# Ethnography Made Easy

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# Understanding Ethnography

By Maureen E. Sheridan

## Defining Ethnography

At its most basic core, ethnography is "writing about people." Ethnography is a research method that permits researchers to explore and examine the cultures and societies that are a vital part of the human experience. This chapter will broaden the reader's understanding of what ethnography is and gives a brief history of its origin. Chapter One looks to inform the reader about how researchers are utilizing modern contemporary ethnography. In recent years, it has become more relevant in multiple disciplines in the field of social sciences. Its popularity has grown in use due to its ability to collect data on living subjects from a first-hand perspective (Alasuutari, 1995; Bryman, 2004; Ladner, 2014; Murchison, 2010; Tombro, 2016).

Approaching research with the ethnographic method may be unlikely for researchers who are not yet acquainted to it and, instead, approach research in a more traditional way. Yet, we find that ethnography can be an essential approach for many researchers looking to evaluate and investigate basic social circumstances (Schensul & LeCompte, 2012). At times ethnography is the best tool to use to explore ongoing events in context where other methods, such as controlled experiments or collections of quantifiable data do not.

Most scientific research strategies are typically done from the perspective of a detached observer. The difference between these traditional methods and ethnography is that the ethnographic method allows the researcher to capture data in the role of active participant and passive observer. So how does one reconcile being active and passive at the same time? The ethnographer gathers data through observation, interviews, fieldnotes, and mapping as well as gains insight through *firsthand* involvement with research subjects or participants (Alasuutari, 1995; Anderson, 1994; Murchison, 2010; Tombro, 2016; Van Mannen, 2003). The ethnographer mainly conducts research by interacting with other people who are part of the study. This partnership or interaction takes on many forms, from conversations and interviews to participating in shared rituals, symbols, artifacts, and emotional experiences. The ethnographer actively participates and gathers information while, at the same time, tries to remain an objective observer.

**Studying Cultural Phenomena**

Like ethnographic frameworks infused into the social sciences, it has been noted that the best way to study social and cultural phenomena is to study them in action. The complexity of humans and their social interactions cannot be captured in a picture or sterile laboratory as there are no strict control of variables in ethnography. Analyzing initial data collection and comparing the experiences captured over time may result in the researcher having to tweak the research process. This comes after viewing conflicts over time as well as other variables found within the environment under investigation. Ethnographers employ multiple research techniques and methods in a complex research strategy that matches the complexity of the living objects under investigation (Bryman, 2004; Ladner, 2014; Tombro, 2016).

An important thing to note is that ethnography is not a static process. And that it occurs over a prolonged period of time of weeks, months, or even years. Ethnographic research incorporates multiple types of research methods and techniques from active participation to passive observation and can incorporate interviews, focus groups, note taking, and mapping, among others. This is why ethnography is not usually the research method of choice by many social scientists. Social scientists in the past have chosen to use surveys, static interviews, focus groups but using them as singular events, etc. However, the ethnographic research method has gained traction as social science trends continue to indicate. Murchison (2010) argued that "today, researchers employ ethnography as a research strategy in a number of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, and education, and as a practical research strategy in marketing, management, and public policy arenas" (p. 4). This demonstration of widespread use indicates that the utility of the approach has become evident in many different situations where a better understanding of social and cultural dynamics is desired.

## Maintaining a Naïve State of Mind as a First-Hand Observer

Early ethnographers wrote about what they saw and heard but did not go into detail to describe how they captured their research data or formed their conclusion. Most early ethnographic accounts did not include the method of research collection as part of the description in the research study. It was believed that the pioneers of ethnography did not fully understand research practices (Anderson, 1994; Averill, 1996; Murchison, 2010; Tombro, 2016; Van Mannen, 2003). Another consideration was that most of earlier ethnographic reports were done in places that required the researcher to travel many miles away from their homeland and study groups of individuals who likely did not speak the same language. Early ethnography ignored much of the complexity found in the human experience. Instead it made a lot of assumptions based on the researcher's own personal bias or their lack of understanding about the phenomena under investigation. Today, the ethnographer tries to avoid bringing in their personal biases and instead remain in a naïve state of mind. They try not to assume or manipulate what the outcome will be.

The fundamental assumption in ethnography’s commitment to remaining attractive as a method of research is that certain types of information are only obtainable through first-hand experience. The belief that ethnography affords the researcher a better understanding of a particular place or culture under investigation stems from the fact that the researcher acts as both participant and observer. A survey, for example, is an instrument that can provide a researcher rich information about demographics, political opinions, economic activities, and many other things. A survey can yield a multitude of useful information but must be well designed and administered properly. The benefit of a survey instrument is that it can be carried out fairly quickly and it may even be conducted at a distance using standard or electronic means of communication such as telephones, mail, or through the Internet.

Other disciplines that study human beings, particularly psychology, have intermittently used detached observation as a research method (Creswell, 1994). This approach places the researcher as a usually removed or detached entity. They are often either observing from a distance or looking through a video lens. It is necessary that the researcher does not directly interact with the participants so there is little or no chance of influencing the situation or subjects under investigation. Detached observation gives the researcher the ability to see how different individuals respond to certain stimuli and either react or problem-solve in the process. These are usually very controlled environments with very little variables to account for.

Ethnography is not like that. Much of the ethnographic process is as an active participant coupled with passive observation. It also has hundreds of uncontrollable variables and situations that could arise. The benefit of ethnography is that it can reveal and recount varying types of information that would not necessarily be readily obtainable through a more detached approach such as observations or surveys. Ethnography allows the researcher to collect and analyze the most relevant conditions or categories regarding the group being studied. The focus of the ethnographic method is on local styles of thought and mannerisms. Ethnography gives the researcher the ability to not only observe what is going on, but to also experience the events, interactions, conflicts, and rituals as manifestations of the larger group or culture under investigation.

Ethnography may capture the disarray of the culture or group under study. It is straightforward in the sense that although the ethnographer has to relinquish much of the control over the research situation, it allows the researcher the opportunity to study first-hand and get an accurate grasp of the behavior under investigation. Murchison (2010) argued that "ethnography allows the researcher to examine how people's actions compare to what they say about their actions in ideal situations and their thoughts or opinions on particular topics". Different outcomes can generate research questions that emerge out of researchers trying to account for apparent disparities. Sometimes researchers must turn their attention to variables or questions that did not seem relevant at first (Anderson, 1994; Bryman, 2004; Murchison, 2010; Tombro, 2016).

The ethnographer's existence in the research site fosters questions about whether they can remain objective. The idea that the ethnographer is both participant and observer is an inherent contradiction of terms. It brings into questions whether or not it can be turned into a generalizable study of behavior as another researcher may not be able to duplicate the study with the same specificity as the first. This brings into question the idea of ethics in ethnographic research. How does the individuals under investigation interact with or react to the individual ethnographer on site? These considerations are important matters when designing and conducting the ethnographer's research plan. Ethnographers share different attitudes about topics. So, when designing a study, the researcher must acknowledge that there may be the need to further explore questions that may arise or devise strategies to make sense for the individual researcher's goals (Alasuutari, 1995; Anderson, 2004; Murchison, 2010; Tombro, 2016). This does not bring into question the validity of ethnography, but rather, demonstrates that its very nature is powerful and potentially precarious.

## Employing Ethnography

Contemporary ethnography evolved over time into a methodical and useful research tool. Critics of classical ethnography started to question early ethnographer's reliance on models that assumed equality and balance. The discussion centered on whether early ethnography could claim to be objective and avoided bringing personal biases into the mix. A review of classic studies demonstrated that strands of personal bias infiltrated many of the assumptions made by earlier social scientists. It was argued that more was needed to ensure that contemporary ethnographers addressed and checked their own personal biases prior to approaching their subjects under study and that they must consider the ethical responsibilities they had with the people they worked with (Ladner, 2014; Murchison, 2010; Van Manned, 2003).

There has been vigorous debate over the subject of the ethnographic approach. Anthropology and sociology are no longer the only disciplines that choose the ethnographic method as a way to collect rich and detailed first-hand knowledge of a group or culture under investigation. Rather, there is an increase in its acceptance across the globe and within studies about urban or rural communities in action (Murchison, 2010). Ethnography does not only mean traveling to remote areas or small rural communities. There is an increased recognition for the utility of capturing cultural and social phenomena using the ethnographic approach. As sociologists utilize ethnography more to capture the ways of industrialized and urban communities, there is more debate on the validity of the earlier classic studies. This critique on earlier ethnography has affected some to pursue ethnography as a contemporary practice. The ethnographic projects verified that researchers could successfully use ethnography in both urban and industrialized research scenarios. This paradigm shift made ethnographic research more acceptable locally. Contemporary ethnographers found that ethnography allowed the researchers to study particular groups and subjects that were not already researched using more traditional methods such as surveys.

## Identifying Bias in the Research Process

The ethnographer's role as a passive observer can be difficult if they choose a field site where they have little knowledge of the local language or customs. In this instance, the researcher runs the risk of making serious mistakes and will have to learn from them quickly. Ethnographic research requires that the researcher adopt a participant-observer role and not bring in any personal bias as to the possible outcomes of the project.

The ethnographer may have a more difficult time planning their research because the process necessitates solid preparation and purpose while entailing the researcher act as an active participant and passive observer at the same time. Ethnographic research takes place over an extended period of weeks, months, or years and requires that the participant-observer maintain an objective, detached attitude. The parameters surrounding ethnography suggest that the researcher should not intentionally redirect or influence the environment or participants under study. One challenge the ethnographer must face is that, while the researcher maintains a neutral unbiased stance, their direct participation in the environment draws them in on a personal level. This happens when their own lived experience mixes with the environment over time and they react to the subjects and environment involved (Alasuutari, 1995; Murchison, 2010; Tombro, 2016).

To achieve their research goals in capturing the personal experiences of a society or culture in action, the ethnographer must become involved on a personal level to some degree. It has been acknowledged that participant-observation involves the researcher acquire first-hand lived experience regarding the subjects under investigation which may cause the ethnographer to involuntarily abandon their objective viewpoint over time. When this happens, the ethnographer could experience social or cultural empathy that might influence the conclusions garnered about the culture or group under study. The researcher must bear in mind that they should try and not prejudge anyone or situation they observe (Bryman, 2004; Emerson et al., 1997; Murchison, 2010; Tombro, 2016).

While all this may be necessary, there is the opposite assumption that a researcher who becomes a "participant" cannot maintain the ability to capture and acknowledge the larger picture. Instead, the ethnographer may absorb the experience of events and may not have the ability to remain objective once they have immersed themselves in the study long term. This can occur when concentrated experiences and emotions have actively ensued over a prolonged time period. The first-hand experience of the ethnographer can change the long-term perception of their environment when they continue to act as a participant-observer long term (Ladner, 2014; Murchison, 2010).

## Summary

The goal of ethnography is to improve insight into cultural and shared group behaviors and understand the cultural relationships and processes that create behavior. An experienced ethnographer will have a well thought out research plan of action prior to collecting distinctive types of information using varying techniques. Earlier ethnographic research studies made assumptions about the culture under investigation. Especially when traveling to isolated groups or areas they considered relatively static cultures. When ethnography evolved over time, present-day ethnographers uncovered inconsistencies across early studies, which led them to question the validity of classic ethnography.

The early ethnographers were considered the authoritative experts on the group under study. However, that research lacked in detail how the data was collected. What method did they use? Early ethnographers framed the researcher as authorities and made sure that their research study told a good story.

Remember, the ethnographer as a researcher is both an active participant and passive observer. Terms that may contradict one another. A practiced ethnographer needs to manage these competing inconsistencies (Murchison, 2010, Schensul & LeCompte, 2017, Tombro, 2016). Ethnography is a unique method that gives the researcher an insider's view into the culture or group in action. Participating directly on-site to take notes, create maps and images, or to have conversations with participants, affords the ethnographer the ability to evolve over the duration of the process. The challenge over time becomes trying to maintain a passive observer role while becoming more accustomed to the local customs, rituals, symbols, and practices (Murchison, 2010; Tombro, 2016).

