few were under unusual

circumstances, such as with a personal friend, or with someone who initiated contact with the author.

Initially, surveys were to be e-mailed to those desiring them, but software conflicts precluded this. Nevertheless, some missionaries, particularly in distant locations, elected to e-mail their responses. Otherwise a typical response from a cooperating foreign missionary might take two weeks. For Likert scale answers which normally required marking inside a circle, the number value of the circle was given, as for example, "Q. #23-5," for the "strongly agree" response on question 25. One missionary answered by three e-mail increments, when his schedule allowed. A follow-up reminder to those receiving surveys was extremely easy by e-mail and at no additional financial cost.

Regular mail, and e-mail addresses of AFAM IC missionary referrals were requested at the end of the survey. This proved to be the chief means by which new contacts were made. Data gathering could have continued, had time allowed.

Information about those to whom a survey was sent, such as telephone and fax numbers, as well as conventional and e-mail addresses, was entered in a Microsoft "Access 97" database, and when a survey was returned, duly noted. The identities and communications addresses of survey respondents

were sought for follow-up purposes. Each respondent was assigned an identification number. Responses will be kept anonymous unless respondents granted permission to quote them (Fetterman 1989, 132). Their names will not be released for bona fide similar research, unless permission was specifically given for that. Otherwise, the identification number will be used.

A five-point Likert scale was used, with questions strongly stated in a positive fashion, with "strongly agree"-type answers consistently being at the same end of the scale (number five in this case; Ted Ward, Social Science Research class notes, April 1994). An attempt was made to have at least two questions for each major topic. Requests for personal data were made at the end of the survey, rather than at the beginning, in contrast to the ethnographic interview (Babbie 1990, 141). A copy of a summary of research findings was offered as thanks to those completing a survey. Those requesting the summary were noted in the database. Others who were contacted in the course of research, but did not match the population profile, also requested this report.

Because some surveys had to be disqualified, since they were returned by those not African American, as described in chapter 1, or by those who had not served at least one year

in IC ministry, a last question was added toward the end of the data-gathering phase. This question was a verification of whether or not the respondent was AFAM and had served at least one year in IC ministry.

The data-gathering phase of approximately six months was far more difficult than had been envisioned. Several AFAM IC missionaries known personally to the author would not complete a questionnaire, perhaps because anonymity was preferred. Some important AFAM leaders would offer no assistance. Most who responded seemed to forget that the researcher was White, but one AFAM wrote,

I felt that the last few questions [#41-42, K, L] on your survey were too invasive. Surely, you must know in your ministry to AFAMs that certain personal information is not handed out too readily to strangers.

A letter of explanation was written to this person.

The author attributes the gaining of 102 qualifying surveys to prayer. The author's church, general prayer supporters and weekly prayer partners were key to the effort, beginning when the first surveys were mailed. For example, at a period when surveys were being returned at a rate of perhaps one per week, the author's primary prayer group was asked to redouble prayer. That week four surveys were received in one day and two more were returned four days later.

Research Design Summary

The research design purpose is to test possible independent variables that might help to explain the under-representation of AFAM IC missionaries. Those variables are tested with both open-ended and Likert-style questions.

The process included these steps: (1) a literature review; (2) incorporation of the author's hunches, based upon ministry experience in the AFAM community; (3) construction of a preliminary survey instrument; (4) consulting a preliminary expert AFAM panel in two stages; (5) refinement of the survey questions; (6) gathering of AFAM IC missionary names and addresses; (7) sending and receiving surveys; (8) data analysis. The derivation of specific survey questions is given in chapter 2, where the connections are easily and readily apparent.

The desire is to allow an expert panel of AFAMs to speak to the issues. The Phase One, Stage One panel consists of Loritts and his staff, and the Phase One, Stage Two panel consists of four AFAM mission CEO's, with a mean length of service of 19.7 years. The Phase Two panel is comprised of 102 AFAMs with at least one cumulative year of IC missionary service. The mean of years they have served is 10.5.

Having dealt with the purpose of the study, the origins of the survey instrument used, the characteristics of those to whom it was sent, and the outcomes expected, chapter 4 consists of an analysis of the data received and the testing of the author's projected outcomes.