Ethnography captures the essence of the human existence. It is straightforward in process and gives the ethnographer unfettered access to the group under study. Ethnographers need to keep in mind that they have to relinquish a lot of the control over the research process in order to avoid bringing in personal bias and clouding the results of the study. The advantage of this process to the ethnographer is that the researcher themselves are allowed access to study first-hand and to gain a first-hand understanding about the behavior under investigation. Ethnography allows the researcher to reconcile what people's actions demonstrate compared with what they say about their actions (Murchison, 2010).

## Chapter Overview

- Defining ethnography
- A brief history behind ethnography
- Trends in today's ethnography
- Exploring the ethnographic method as first-hand research
- Recognizing the ethnographer as research instrument
- Understanding how the ethnographer as participant-observer partners with study participants

**Keywords:**

- Ethnography
- Research strategy
- Participant-observer
- Research subjects
- Bias
- Mapping
- Objectivity
- Building rapport
- Validity

## Chapter Questions

1. What was the significance of a rise in the use of the ethnographic method?
2. What are some of the differences between early ethnography and contemporary ethnography? What are the potential problems that stemmed from early ethnographic accounts?
3. What key feature is missing in the early work?
4. Why did most early ethnographers choose only one elder male to speak for the rest of the group and then make assumptions about the group based from on encounters alone?
5. In what ways was early ethnographic work problematic or inconsistent?
6. In what was has ethnography evolved in contemporary ethnographic research methods?
7. What main characteristics in ethnography are different from other research strategies in the social sciences?
8. Do you believe ethnography is a good way to collect data?
9. In your opinion, do you think social scientists would choose ethnography as a means to pursue a study?
10. How does the ethnographer function as research instrument?
11. What should an ethnographer do to nurture a better rapport between ethnographer and participant?
12. What are the most positive elements of ethnographic research methods?

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# Thinking Like an Ethnographer

Kristina Baines

## Background and History

Learning to conduct ethnographic research means more than simply learning about the different ethnographic methods and putting them into action. To gather data ethnographically, we say we need to use ourselves--our bodies and our minds--as the tool of data collection. Ethnographers use their five senses to observe human behavior and write about what they observe, however, they need to develop those senses to help them collect accurate data. Part of this process is developing what is called the "ethnographic mindset." As mentioned in the previous chapter, anthropologists have been instrumental in history in developing what we think of when we talk about an ethnographic mindset.

Franz Boas is an important historic figure in our consideration of how an ethnographer should think. Boas is credited with developing the concept of cultural relativity, which forms the core of the ethnographic mindset. Cultural relativity, or cultural relativism, is the understanding that certain cultures and societies are not superior to others, but rather they are just different. Before his research studies, it was common for scholars to assume that Western societies were superior to non-Western societies, for example, small, indigenous communities living in remote locations. Making observations without assuming that one culture, society or group is better or worse than another is the key to being a cultural relativist and critical to thinking like an ethnographer.

In 1899, Boas became the first ever Professor of Anthropology at Columbia University in New York City, where he worked for 41 years. During that time, he mentored many ethnographers, including Zora Neale Hurston and Margaret Mead. Hurston was the first black woman to graduate from Barnard College and used her ethnographic research about folklore to write famous novels and essays about African American culture from a detailed, rich and positive perspective. Mead also became well known both inside and outside of academic circles for her work with the youth in Samoa. She used ethnographic research to challenge ideas held in the United States and Europe that all teenagers experienced a period of "storm and stress" and that this was something that was universal and not limited to one culture or society. She found that the "teen angst" that her culture assumed was present everywhere was not present in Samoa. Without an ethnographic mindset, Mead would have likely assumed that the teenagers in Samoa would be behaving in similar ways to those she grew up around in the US. Her work helped researchers and the general public understand the value of ethnography and the importance of cultural relativism.

## Operationalizing the Ethnographic Mindset

The ethnographic mindset is grounded in the concept of cultural relativism, however, it takes many steps and training to truly "step out" of your own culture and be an impartial observer of behavior that might be very different from your Below,.   we outline several key qualities and steps that will help in working to develop the ethnographic mindset.

1. No Judgment

Most people if asked if they were  judgmental would probably say "no."   , however, we make small judgments every day as part of our daily lives. Have you ever been riding the bus or the train and thought someone was strangely dressed? How about thinking someone at a restaurant was speaking too loudly? Or eating in an impolite way? These are simply everyday judgments based on what your culture has taught you is normal to do. These cultural norms are learned from family, friends, school, the media, etc. from a very early age and we rarely question them or consider them as judgments. However, in order to really develop an ethnographic way of thinking, we need to focus on not passing judgment about what we observe and instead simply observe and describe it. For example, if you observe a person in a restaurant eating with her hands, you might write, "there was a disgusting mess on her fingers." This observation passes judgment. Instead, a developed ethnographic mind might write, "there was food extending down each finger and onto the palms of her hands. A napkin was visible on the table but not used." A good rule of thumb is to consider what happened and not what you think of it (not yet anyway- the analysis comes later).

2. Act like an Alien
   It can be a helpful exercise to try and think about what it would be like to be from another planet on Earth to observe humans. Pretend that you know nothing about human behavior- nothing about what humans are supposed to do or how they are supposed to act. This way, you can attempt to really step out of all you have assumed or been taught throughout your life and really just see things for what they are. Of course, it is almost impossible to completely forget everything you know but you can practice by focusing on everyday, mundane activities and try seeing details you have never noticed before because you take them for granted.

Example activity:  Take a ride in an elevator. As you climb the floors, watch the people who get in and out. Pretend you are an alien and have never ridden in an elevator before. What do you notice? What are people doing? Do they do similar or different things from each other? Do they notice you? Try this activity with and without a notebook to write down your observations. Is there any difference in how people behave toward you? This activity will help you notice ordinary actions in a different way.

3. Be an Insider and an Outsider
   It is important to really step outside of your culture and develop the perspective of an alien looking in without judgment. It also important, however, to develop an insider perspective at the same time. To really understand a community or a culture, it is important to understand what motivates and drives that community. It is difficult to be an outsider and an insider at the same time- to look in and observe but to also be a part of the action. Good ethnographers will develop the ability to understand when each perspective is valuable. For example, if you are researching the role of dance in Garifuna ceremonies, it is important to sit back and watch the different parts of the ceremony with respect. It is also important to participate in the dance if the community invites you so that you can deeply understand the rules and the moves involved in the dance. Thinking like an ethnographer means being willing to both sit back and observe and to join in the action, AND trying to understand which action is appropriate at which time.

4. Holistic and Immersive
   Thinking like an ethnographer relies on seeing details but it also takes a broad view of human behavior. Anthropologists often say that they study humans "across time and

space" and it is important to keep the big picture of human behavior in mind when conducting ethnographic research. Developing the ethnographic mindset includes fostering an interest in how the details connect to each other to form the whole view of a community or culture. Often, this view is formed by ethnographers immersing themselves in the community. Immersion means that you spend some time surrounded by the everyday practices where you are focusing your research and take into account details that may not seem directly related to your research at first. In contrast to conducting a survey, as an example, collecting ethnographic data is enriched by spending extended periods of time in a community and really understanding the context for the observations, interviews and other data to be collected. Traditionally, ethnographers spend at least a year living and researching in a community in order to fully immerse themselves in the details of daily life. We might not have a year, a month or even more than an hour to do an assignment or conduct our research but we can still keep in mind how we can go deeper and be more holistic in our study rather than skimming the surface.

5. Awareness
   The ethnographic mindset includes a heightened sense of awareness about what is happening around you. Being aware of your surroundings, the context of what is going on around you and how people are considering and affected by your presence is an important piece of the ethnographic puzzle. Ethnographers can never "check out" as they will never know what small detail will become important to understanding what they are studying. As an ethnographer, there is no "time off" and you are always "on" as you observe and engage.

6. Openness and Curiosity
   Ethnographic thinking is characterized by an openness to the process of exploration and a curiosity about the process of discovery. Ethnographers should not enter a fieldwork situation already knowing exactly what they want to find and how they are going to find it. While they are often guided by a broad research question, they should strive to be open to new ideas and directions that the research takes them in. Exploring unexpected ideas that arise and being open to thoughts the community members participating in the research have about the direction of the inquiry are critical to thinking like an ethnographer. While sometimes frustrating at first, unexpected avenues to explore can really enrich the research and produce new and useful knowledge.

7. Empathy and Humility
   In order to understand another person, it is valuable to develop empathy for that person. You can do this by trying to put yourself in that person's shoes and consider their choices from their own perspective, not from yours. This is a difficult task but critical to the development of the ethnographic mindset. One focus, which makes the process of developing empathy easier, is to develop your own sense of humility. When you work on allowing yourself to understand that your perspective is not better or greater than anyone else's, but simply different, you help to open your mind to different ways of seeing and thinking about the world. This is key to understanding and can help in doing ethnographic research- but also in navigating a complicated and diverse world.

Example activity: Honing empathy skills can be challenging, particularly when we are conducting research with people in communities different from our own (of course, it can be challenging even with those closest to us!). To practice empathy, engage in an activity that you would not normally do. This may be as simple as riding the bus or preparing a meal. Before you actually engage in the activity, write a short paragraph about what you expect the experience to be like. After participating, write your answers to the following questions: How did engaging in that activity make you feel? How was this the same or different from what you anticipated? How did this activity help you understand the value of empathy in doing ethnography?

## Moving Forward

Keeping these qualities and examples in mind will help prepare you as a researcher to engage in the methods described in detail later in this book. Training yourself to have an ethnographic mindset does not happen overnight. It takes focus and practice to really step outside your own culture and be an open, empathetic observer without making assumptions and passing judgment. With some preparation, however, the results of the ethnographic research are likely to be richer in detail and accuracy.

## In Summary

- Thinking like an ethnographer requires training yourself to observe the details of a culture or community without passing judgment.
- The concept of cultural relativism, first developed by Franz Boas, means that each culture should be evaluated only by its own standards and not by the standards of the observer's own culture, and this guides ethnographic thinking.
- Empathy, humility, openness, curiosity and the ability to separate yourself from your own cultural norms are all qualities that good ethnographic thinkers develop

## Key Questions

1. What do you think are the benefits of conducting ethnographic research in the culture or community you are already part of? What are the challenges?

2. What do you think are the benefits of conducting ethnographic research in a culture or community that is different from the one you are part of? What are the challenges?

3. Which quality do you think is most important in thinking like an ethnographer? Why did you select this one?

4. Why can it be challenging to practice cultural relativism?

5. How does thinking like an ethnographer help you collect different data than a survey, for example?

## Key Terms

- Cultural Relativism
- Ethnocentrism
- Cultural Norms
- Immersion
- Empathy
- Western/Non-Western

## Resources

https://www.ted.com/talks/tricia_wang_the_human_insights_missing_from_big_data/transcript

https://blog.simonassociates.net/podcast/043-jay-hasbrouck-thinking-like-an-anthropologist

# Autoethnography

Alia R.Tyner-Mullings

While it is an ethnographic method on its own, an **autoethnography** can also be a good place to begin an ethnographic investigation. Through it, you can begin to situate yourself within the larger structural and social system. It allows you to explore your own positionality before you begin to examine the lives of others as an autothenography is a way to turn ethnography on yourself and to learn about your life in the same way you might learn about someone else's. The process of creating an autoethnography allows you to be reflective on what makes you who you are and how you came to be. Through this process, an authoethnography can also help you to look at the larger context in which you live. [1]

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005). This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others (Spry, 2001) and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product.[2]

## History of Autoethnography

So how did autoethnography come to be? In the 1980s, scholars introduced new and abundant opportunities to reform social science and reconceive the objectives and forms of social science inquiry. Scholars became increasingly troubled by social science's ontological, epistemological, and axiological limitations (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Furthermore, there was an increasing need to resist colonialist, sterile research impulses of authoritatively entering a culture, exploiting cultural members, and then recklessly leaving to write about the culture for monetary and/or professional gain, while disregarding relational ties to cultural members (Conquergood, 1991; Ellis, 2007; Riedmann, 1993).

Gradually, scholars across a wide spectrum of disciplines began to consider what social sciences would become if they were closer to literature than to physics, if they proffered stories rather than theories, and if they were self-consciously **value-centered** rather than pretending to be value free (Bochner, 1994). Many of these scholars turned to autoethnography because they were seeking a positive response to critiques of canonical ideas about what research is and how research should be done. In particular, they wanted to concentrate on ways of producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience, research that would sensitize readers to issues of identity politics, to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnographers recognize the innumerable ways personal experience influences the research process. For instance, a researcher decides who, what, when, where, and how to research, decisions necessarily tied to institutional requirements (e.g., Institutional Review Boards), resources (e.g., funding), and personal circumstance (e.g., a researcher studying cancer because of personal experience with cancer). A researcher may also

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[1] In order to make this book as relevant to our students as possible, the author added this paragraph

[2] Ellis, Carolyn; Adams, Tony E. & Bochner, Arthur P. (2010). Autoethnography: An Overview [40 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *12*(1), Art. 10, http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101108

change names and places for protection (Fine, 1993), compress years of research into a single text, and construct a study in a pre-determined way (e.g., using an introduction, literature review, methods section, findings, and conclusion; Tullis Owen, McRae, Adams & Vitale, 2009). Even though some researchers still assume that research can be done from a neutral, impersonal, and objective stance (Atkinson, 1997; Buzard, 2003; Delamont, 2009), most now recognize that such an assumption is not tenable (Bochner, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Rorty, 1982). Consequently, autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist.

Furthermore, scholars began recognizing that different kinds of people possess different assumptions about the world—a multitude of ways of speaking, writing, valuing and believing—and that conventional ways of doing and thinking about research were narrow, limiting, and parochial. These differences can stem from race (Anzaldúa, 1987; Boylorn, 2006; Davis, 2009), gender (Blair, Brown & Baxter, 1994; Keller, 1995), sexuality (Foster, 2008; Glave, 2005), age (Dossa, 1999; Paulson & Willig, 2008), ability (Couser, 1997; Gerber, 1996), class (Hooks, 2000; Dykins Callahan, 2008), education (Delpit, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999), or religion (Droogsma, 2007; Minkowitz, 1995). Often, those who advocate and insist on canonical forms of doing and writing research are advocating a White, masculine, heterosexual, middle/upper-classed, Christian, cis-gendered and able-bodied perspective. Following these conventions, a researcher not only disregards other ways of knowing but also implies that other ways are unsatisfactory and invalid. Autoethnography, on the other hand, expands and opens up a wider lens on the world, eschewing rigid definitions of what constitutes meaningful and useful research; this approach also helps us understand how the kinds of people we claim, or are perceived, to be influence interpretations of what we study, how we study it, and what we say about our topic (Adams, 2005; Wood, 2009).

## The Structure of Autoethnographies

As described above, autoethnography combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography and in writing an autobiography, an author retroactively and selectively writes about past experiences. Usually, the author does not live through these experiences solely to make them part of a published document; rather, these experiences are assembled using hindsight (Bruner, 1993; Denzin, 1989, Freeman, 2004). In writing, the author also may interview others as well as consult with texts like photographs, journals, and recordings to help with recall (Delany, 2004; Didion, 2005; Goodall, 2006; Herrmann, 2005).

Most often, autobiographers write about **"epiphanies"**—remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person's life (Bochner & Ellis, 1992; Couser, 1997; Denzin, 1989), times of existential crises that forced a person to attend to and analyze lived experience (Zaner, 2004), and events after which life does not seem quite the same. While epiphanies are self-claimed phenomena in which one person may consider an experience transformative while another may not, these epiphanies reveal ways a person could negotiate "intense situations" and "effects that linger—recollections, memories, images, feelings—long after a crucial incident is supposedly finished" (Bochner, 1984, p.595). This is one justification for focusing the autoethnography on a student’s path to college and how they arrived at our school like we do at Guttman Community College. When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity. However, in addition to telling their audiences about experiences, autoethnographers often are required by social science publishing conventions to analyze these experiences. As Mitch Allen says, an autoethnographer must

> "look at experience analytically. Otherwise [you're] telling [your] story—and that's nice—but people do that on Oprah [a U.S.-based television program] every day. Why is your story more valid than anyone else's? What makes your story more valid is that you are a researcher. You have a set of theoretical and methodological tools and a research literature to use. That's your advantage. If you can't frame it around these tools and literature and just frame it as 'my story,' then why or how should I privilege your story over anyone else's I see 25 times a day on TV?" (personal interview, May 4, 2006)[3]

Autoethnographers must not only use their methodological tools and research literature to analyze experience, but also must consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies; they must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders. To accomplish this might require comparing and contrasting personal experience against existing research (RONAI, 1995, 1996), interviewing cultural members (Foster, 2006; Marvasti, 2006; Tillmann-Healy, 2001), and/or examining relevant cultural artifacts (Boylorn, 2008; Denzin, 2006).

In her piece "Evaluating Ethnography," Laurel Richardson examines the divide that has persisted between literary and scientific writing (253). This is similar to the division that has existed between academic and personal writing. She notes the "oxymoronic" naming of genres that have tried to bridge this gap, thus blurring distinctions among categories such as "creative nonfiction; faction; ethnographic fiction; the nonfiction novel; and true fiction" (253). And she seeks to lay out the criteria she uses to judge ethnography's success.[4]

In attempting to create new standards that allow writers to move more freely in their ethnographic work, Richardson establishes the following as important evaluative criteria. She believes the work should: make a substantive contribution, have aesthetic merit, have reflexivity, make an impact, and express a reality (254). In this way, Richardson intends to show the related nature of scientific research and creative expression.

Arthur Bochner responds to Richardson in "Criteria Against Ourselves" and sets up his own evaluation criteria for what he terms "alternative ethnography," another name often assigned to ethnography that deviates from traditional social science norms. He sees alternative ethnographies as "narratives of the self" that "extract meaning from experience rather than depict experience exactly as it was lived" (270). When looking at this personal writing, he wants abundant concrete detail, structurally complex narratives, emotional credibility, a tale of two selves, and ethical self-consciousness (270-71).

In "Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Emotionally About Our Lives," Carolyn Ellis describes her gradual departure from traditional sociological methods into an approach that is more personally meaningful. She achieves this balance in her writing by using multiple voices, starting and restarting to establish her point of view through both analysis and storytelling. "I made myself begin again in an autoethnographic voice that concentrates on telling a personal, evocative story to provoke others' stories and adds blood and tissue to the abstract bones of the

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[3] Ellis, Carolyn; Adams, Tony E. & Bochner, Arthur P. (2010). Autoethnography: An Overview [40 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *12*(1), Art. 10, http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101108

theoretical discourse" (117). Throughout the piece, she clearly establishes a point of view, which she emphasizes in many of her works about autoethnography, "I think that sociology can be emotional, personal, therapeutic, interesting, engaging, evocative, reflexive, helpful, concrete, and connected to the world of everyday experience" (120). She aims to be true to her feelings, move away from time ordered structures and convey her emotions (128).

Ellis draws on interviews, notes, conversations, and diaries to construct her writing and seeks to find herself in the context of a larger world. "The inner workings of the self must be investigated in reciprocal relationship with the other: concrete action, dialogue, emotion, and thinking are featured, but they are represented within relationships and institutions, very much impacted by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, thought, and language" (133).

She seeks to find value in autoethnography through the impact it has on her audience. "A story's 'validity' can be judged by whether it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is authentic and lifelike, believable and possible; the story's generalizability can be judged by whether it speaks to readers about their experience" (133). She believes that by sharing stories this way, we open up a world that allows others to share their stories (134).

To accomplish this, your first attempt at autoethngraphy might begin with Allen's simple retelling of a "story". This story connects with something powerful in your life and may lead you to a particular conclusion about how your individual world works and how that is affected by larger social institutions. If you are able to do multiple drafts, the opportunity for reflection grows and the connection to larger social institutions is more easily made.[5]

## Preparing for the Autoethnograhy

In writing an autoethnography, you will be asked to analyze your epiphany, position in the subculture or the educational path you are currently on as well as the positioning of others and how it might affect your perspective. Autoethnographic analysis in this case might include interviewing other members of the subculture, conducting field observation, analyzing textual materials, investigating histories, and engaging in self-reflection. Previous involvement in or attachment to a subculture provides a vested interest in the project, a sense of authority, and a position from which to analyze.[6]

When conducting autoethnographic research, as opposed to traditional ethnographic research, you start out with a certain amount of knowledge about the subculture or epiphany you are investigating because you have some expertise about it. At the same time, because it is necessary to explain the subculture to those who are unfamiliar with it, you must also learn how to translate that knowledge to an outside audience. In addition, when considering any observations you might make, you need to look at the subculture afresh and describe elements you may have taken for granted. You must account for rituals, language and subtleties that make it operate as something unique and situated. You might consider interviewing members of the subculture who inhabit a different position than you do, and you can also gather new perspectives from insiders that will help you to further articulate your own ideas and question your own authority in communicating exactly what the subculture is. Interviewing and conducting observations can both empower you and decenter you from your own experience,

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forcing you to question and revise your representation of your experience to an intended audience (your instructor and classmates, who may see this writing at multiple stages).[7]

When you draw on visceral experiences as well as textual evidence, it can also create a richer understanding of the subculture and an ethical responsibility to convey its multiple facets and to avoid being reductive. This can increase your understanding and involvement in the subculture and produce a new appreciation for an activity that perhaps had been an unexamined part of your life outside the classroom. In this way, the writing carries an impact that extends beyond the scope of the assignment and its evaluation against classroom standards.

One of the first steps you want to take in preparing for your autoethnograpy is to determine its structure. An autoethnography assignment will generally provide you with an overall question, a particular subculture or epiphany or a series of smaller questions related to an overall theme. You should pay close attention to what is being asked of you including what you will need to submit, the research required to complete it and what the differences are between any subsequent drafts.  At Guttman, we generally begin with an exercise that helps you to think about your path to college. This might be a brainstorm, a list of questions or an exploration of your own notes, posts, assignments or journal entries.[8]

## Collecting data for your autoethnography

If you have not been provided a list of questions, you may need to develop your own. In this case, you will need to review whichever aspect of your world your professor has asked you to examine and any experiences, people and artifacts that are related.[9]

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|---|
| At Guttman, we focus on the general question "How Did I Get Here?" and ask you to reflect on your unique experiences, positions and perspectives in this world. You should think about who were the people that lead you to this college? What has happened with your schooling and work experiences, your family and friends, your spiritual/religious beliefs, and/or your neighborhoods that brought you to Guttman?<br><br>For your autoethnography, you will think deeply about your own understanding of how you got to Guttman—the people, places and experiences in your life that led you to New York, to Guttman, through your first year and to a possible major and career. This is called an autoethnography because the primary source of analysis is your experience and perceptions of the events in your life.  Your introduction should engage readers with your story and your purpose of writing and your conclusion should state your main findings about your path to Guttman and reflect more broadly on how your experience may indicate larger ideas/experiences/structures in our social world.<br>Some professors may also ask you to consider the following questions:<br>1. How do your experiences reflect broader societal issues about education? |


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[9] In order to make this book  as relevant to our students as possible, the author added this paragraph

2. How does race, socio-economic class, gender and other aspects of identity play out in your narrative?
3. What is important about the main challenges and opportunities you experienced?
4. What is the role of social institutions—such as family, schools, religion, etc--and your pathway to Guttman?

The structure of your autoethnography should be similar to how you might write up an ethnography. This will generally include one or more narrative stories that describe the particular aspects of your subculture or epiphany that are referred to in your assignment. You might include pictures or images that capture your experiences. As part of this assignment, you may find it useful to speak to family or friends who might also have insight into those parts of your life, examining journals, photos and pictures to collect information can also provide information.

As you think about your autoethnography, you must also understand that memory is fallible. As a rule, people remember only a very small amount of what they experience. If this were not true, we would not be able to function on a daily basis. Consider whether you have a memory of something that others dispute—maybe something that happened in childhood or an experience with a friend on which you disagree about what actually occurred.

It is important to establish that just because memories differ does not mean they are invalid. There is a fine line between remembering something to the best of our ability and willfully misremembering something. Talking to others who were involved in memories, if possible, can be helpful in fleshing out details. . Since memory is fallible, interviewing others who were present at important events, speaking to multiple people directly involved in the memories or reading journals or other first-hand accounts can be an important part of the writing. It may come as a surprise that writing about your own life can require research.[10]

Once you have your data, you want to begin to organize it. There are two general ways to organize your autoethnography—chronologically and by theme. If you are describing your path to or through something, you will likely want to write this chronologically. You should begin with the earliest event, person or activity and share a story or multiple stories through to the current time.[11]

If you are not writing your essay as building up to something or this is later draft that includes some analysis or examination of social institutions, you might want to organize your paper by theme. In this case, you might collect particular examples that share a particular pattern or connect to a theme.

## Ethnographic Narratives

The forms of autoethnography also differ in how much emphasis is placed on the study of others, the researcher's self and interaction with others, traditional analysis, and the interview context, as well as on power relationships.[12] Many assignments in a class are likely to focus more


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on the self but others might ask you to pull on data outside of your own experiences. These are built off of different structures of ethnographic research and the ways in which narratives are composed.[13]

Indigenous/native ethnographies, for example, develop from colonized or economically subordinated people, and are used to address and disrupt power in research, particularly a (outside) researcher's right and authority to study (exotic) others. Once at the service of the (White, masculine, heterosexual, middle/upper-classed, Christian, cis-gendered, able-bodied) ethnographer, indigenous/native ethnographers now work to construct their own personal and cultural stories; they no longer find (forced) subjugation excusable (see Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008).[14]

Narrative ethnographies refer to texts presented in the form of stories that incorporate the ethnographer's experiences into the ethnographic descriptions and analysis of others. Here the emphasis is on the ethnographic study of others, which is accomplished partly by attending to encounters between the narrator and members of the groups being studied (Tedlock, 1991), and the narrative often intersects with analyses of patterns and processes.

Reflexive, dyadic interviews focus on the interactively produced meanings and emotional dynamics of the interview itself. Though the focus is on the participant and her or his story, the words, thoughts, and feelings of the researcher also are considered, e.g., personal motivation for doing a project, knowledge of the topics discussed, emotional responses to an interview, and ways in which the interviewer may have been changed by the process of interviewing. Even though the researcher's experience isn't the main focus, personal reflection adds context and layers to the story being told about participants (Ellis, 2004).

Reflexive ethnographies document ways a researcher changes as a result of doing fieldwork. Reflexive/narrative ethnographies exist on a continuum ranging from starting research from the ethnographer's biography, to the ethnographer studying her or his life alongside cultural members' lives, to ethnographic memoirs (Ellis, 2004, p.50) or "confessional tales" (Van Maanen, 1988) where the ethnographer's backstage research endeavors become the focus of investigation (Ellis, 2004).

Layered accounts often focus on the author's experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature. This form emphasizes the procedural nature of research. Similar to grounded theory, layered accounts illustrate how "data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously" (Charmaz, 1983, p.110) and frame existing research as a "source of questions and comparisons" rather than a "measure of truth" (p.117). But unlike grounded theory, layered accounts use vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection (Ellis, 1991) to "invoke" readers to enter into the "emergent experience" of doing and writing research (Ronai, 1992, p.123), conceive of identity as an "emergent process" (Rambo, 2005, p.583), and consider evocative, concrete texts to be as important as abstract analyses (Ronai, 1995, 1996).

Interactive interviews provide an "in-depth and intimate understanding of people's experiences with emotionally charged and sensitive topics" (Ellis, Kiesinger & Tillmann-Healy, 1997, p.121). Interactive interviews are collaborative endeavors between researchers and participants, research activities in which researchers and participants—one and the same—probe together about issues that transpire, in conversation, about particular topics (e.g., eating

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disorders). Interactive interviews usually consist of multiple interview sessions, and, unlike traditional one-on-one interviews with strangers, are situated within the context of emerging and well-established relationships among participants and interviewers (Adams, 2008). The emphasis in these research contexts is on what can be learned from interaction within the interview setting as well as on the stories that each person brings to the research encounter (Mey & Mruck, 2010).

Similar to interactive interviews, community autoethnographies use the personal experience of researchers-in-collaboration to illustrate how a community manifests particular social/cultural issues (e.g., whiteness; Toyosaki, Pensoneau-Conway, Wendt & Leathers, 2009). Community autoethnographies thus not only facilitate "community-building" research practices but also make opportunities for "cultural and social intervention" possible (p.59; see Kardorff & Schönberger, 2010).

Co-constructed narratives illustrate the meanings of relational experiences, particularly how people collaboratively cope with the ambiguities, uncertainties, and contradictions of being friends, family, and/or intimate partners. Co-constructed narratives view relationships as jointly-authored, incomplete, and historically situated affairs. Joint activity structures co-constructed research projects. Often told about or around an epiphany, each person first writes her or his experience, and then shares and reacts to the story the other wrote at the same time (see Bochner & Ellis, 1995; Toyosaki & Pensoneau, 2005; Vande berg & Trujillo, 2008).

Generally, the autoethnographies you will write for classes will be personal narratives--stories about authors who view themselves as the phenomenon and write evocative narratives specifically focused on their academic, research, and personal lives (e.g., Berry, 2007; Goodall, 2006; Poulos, 2008; Tillmann, 2009). These often are the most controversial forms of autoethnography for traditional social scientists, especially if they are not accompanied by more traditional analysis and/or connections to scholarly literature. Personal narratives propose to understand a self or some aspect of a life as it intersects with a cultural context, connect to other participants as co-researchers, and invite readers to enter the author's world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives (Ellis, 2004, p.46)

Even if it is not assigned, an autoethnography can be a good exercise before embarking on ethnographic research. It allows you to begin to think like an ethnographer with familiar data. It can also provide space for you to began to think about your perspectives on a particular research subject, as well as your biases and blindspots. In addition, the reflective purposes it serves can be invaluable in moving your own research forward.[15]

a. Outlining the overall structure
   Come up with a name that isn't "how I got here" "my trip here" "Why I'm here" Something reflective of the paper.
b. Writing an introduction
c. Writing a conclusion
d. Revision
   Revise your document by incorporating any and all edits on your previous draft and make sure that you have an introduction and a conclusion. You also should make sure that the new paragraphs fit with the paper as a whole.

2. Learning from your autoethnography

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a. Re-coding your autoethnography
You will also be expected to return to and revise your first autoethnography to ensure that it fits your additions and to add more information covering your first year. This may also include information from reflections or work in any of your other classes. You will also do the ethnographic coding that you have learned since your previous autoethnography and describe the themes and patterns that emerged.
Read through the entire paper and pull out the theoretical notes. What are the patterns in your life? The people, places, attitudes and/or opinions that have had an effect on your life? Select at least three theoretical notes and describe their importance to you.

Chapter Summary

- Autoethnography is a reflective practice that allows the researcher to use their own experience in understanding social phenomena
- The researcher may need to consult sources outside of themselves
- A researcher can do an autoethnography on their own experiences but can also ask research subjects to do them on themselves

Key Terms

- Autoethnography
- Value-centered
- Epiphanies

Questions

1. How has autoethnography been used over time?
2. If you had to develop three themes that illustrated your life so far, what would they be and what epiphanies led to them or are a result of them?
3. How should autoethnographies be organized?

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Research Ethics
Alia R. Tyner-Mullings

Practicing sociologists and sociology students have a lot to consider when conducting research. Researchers must try to be skillful and fair-minded in their work, especially as it relates to their human subjects. Researchers must obtain participants' informed consent and inform subjects of the responsibilities and risks of research before they agree to partake. During a study, sociologists must also ensure the safety of participants and immediately stop work if a subject becomes potentially endangered on any level. This chapter will discuss some of the ways this happens and what happens when it does not.

Researchers are required to protect the privacy of research participants whenever possible. Even if pressured by authorities, such as police or courts, researchers are not ethically allowed to release confidential information. Researchers also must make results available to other sociologists, must make public all sources of financial support, and must not accept funding from any organization that might cause a conflict of interest or seek to influence the research results for its own purposes. The American Sociological Association, or ASA, maintains a **code of ethics**—formal guidelines for conducting sociological research—consisting of principles and ethical standards to be used in the discipline. It also describes procedures for filing, investigating, and resolving complaints of unethical conduct. The ASA's ethical considerations shape not only the study but also the publication of results.

Pioneer German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) identified another crucial ethical concern. Weber understood that personal values could distort the framework for disclosing study results. While he accepted that some aspects of research design might be influenced by personal values, he declared it was entirely inappropriate to allow personal values to shape the interpretation of the responses. Sociologists, he stated, must establish **value neutrality**, a practice of remaining impartial, without bias or judgment, during the course of a study and in publishing results (1949). Sociologists are obligated to disclose research findings without omitting or distorting significant data.

Many sociologists believe it is impossible to set aside personal values and retain complete objectivity. Instead, they caution readers to understand that sociological studies may, by necessity, contain a certain amount of value bias. It does not discredit the results but allows readers to view them as one form of truth rather than a singular fact. Some sociologists attempt to remain uncritical and as objective as possible when studying cultural institutions. Value neutrality does not mean having no opinions. It means striving to overcome personal biases, particularly subconscious biases, when analyzing data. It means avoiding skewing data in order to match a predetermined outcome that aligns with a particular agenda, such as a political or moral point of view. Investigators are ethically obligated to report results, even when they contradict personal views, predicted outcomes, or widely accepted beliefs.[16]

The research that ethnographers do requires that much of their time is spent interacting with other people. Researchers observe, ask questions or even work alongside other people or researchers. Researching people is not the same as researching using journal articles. The researcher must be prepared to protect the subjects of their research and make sure they do not do anything to harm them.

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[16] OpenStax, Introduction to Sociology 2e. OpenStax CNX. Mar 20, 2019 http://cnx.org/contents/02040312-72c8-441e-a685-20e9333f3e1d@12.4.

Questionable Research

Although researchers now do everything they can to protect their research subjects and ensure that they are informed of the research being conducted, there was research conducted before human subjects had these kinds of protections and researchers had these guidelines. [17]There are several important examples of studies that would not meet the baseline level for human subject research today.

The earliest documented cases of research using human subjects are of medical vaccination trials (Rothman, 1987). One such case took place in the late 1700s, when scientist Edward Jenner exposed an 8-year-old boy to smallpox in order to identify a vaccine for the devastating disease. Medical research on human subjects continued without much law or policy intervention until the mid-1900s when, at the end of World War II, a number of Nazi doctors and scientists were put on trial for conducting human experimentation during the course of which they tortured and murdered many concentration camp inmates (Faden & Beauchamp, 1986). The trials, conducted in Nuremberg, Germany, resulted in the creation of the Nuremberg Code, a 10-point set of research principles designed to guide doctors and scientists who conduct research on human subjects. [18]

## Medical Research

Just prior to that formulation of that code, in 1932, the U.S. Public Health Service recruited several hundred poor, illiterate, and rural African American sharecroppers from Tuskegee, Alabama. The men had syphilis, for which no cure then existed, and were studied to determine its effects. In exchange for free medical care, meals, and burial insurance, 600 men agreed to participate in the study. A little more than half of the men tested positive for syphilis, and they served as the experimental group (given that the researchers could not randomly assign participants to groups, this represents a quasi-experiment). The remaining syphilis-free individuals served as the control group. However, those individuals over the course of the study who tested positive for syphilis were never informed that they had the disease.

While there was no treatment for syphilis when the study began, by 1947 penicillin was recognized as an effective treatment for the disease. Despite this, no penicillin was administered to the participants in this study, and the participants were not allowed to seek treatment at any other facilities if they continued in the study because doing so would end the research. Over the course of 40 years, many of the participants unknowingly spread syphilis to their wives (and subsequently their children born from their wives) and eventually died because they never received treatment for the disease. This study not discontinued until 1972 when the experiment was discovered by the national press (Tuskegee University, n.d.). Several observers likened it to those experiments conducted by Nazi scientists. If the subjects had been white and middle class,

[17] In order to make this book  as relevant to our students as possible, the author added this paragraph

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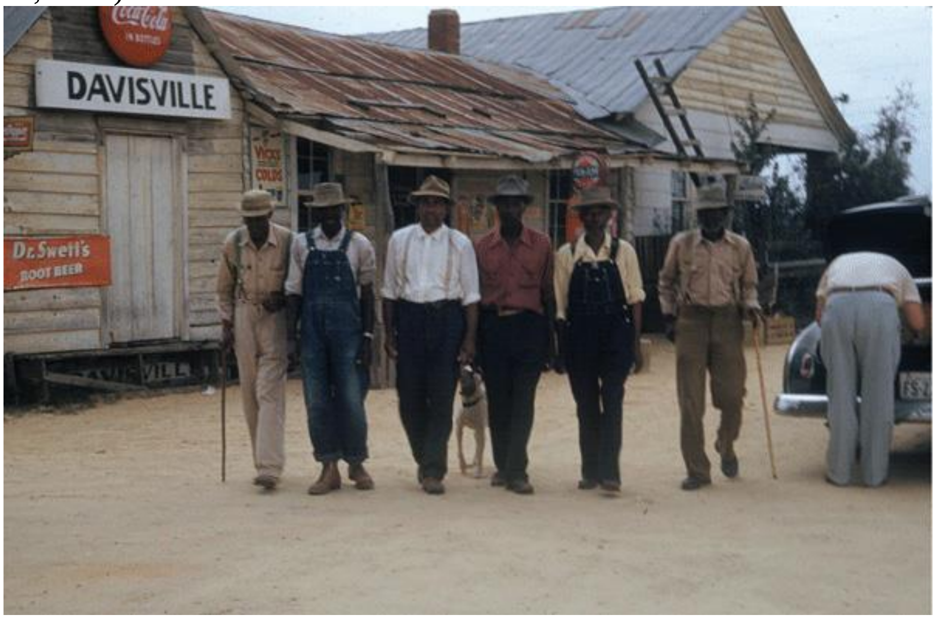
they said, the government would have ended the study once it learned that penicillin could cure syphilis (Jones, 1981). [19][20]




In a study that began in 1932 of syphilis among African American men in Tuskegee, Alabama, government physicians decided not to give penicillin to the men after it was found that this drug would cure syphilis.
Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

[19] OpenStax, Psychology. OpenStax CNX. Mar 6, 2019 http://cnx.org/contents/4abf04bf-93a0-45c3-9cbc-2cefd46e68cc@10.16.
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A participant in the Tuskegee Syphilis Study receives an injection.

The hope of many of us is that this research ended here but there are several less well known examples of this same research project replicated in different context. The Guatemala syphilis studies, for example, were conducted on mental patients, sex workers, prisoners and soldiers between 1946 and 1948. In this case, the researchers actually infected some subjects with the disease to study its effects. The doctors either used prostitutes who were already infected or the subjects were infected through a shot of the disease. The subjects ranged in age from children to seniors and many of the subjects died over the course of the research. The United States did not apologize for the research until 2010.[21]

## Social Research

Fortunately, most sociological research does not have this potential for causing death or serious illness but medical scientists are not the only researchers who have conducted questionable research on humans. In the 1960s, psychologist Stanley Milgram (1974) conducted a series of experiments designed to understand obedience to authority in which he tricked subjects into believing they were administering an electric shock to other subjects. In fact, the shocks weren’t real at all, but some, though not many, of Milgram’s research participants experienced extreme emotional distress after the experiment (Ogden, 2008). A reaction of emotional distress is understandable. The realization that one is willing to administer painful shocks to another human being just because someone who looks authoritative has told you to do so might indeed be traumatizing— even if you later learn that the shocks weren’t real.

Around the same time that Milgram conducted his experiments, sociology graduate student Laud Humphreys (1970) was collecting data for his dissertation research on the tearoom trade, the practice of men engaging in anonymous sexual encounters in public restrooms. Humphreys wished to understand who these men were and why they participated in the trade. To conduct his research, Humphreys offered to serve as a “watch queen,” the person who keeps an

[21] In order to make this book  as relevant to our students as possible, the author added this paragraph

eye out for police and gets the benefit of being able to watch the sexual encounters, in a local park restroom where the tearoom trade was known to occur. What Humphreys did not do was identify himself as a researcher to his research subjects. Instead, he watched his subjects for several months, getting to know several of them, learning more about the tearoom trade practice and, without the knowledge of his research subjects, jotting down their license plate numbers as they pulled into or out of the parking lot near the restroom. Some time after participating as a watch queen, with the help of several insiders who had access to motor vehicle registration information, Humphreys used those license plate numbers to obtain the names and home addresses of his research subjects. Then, disguised as a public health researcher, Humphreys visited his subjects in their homes and interviewed them about their lives and their health. Humphreys's research dispelled a good number of myths and stereotypes about the tearoom trade and its participants. He learned, for example, that over half of his subjects were married to women and many of them did not identify as gay or bisexual.

Once Humphreys's work became public, the result was some major controversy at his home university (e.g., the chancellor tried to have his degree revoked), among sociologists in general, and among members of the public, as it raised public concerns about the purpose and conduct of sociological research. In addition, the Washington Post journalist Nicholas von Hoffman wrote the following warning about "sociological snoopers":

> We're so preoccupied with defending our privacy against insurance investigators, dope sleuths, counterespionage men, divorce detectives and credit checkers, that we overlook the social scientists behind the hunting blinds who're also peeping into what we thought were our most private and secret lives. But they are there, studying us, taking notes, getting to know us, as indifferent as everybody else to the feeling that to be a complete human involves having an aspect of ourselves that's unknown. (von Hoffman, 2008)

In the original version of his report, Humphreys defended the ethics of his actions. In 2008, years after Humphreys's death, his book was reprinted with the addition of a retrospect on the ethical implications of his work. In his written reflections on his research and the fallout from it, Humphreys maintained that his tearoom observations constituted ethical research on the grounds that those interactions occurred in public places. But Humphreys added that he would conduct the second part of his research differently. Rather than trace license numbers and interview unwitting tearoom participants in their homes under the guise of public health research, Humphreys instead would spend more time in the field and work to cultivate a pool of informants. Those informants would know that he was a researcher and would be able to fully consent to being interviewed. In the end, Humphreys concluded that "there is no reason to believe that any research subjects have suffered because of my efforts, or that the resultant demystification of impersonal sex has harmed society" (p. 231).

These and other studies (Reverby, 2009) led to increasing public awareness of and concern about research on human subjects. In 1974, the US Congress enacted the National Research Act, which created the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects in Biomedical and Behavioral Research. The commission produced The Belmont Report, a document outlining basic ethical principles for research on human subjects (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects in Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The National Research Act also required that all institutions receiving federal support establish institutional review boards (IRBs) to protect the rights of human research subjects

(1974). Since that time, many organizations that do not receive federal support but where research is conducted have also established review boards to evaluate the ethics of the research that they conduct. [22]

As all these examples of ethical issues demonstrate, it is not always easy to decide whether a particular research project is ethically justifiable. Partly for this reason, colleges and universities have committees[23] that review proposed human-subject research to ensure that federal guidelines are followed as research conducted on human subjects can vary dramatically from those of research conducted on nonliving entities. The US Department of Health and Human Services defines a human subject as "a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) identifiable private information" (1993).[24]

In some states, human subjects also include deceased individuals and human fetal materials. Nonhuman research subjects, on the other hand, are objects or entities that investigators manipulate or analyze in the process of conducting research. In sociology, nonhuman research subjects typically include sources such as newspapers, historical documents, advertisements, television shows, buildings, and even garbage (to name just a few) that are analyzed for unobtrusive research projects.

Institutional Review Board

Unsurprisingly, research on human subjects is regulated much more heavily than research on nonhuman subjects. Any experiment involving the participation of human subjects is governed by extensive, strict guidelines designed to ensure that the experiment does not result in harm. Any research institution that receives federal support for research involving human participants must have access to an **institutional review board (IRB)**. The IRB is a committee of individuals often made up of members of the institution's administration, scientists, and community members. The purpose of the IRB is to review proposals for research that involves human participants. The IRB reviews these proposals with the principles mentioned above in mind, and generally, approval from the IRB is required in order for the experiment to proceed.[25] IRBs are tasked with ensuring that the rights and welfare of human research subjects will be protected at all institutions, including universities, hospitals, nonprofit research institutions, and other organizations, that receive federal support for research.

IRBs typically consist of members from a variety of disciplines, such as sociology, economics, education, social work, and communications (to name a few). Most IRBs also include representatives from the community in which they reside. For example, representatives from nearby prisons, hospitals, or treatment centers might sit on the IRBs of university campuses near them. The diversity of membership helps to ensure that the many and complex ethical issues that may arise from human subjects research will be considered fully and by a knowledgeable and experienced panel. Investigators conducting research on human subjects are required to

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[25] OpenStax, Psychology. OpenStax CNX. Mar 6, 2019 http://cnx.org/contents/4abf04bf-93a0-45c3-9cbc-2cefd46e68cc@10.16.

submit proposals outlining their research plans to IRBs for review and approval prior to beginning their research. Even students who conduct research on human subjects must have their proposed work reviewed and approved by the IRB before beginning any research (though, on some campuses, some exceptions are made for classroom projects that will not be shared outside of the classroom).

It may surprise you to hear that IRBs are not always popular or appreciated by researchers. In some cases, the concern is that IRBs are most well versed in reviewing biomedical and experimental research, neither of which is particularly common within sociology. Much sociological research, especially qualitative research, is open ended in nature, a fact that can be problematic for IRBs. The members of IRBs often want to know in advance exactly who will be observed, where, when, and for how long, whether and how they will be approached, exactly what questions they will be asked, and what predictions the researcher has for her or his findings. Providing this level of detail for a yearlong participant observation within an activist group of 200-plus members, for example, would be extraordinarily frustrating for the researcher in the best case and most likely would prove to be impossible. Of course, IRBs do not intend to have researchers avoid studying controversial topics or avoid using certain methodologically sound data collection techniques, but unfortunately, that is sometimes the result. The solution is not to do away with review boards, which serve a necessary and important function, but instead to help educate IRB members about the variety of social scientific research methods and topics covered by sociologists and other social scientists. [26]

### Consent

An institution's IRB requires several components in any experiment it approves. For one, each participant must sign an **informed consent** form before they can participate in the experiment.[27] A norm of voluntary participation is presumed in all sociological research projects. In other words, we cannot force anyone to participate in our research without that person's knowledge or consent. Researchers must therefore design procedures to obtain subjects' informed consent to participate in their research. Informed consent is defined as a subject's voluntary agreement to participate in research based on a full understanding of the research and of the possible risks and benefits involved. Although it sounds simple, ensuring that one has actually obtained informed consent is a much more complex process than you might initially presume. [28]

An informed consent form summarizes the aims of the study and the possible risks of being a subject. If researchers want to study minors (under age 18), they normally must obtain a signature from a parent or legal guardian. Informed consent is a requirement for most "real" research these days, but ethical issues arise over the meaning of "consent." For consent to have any real meaning, potential research subjects must have the right to refuse to take part in a research project without any penalties whatsoever. Otherwise, they may feel pressured to participate in the project without really wanting to do so. This result would violate what "consent" is supposed to mean in the research process. Sometimes subjects are promised a small reward (often between $5 and $20) for taking part in a research project, but they are still utterly

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[27] OpenStax, Psychology. OpenStax CNX. Mar 6, 2019 http://cnx.org/contents/4abf04bf-93a0-45c3-9cbc-2cefd46e68cc@10.16.
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free to refuse to do so, and this small inducement is not considered to be undue pressure to participate.[29]

The first requirement for appropriate informed consent is that, in giving their informed consent, subjects may neither waive nor even appear to waive any of their legal rights. Subjects also cannot release a researcher, his or her sponsor, or institution from any legal liability should something go wrong during the course of their participation in the research (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). Because sociological research does not typically involve asking subjects to place themselves at risk of physical harm by, for example, taking untested drugs or consenting to new medical procedures, sociological researchers do not often worry about potential liability associated with their research projects. However, their research may involve other types of risks. For example, what if a sociological researcher fails to sufficiently conceal the identity of a subject who admits to participating in a local swinger's club, enjoying a little sadomasochistic activity now and again or violating her marriage vows? While the law may not have been broken in any of these cases, the subject's social standing, marriage, custody rights, or employment could be jeopardized were any of these tidbits to become public. This example might seem rather extreme, but the point remains: even sociologists conduct research that could come with some very real legal ramifications.

In addition to sharing some details about the purpose of the research, the researcher must also share possible benefits of participation and possible risks associated with participating in that research with their subjects. It is also important for the researcher tot describe how they will protect subjects' identities, how and for how long any data collected will be stored, and whom to contact for additional information about the study or about subjects' rights. All this information is typically shared in the informed consent form. In some cases, subjects are asked to sign the consent form indicating that they have read it and fully understand its contents. In other cases, subjects are simply provided a copy of the consent form and researchers are responsible for making sure that subjects have read and understand the form before proceeding with any kind of data collection.

Informed consent becomes a more difficult problem when a researcher wants to include certain vulnerable populations in a study. These subjects are members of vulnerable populations because they may be at risk of experiencing undue influence or coercion. The rules for consent are more stringent for vulnerable populations. Minors, for example, must have the consent of a legal guardian in order to participate in research. In some cases, the minors themselves are also asked to participate in the consent process by signing an assent form, a special, age-appropriate consent form designed specifically for them. [30]

Another clear example of such a problem is when a study involves prisoners. When prisoners are asked to be interviewed or to fill out a questionnaire, they certainly can refuse to do so, but they may feel pressured to participate. They realize that if they do participate, they may be more likely to be seen as a "model" prisoner, which helps them win "good time" that reduces their sentence or helps them win a release decision from a parole board. Conversely, if they refuse to participate, they not only lose these advantages but also may be seen as a bit of a

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troublemaker and earn extra scrutiny from prison guards.[31] Concern about the vulnerability of these subjects comes from the very real possibility that prisoners and parolees could perceive that they will receive some highly desired reward, such as early release, if they participate in research.

Beyond the protection of members of vulnerable populations, researchers also have concern that they may be underrepresented in research, and even denied potential benefits of participation in research, specifically because of concerns about their ability to consent. So on the one hand, researchers must take extra care to ensure that their procedures for obtaining consent from vulnerable populations are not coercive and that the procedures for receiving approval to conduct research on these groups may be more rigorous than that for nonvulnerable populations. On the other hand, researchers must work to avoid excluding members of vulnerable populations from participation simply on the grounds that they are vulnerable or that obtaining their consent may be more complex. While there is no easy solution to this double-edged sword, an awareness of the potential concerns associated with research on vulnerable populations is important for identifying whatever solution is most appropriate for a specific case.[32]

While the informed consent form should be as honest as possible in describing exactly what participants will be doing, sometimes deception is necessary to prevent participants' knowledge of the exact research question from affecting the results of the study. **Deception** involves purposely misleading experiment participants in order to maintain the integrity of the experiment, but not to the point where the deception could be considered harmful. For example, if we are interested in how our opinion of someone is affected by their attire, we might use deception in describing the experiment to prevent that knowledge from affecting participants' responses. In cases where deception is involved, participants must receive a full **debriefing** upon conclusion of the study—complete, honest information about the purpose of the experiment, how the data collected will be used, the reasons why deception was necessary, and information about how to obtain additional information about the study.[33]

Privacy and Confidentiality

One of the most important ethical guidelines in sociological and other human-subject research concerns privacy and confidentiality. When they do research, sociologists should protect the privacy and confidentiality of their subjects. When a survey is used, the data must be coded (prepared for computer analysis) anonymously, and in no way should it be possible for any answers to be connected with the respondent who gave them. In field research, anonymity must also be maintained, and aliases or pseudonyms (fake names) should normally be used when the researcher reports what she or he has been observing.

Some sociologists consider the privacy and confidentiality of subjects so important that they have risked imprisonment when they have refused to violate confidentiality. In one example, a graduate student named Mario Brajuha had been doing participant observation as a

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[33] OpenStax, Psychology. OpenStax CNX. Mar 6, 2019 http://cnx.org/contents/4abf04bf-93a0-45c3-9cbc-2cefd46e68cc@10.16.

restaurant waiter on Long Island, New York, when the restaurant burned down. When the police suspected arson, they asked Brajuha to turn over his field notes. When Brajuha refused, he was threatened with imprisonment. Meanwhile, two suspects in the case also demanded his field notes for their legal defense, but again Brajuha refused. The controversy ended 2 years later when the suspects died and the prosecutor's office abandoned its effort to obtain the notes (Brajuha & Hallowell, 1986).

In another case, a graduate student named Rik Scarce refused to turn over his field notes on radical environmentalists after one of the groups he was studying vandalized a university laboratory. Scarce was jailed for contempt of court when he refused to tell a grand jury what he had learned about the group and spent several months behind bars (Monaghan, 1993).[34]

The requirement of informed consent becomes an ethical issue when prisoners are studied, because prisoners may feel pressured to participate in the study.
Kim Daram – prison – CC BY-NC 2.0.

In protecting subjects' identities, researchers typically promise to maintain either the **anonymity** or the **confidentialit**y of their research subjects. Anonymity is the more stringent of the two. When a researcher promises anonymity to participants, not even the researcher is able to link participants' data with their identities. Anonymity may be impossible for some sociological researchers to promise because several of the modes of data collection that sociologists employ, such as participant observation and face-to-face interviewing, require that researchers know the

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identities of their research participants. In these cases, a researcher should be able to at least promise confidentiality to participants. Offering confidentiality means that some identifying information on one's subjects is known and may be kept, but only the researcher can link participants with their data and he or she promises not to do so publicly. Sometimes it is not even possible to promise that a subject's confidentiality will be maintained. This is the case if data are collected in public or in the presence of other research participants in the course of a group interview, for example.

Protecting research participants' identities is not always a simple prospect, especially for those conducting research on stigmatized groups or illegal behaviors. Sociologist Scott DeMuth learned that all too well when conducting his dissertation research on a group of animal rights activists. As a participant observer, DeMuth knew the identities of his research subjects. So when some of his research subjects vandalized facilities and removed animals from several research labs at the University of Iowa, a grand jury called on Mr. DeMuth to reveal the identities of the participants in the raid. When DeMuth refused to do so, he was jailed briefly and then charged with conspiracy to commit animal enterprise terrorism and cause damage to the animal enterprise (Jaschik, 2009).

Publicly, DeMuth's case raised many of the same questions as Laud Humphreys' work 40 years earlier. What do social scientists owe the public? Is DeMuth, by protecting his research subjects, harming those whose labs were vandalized? Is he harming the taxpayers who funded those labs? Or is it more important that DeMuth emphasize what he owes his research subjects, who were told their identities would be protected? DeMuth's case also sparked controversy among academics, some of whom thought that as an academic himself, DeMuth should have been more sympathetic to the plight of the faculty and students who lost years of research as a result of the attack on their labs. Many others stood by DeMuth, arguing that the personal and academic freedom of scholars must be protected whether we support their research topics and subjects or not. DeMuth's academic adviser even created a new group, Scholars for Academic Justice (http://sajumn.wordpress.com), to support DeMuth and other academics who face persecution or prosecution as a result of the research they conduct. What do you think? Should DeMuth have revealed the identities of his research subjects? Why or why not?[35]

As a researcher, the protection of your human subjects should always be at the forefront of any work you do. As a student, conducting research as a part of a class, you are generally exempt from completing the entire IRB process. However, if your rested will contribute to generalizable knowledge or be published outside of the classroom, you may need to consider some or all of this process. Most importantly, protection of human subjects should be practiced whether it not it is required. Although the formal aspects may be unnecessary, showing respect for your subjects by treating them humanely is never optional.[36]

Chapter Summary

- Social science researchers must always protect their home subjects
- This is done through ensuring that subjects are clear about the research and any benefits and risks involved
- Vulnerable populations require additional protections

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[36] In order to make this book as relevant to our students as possible, the author added this paragraph

- All colleges and universities but have mechanisms to monitor and approve research before it is conducted on human subjects
- Research that has not had to follow these strict guidelines has had psychological and physiology effects on subjects

Questions

1. What is the name of the group of people tasked with monitoring his subjects research?
2. What have been adverse effects of studies that haven't filled e the proper procedure?
3. How can a researcher project their subjects?
4. Thinking about research you have conducted or read about, in what ways might it have had an effect on the researchers subjects?
5. What kind of research might not have risks for the subject?

Key Terms

- Code of ethics
- Value neutrality
- Institutional Review Board
- Informed consent
- Deception
- Debriefing
- Anonymity
- Confidentiality

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# Ethnographic Mapping

Tom Martin, PhD

Because human action is closely tied to the physical spaces in which it unfolds, it is important that ethnographers pay close attention to the role that their location and surroundings play in their research. Maps allow us to record how our participants move across landscapes and through time, interacting with physical environments and with other people. As with all ethnographic recording, maps represent the ethnographer's *interpretation* of people, places, and events; mapping is another way to record your unique perspective on how your research participants lead their daily lives.

While maps traditionally record physical spaces, like the layout of cities or patterns of movement within the workplace, they can be used to represent much more abstract things as well. In this chapter, we will begin by discussing maps that represent physical settings, then move on to talk about mapping life histories, organizations, and processes. These other kinds of mapping will allow you to interpret and represent more than just the setting of your research, showing the audience the 'how' and 'why' aspects, rather than just the 'what' and 'where'. Regardless of what you are mapping, however, this chapter will stress that maps should always be clearly understandable, making the information that they present immediately accessible to the reader.

Throughout the chapter, I will illustrate each kind of map that I discuss with examples from my own research, where I conducted an ethnography in the wooden boat builder's workshop, studying how apprentices learn the trade. I encourage you to look at each of the maps I made very closely, then think about how you might have done it differently yourself.

## Mapping spaces

When you picture a map, you probably think of a road map, with intersecting lines indicating highways and city streets. Perhaps you think of a digital version with GPS, like what you have on your phone, since those have largely replaced printed maps in day-to-day use. These classic maps are 'spatial maps', representing physical spaces.

Ethnographers have long been interested in spatial maps because cultures are often better understood when the physical spaces occupied by the people of those cultures are taken into consideration. Ethnographic maps are different from traditional maps, however, in that they do not just represent the geographical features of a particular space; ethnographic maps also indicate how people interact with a space, or how particular spatial features interact with cultural practices (Pelto, 2016).

Take a look at an ethnographic map I made in one of the boat-building workshops where I did my own research (Figure 1), which has all the important tools and machine labelled. Note the rectangles labelled ‘table saw’, ‘shop saw’, and ‘bandsaw’, the names of tools that my fieldwork participants and I used every day.

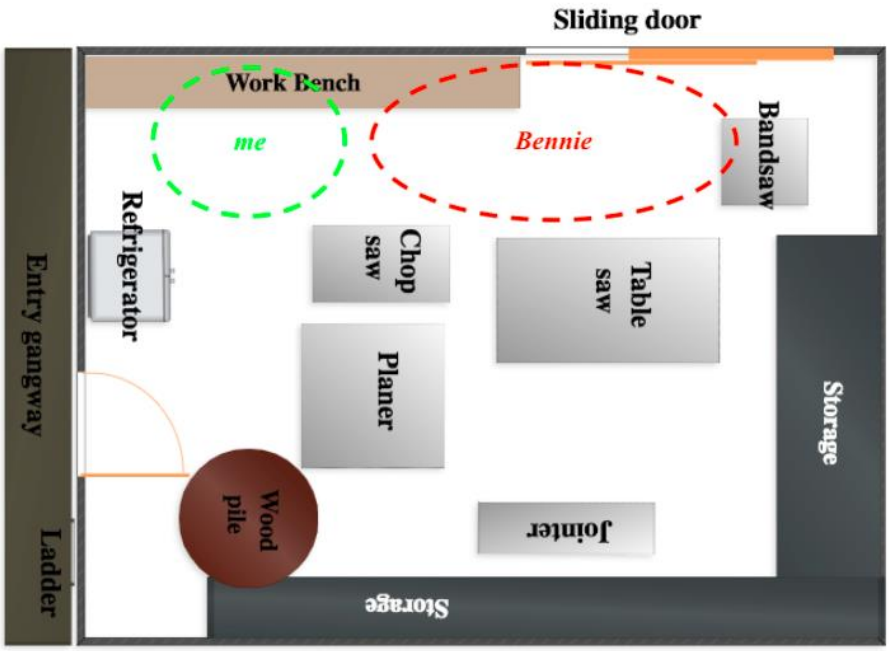


*Figure 1: A map of the ship's workshop, from my own doctoral research*

What makes the map above ethnographic, rather than just spatial, is that it also indicates how my participants and I used the space. At the top of the map, you will see two colored circles; these mark the general area in which my colleague Bennie and I would set up our work. As you can see, Bennie – who was much more experienced, having been a carpenter for decades – took up most of the prime space in the workshop, situating himself directly between the most common tools. I, on the other hand, claimed only a corner of the workshop, over by the refrigerator where I could not easily be seen. Because I was a new apprentice at the time, I wanted to stay out of sight while I worked on my projects so that no one could see the mistakes I was making. These interpersonal aspects of fieldwork, like participants hiding away or taking ownership of an important space, are important for fully understanding cultural interactions, and are usefully captured in a spatial ethnographic map.

In my research, because I was studying how people learn professional skills, I mapped out where people at different skill levels established themselves in the workshop and how these patterns changed over time. There are endless other ways I could have mapped out the same space, however; for instance, if I had been researching the effectiveness of the layout of the workshop, I would have marked every place where two carpenters accidentally bumped into each other (which happened all the time). Likewise, if I had primarily been researching social interaction in the workshop, I would have noted the places where my participants would sit at the end of the day, relaxing around the wood-burning stove on make-shift stools. When you make your own ethnographic maps, always remember to keep your research questions in mind to ensure that your maps present information that is highly relevant and support the goals of your research project.

## Non-spatial maps

While the most common kind of ethnographic map shows a physical space (like the map in Figure 1), you can use maps to illustrate a variety of non-spatial phenomena as well. The following three sections will each describe a different kind of non-spatial mapping: life history maps, organizational maps, and process maps. Keep in mind that this is not a comprehensive list of mapping techniques, and that you should feel free to experiment with mapping in your own research to capture and interpret anything that you feel is best conveyed with images and diagrams, rather than just through text.

### Life history maps

One useful non-spatial mapping technique is making 'life history maps', timelines on which your participants can indicate key events that relate to your research questions. In my own research, I asked my participants to map out the history of their careers as boat builders, indicating where they worked and what they learned. In the map below (Figure 2), a master boat builder named Lou drew a complicated map that shows the various phases of his career. Using a selection of colored markers, Lou indicated the different communities he saw himself as being a part of as his career progressed – brown was his community of school friends, green was his family, and purple indicated the wooden boat building community he belonged to when I met him.

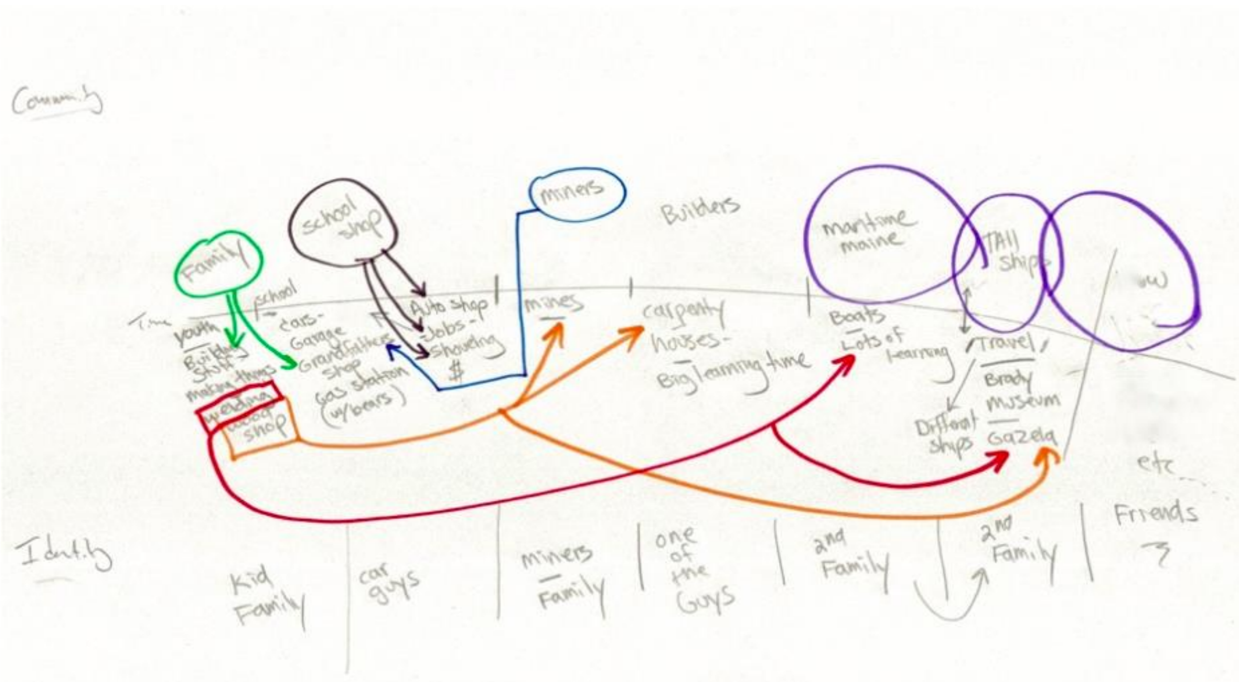


*Figure 2: Lou's career map*

As you can see from the complicated map above, I let my fieldwork participants represent their own life histories in this exercise, and some (like Lou) came up with fairly complex ways to draw out their stories. The great advantage of having your participants draw their own maps is that they get to draw out their life histories exactly as they understand them, using whatever format they think makes the most sense. A drawback of this technique, however, is that no two maps are every directly comparable, since everyone creates their map in a unique way. If you want all of your maps to make sense as you look at them side-by-side, you should either specify precise instructions for your participants or draw the map yourself as your participants narrate their life story. If comparability between maps is not a major concern for your research, then letting people draw their own maps is a great way to get graphical representations that you would never have imagined on your own.

Not all life history maps display stages in a person's career, although the prominence of work in people's lives usually means that jobs appear somewhere on a life history map. If you want to record how people moved around over the course of their lives, you might consider combining a life history map with a spatial map, drawing lines of movement over a map of the state, country, or whole world. Alternately, if your research questions refer to figures your participants can measure (or even estimate), you might want to use a life history map that looks more like a line graph, with dates on the X axis and something like income or personal happiness on the Y axis.

### Organizational maps

Another helpful mapping technique is called 'organizational mapping', in which the researcher creates a graphical representation of an organization, community, family, or other social structure. These maps are helpful for two reasons: First, they show the reader who the key players in the ethnography are, and how those people relate to one another. Second, organizational maps illustrate identities and power relationships, helping the reader to understand the social structures that govern the participants' behavior.

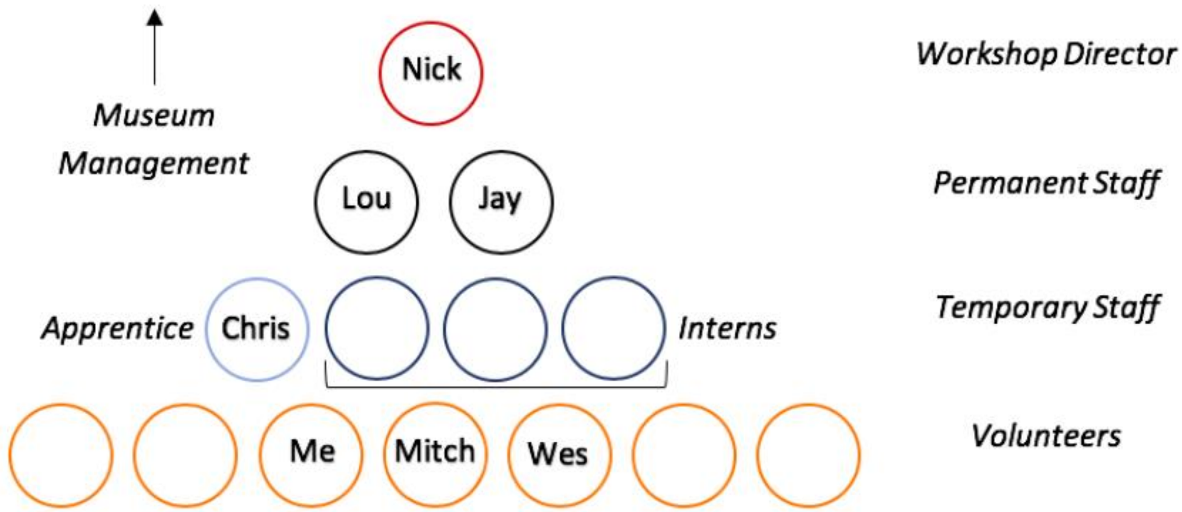


*Figure 3: An organizational map of one of my fieldwork sites*

In the map above (Figure 3), I displayed several of my colleagues in the boat workshop, showing their professional roles and where they fit within the organizational hierarchy. As you can see, the map immediately conveys the sense that the workshop had a tight hierarchical structure, with one person on top and increasingly-larger groups below them. Color-coding the different professional roles helps the reader to immediately understand that the volunteers in the workshop (orange) far outnumber the permanent staff (black and red), indicating a key aspect of the power dynamic in the workshop. Maps like this can be comprehensive – that is, they can list every person in the organization – or they can be representational, like this one, where only the most important players are mentioned by name. The empty circles in the map above indicate people who were present in the workshop during my research, but whom I did not observe directly; it is helpful to give the reader this overview of your fieldwork setting in addition to specifics about people you focus on in the written text.

When you are making your own organizational maps, make sure to consider how the overall shape of the map relates to the information it displays. Since the map in Figure 3 shows a hierarchical structure, a pyramid was an obvious choice. If you are mapping a co-operative organization where everyone has equal decision-making power, however, you may prefer to arrange your icons in a circle. For organizations that share members, such as project groups within a corporation, you may choose to use several overlapping circles, resembling a Venn diagram. Whatever shape you choose, make sure that it immediately conveys some significant aspect of the organization you are representing, and that the aspect being displayed is relevant to your research questions.

## Process maps

An important aspect of ethnographic research to keep in mind is that human beings *do* things. Ethnography is never static; it describes people moving, making, and generally getting things done. Sometimes, you will need to map out these processes for your reader, who might have a hard time understanding your written description alone. Take for example the following description of knot-tying from my project:

> To teach the knot, the beginner is given a mnemonic story of a rabbit popping out of a hole, running around a tree, then retreating back into the hole, in which the rabbit is the end of the rope (in blue in Figure [4], left), the hole is a loop in the rope's middle (red), and the tree is the 'standing end', the section of rope not being manipulated (green). This story is recited during bowline-tying until the novice can see the different parts of the knot as it develops, at which point the procedure becomes obvious and the mnemonic is no longer needed. (Martin, 2019, p. 199)

On its own, the written description above is hard to follow. Looking at the accompanying pictures (Figure 4), however, it makes a lot more sense:

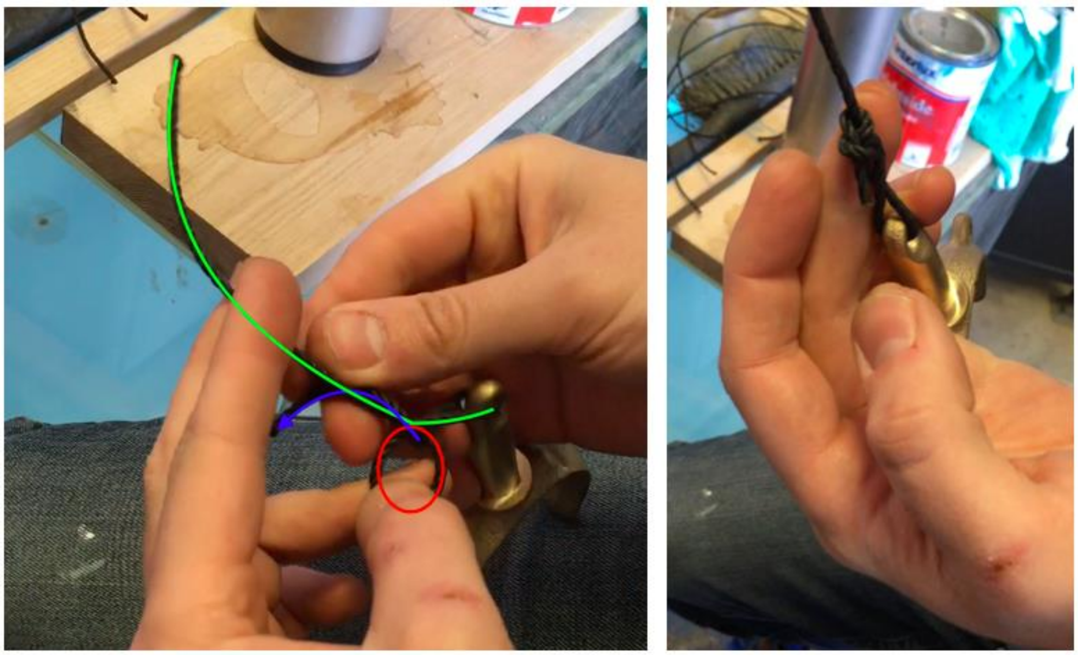

*Figure 4: A process map of knot-tying*

The left-hand image in Figure 4 is overlaid with three colored lines, indicating the different parts of the knot that my participant is tying. This image may strike you at first as being a photo illustration, rather than a map, but remember that ethnographic maps are defined by the recording of human action and interaction in space or over time; from that perspective, mapping the movements of a person's hands as they do culturally-significant work is certainly an example of ethnographic process mapping.

In the ethnography of work, process mapping is often essential for conveying the complex activities within productive occupations. You might be interested, like I was, in recording the steps in a skillful activity. Alternately, consider recording how people interact with machines at their jobs, or how logistical supply chains keep the workplace running. Each of these processes are more clearly represented to your reader in images, since they have several inter-locking activities happening in parallel.

## Map-making techniques

Now that you know some of the different kinds of ethnographic maps available to you, how do you actually go about making one? As you have probably guessed, most ethnographers do not have the resources to bring advanced cartography equipment into the field – and even if they could afford such luxuries, they would generally be too busy conducting participant observation to use them. Luckily, ethnographic maps are not primarily concerned with spatial precision; that is, measuring distances within the workshop down to a quarter of an inch is not nearly as important for an ethnography as recording how, when, and where people move throughout a workplace. Here are some suggestions for how you might collect the information you need for an ethnographic map:

- *Work from pictures*: You may not have time to sit down and draw out the maps you want while you are fully immersed in fieldwork. Instead, consider taking as many pictures as possible, then reconstructing a map of the fieldwork environment later at home. If you have something of a fixed size handy (e.g., a yard-stick) position it in your pictures to get a sense of scale

- *Use video*: If your participants consent to being video recorded, you can try to place your camera in such a way that it captures an overhead view of your fieldwork setting; if you are in an office, resting it over a door jamb will give you a birds-eye view of movement between cubicles. Speeding up this video when you watch it at home will give you a good sense of how people move around during the course of the day, and will help you to capture this movement on maps of your own making.

- *Use copyright-free resources*: Many existing maps are in the public domain, meaning that you can use them for your own research purposes without paying anyone. If you want to track someone's movement across the country over the course of their career, you may consider downloading a copyright-free map beforehand as a template, then drawing onto that. The important part to this process is making sure that the image is free to use *and* free to modify for your own purposes; check with the Open Source Initiative to make sure that the license for an image allows you to do what you want to do.

- *Collaborate with your participants*: In most instances, your participants will have a better sense of important landscapes, processes, and organizational features than you ever will. Consequently, you might want to ask your research participants to make the maps with you, or even for you (assuming this does not impose too much of a burden). Normally these will be simple sketches of how they understand the features of the world that you are asking them about, rather than full-blown visualizations – you can re-interpret the maps you collect later to make them clearer to the reader, or simply include them alongside your text as-is.

## Conclusion

Ethnographic maps record human action and interaction in space and over time. In many cases, these maps look like everyday road maps, indicating the layout of the researcher's fieldwork site; these maps are called 'spatial maps.' What makes ethnographic maps unique is that they display the ways in which fieldwork participants interact with the space, rather than just its geographical layout. Since ethnography is essentially 'recording culture', spatial ethnographic maps interpret and display how culture unfolds within physical spaces and places, structuring the movements and activities of the people there.

A wide variety of non-spatial mapping techniques exist as well, allowing the ethnographer to record more abstract aspects of research like life histories, organizational structures, or practical processes. These maps are highly interpretive, and require that the ethnographer spend a good deal of time thinking about how best to display aspects of their ethnographic data. When these maps are done well, however, they provide useful ways for the reader to immediately grasp ideas that would be very difficult to represent through text alone.

In summary:

- When you make your own ethnographic maps, always remember to keep your research questions in mind, so that you ensure that your maps capture information you need for your project.

- Consider using maps to represent a variety of aspects of your fieldwork, from physical spaces to processes and organizational structures.

- Enlist the help of your fieldwork participants in making maps, as they will bring their own helpful interpretations to the mapping process.

## Study Questions

1. What are the four kinds of ethnographic mapping discussed in this chapter?
2. How do ethnographic maps differ from traditional maps, such as road maps?
3. How does the shape of an organizational map affect the information it conveys?
4. What are strategies for using technology to assist you in your map-making?
5. What kind of maps could you use to help the reader understand your own research, or to help you organize your ideas in the field?

## Key Terms

*Ethnographic mapping*: The process of recording and displaying human action and interaction as it unfolds in space and over time.

*Spatial maps:* Maps that indicate the physical features of a landscape or environment. These maps most closely resemble traditional maps, such as roadmaps or surveyor's maps.

*Life history maps:* These maps display some aspect of a research participant's personal development over time. Life history maps are commonly used to represent changes in work history, interpersonal relationships, or political affiliation.

*Organizational maps:* Organizational maps display the structures of organizations, and often indicate key power relationships that the organizational structure affords. These maps also serve to document who is present during fieldwork, and what their relationships to one another are.

*Process maps:* These maps serve as diagrams to help the reader understand a technical process. They can represent work process involving physical tools and materials, or can indicate steps in something work, such as a decision-making process.

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# Collecting Data and Taking Notes

Mary Gatta. PhD

In this chapter, we explore the heart of ethnography—collecting data and taking fieldnotes. Ethnographic data is collected in a variety of ways that involve the researcher being embedded in the field in a variety of ways Ethnographers collect data by observing in the field. This includes both structured and unstructured observations, along with participant observations. In addition ethnographers engage in formal and informal interviews and focus groups with subjects. Often researchers will engage in a variety of methods for one research project and this data collection will occur over a period of time. An ethnographer may spend days, months or even years in one **field site** to observe and interview research subjects. A field site is the location or environment an ethnographer is studying. It can be virtually any place—a school, workplace, community, home, street, and even in the online world. This **triangulation** of ethnographic methods-using a variety of methods in a field site--- helps the researcher to gather as much data as possible to identify trends, patterns and nuances of the field they are studying.

As a result of the intensive data collections methods that ethnographers engage, researchers often end up with a good deal of data to analyze. It is therefore important for ethnographers to have a plan on exactly how they will collect their data before they head into the field. How will they collect data? Will they take notes in the field or when they leave the field? Will they record interviews via audio or video means? How will they capture pictures? How will they organize notes? Where will they store notes? In this chapter, we will get a sense of these and other questions.

## What Are Fieldnotes?[37]

A staple of ethnographic data collection are **field notes**. Field notes are the notes created by the researcher to remember and record the behaviors, activities, events, and other features of an observation. Field notes are intended to be read by the researcher as evidence to produce meaning and an understanding of the culture, social situation, or phenomenon being studied. (Schwandt, 2015)

As you begin your research using ethnographic methodologies, including the writing of fieldnotes, you need to be keenly aware that this kind of research, represented through the written word, is subject to personal interpretation. You are choosing what to write about, you are making decisions about what to include and what to omit. You, as the researcher, come to the field with a particular set of values and beliefs and those values and beliefs will affect what you see and how you see it. Ethnographic writing is always, in some ways or others, a representation of the ethnographer.

This doesn't mean that some ethnographic writing isn't better than other ethnographic writing, that the primary data itself isn't valid or truthful. This may be the first primary data collection experience for you. This means that this is a learning experience, and your fieldnote writing will, over time, improve, shift, become more dense, and appear more like primary data and less like a journal writing. Many ethnographers write fieldnotes as well as journals, the

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principle difference being the degree to which the writing serves to analyze what is being observed.

One of the stumbling blocks in writing fieldnotes for the first time is that, in the end, fieldnotes are only for you. They are the primary data you will use to write your final piece, your larger representation of your research. But, though it seems this would be low-stakes writing (writing only for you, without an immediate purpose), understand that your final project is greatly affected by the time and care and attention you give to these notes. Therefore, while any one set of notes may be low-stakes, collectively, they are high-stakes, in indeed. Together all of the notes are the foundation of this project; they are the point of it all.

To start, it is helpful to listen to some ethnography students at the University of Southern California talk about the basics of fieldnotes.

## Basics of Fieldnotes[38]

The students in the video point to several important aspects of fieldnotes. First, we need to be sure what we are doing is ethical. If we are interviewing someone, did we get their consent for an interview and to be recorded? How will the ethnographer protect the confidentiality of the interviewee? If we are observing a worksite, how will we let the workers know and protect their identities? This is discussed in the ethics chapter of this text, and it is important to ensure you are ethically collecting data.

Once you have ensured ethical data collection, you want to begin collecting data. What does it mean to "do fieldwork," to "take fieldnotes"? The answers to these questions are at once simple and complicated. Simply stated, one "does research" by hanging out in your research site, observing what goes on and participating in the activities and conversation going on around you. This process is understood as participant-observation research methodology. However, simply participating and observing isn't enough. You need to record your observations and thoughts on paper. You need to record what people in the site say and do. You need to "take fieldnotes" and write down what you see, feel and think about your research. When you write these observations, thoughts, feelings and analyses, you are creating primary data.

Your first visit to your site presents the opportunity to "see" the site for the first time as an ethnographer. Make sure that you some device (pen, paper, phone, laptop) available to record in writing everything that you see, hear, taste, smell, touch, and feel. You're going to try to capture the atmosphere and mood. You want to gather the kind of information that will make it possible to bring your site alive through your writing. In your first visit to the site, you also want to walk away with a good idea of how you see the site . Your primary data set—your fieldnotes—will evolve over time. (http://www.engagingcommunities.org/writing-fieldnotes/)

## Jottings and Notes[39]

Our observations are recorded in the form of **jottings and notes**. When we are in the field we make write down (or type into our phones/tablets) jottings about what we are seeing, feeling and observing.

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At the site, you should try to take notes that address all five senses:

| |
|---|
| VISION: What is this place? Who are the people? What do they look like? What are they doing? In what order do people do things? What artifacts and objects do you see? What do people do with them? |
| HEARING: What do people say? What noises do you hear? How loud is it? How quiet? Are is the sound from voice or other activity? |
| TASTE: Is there food involved in this setting? Does the space taste like anything you know? Is taste important in this site? |
| SMELL: What odors do you encounter here? Do people reference smell? Does it smell like other places you know? Does the smell remind you of other places? |
| TOUCH: Is there anything here to touch or feel? Are bodies close to each other? Is this place sexually charged? Is it intellectually charged? What does the place make you feel like? Where and how and when do people here touch each other? Are you engaged in this touch? Is the touch ritualistic or random? |

You should also note how you feel about being present at the site. Are you comfortable? Do you feel out of place? Are you interested in what you see? Are you comparing this context with a similar context in your own culture? Is this your own culture? What, specifically, makes you feel that way?

Keep in mind that these notes are just notes. They don't have to be complete sentences or beautiful words. If your native language is not English and you are more comfortable writing quickly in your native language, these on-site notes, or "jottings," don't even have to be in English. What they do have to do is provide enough information for you to expand on them when you revisit the notes to begin to write. In several weeks, when you have recorded many, many pages of fieldnotes, you will read through them carefully, looking for patterns. What actions/behaviors/words/thoughts reoccur? What did you find to be of extreme interest to you as you conducted your research? You will use those things to frame and write your final ethnography paper, but in the meantime, you'll be working with your fieldnotes to produce quite a bit of writing. http://www.engagingcommunities.org/writing-fieldnotes/4a-rhetorical-strategies-for-writing-observations/

You want to be sure to think about the best way to record your notes. Maybe carry a notebook or journal, or use a computer to type them up in the field. You want to decide whether you will take notes in the field or carve out time after. Also, you want to think about what photos and recordings you can take that will help you remember what you are observing.

## Characteristics of Field Notes[40]

The ways in which you take notes during an observational study is very much a personal decision developed over time as you become more experienced in observing. However, all field notes generally consist of two parts:

Descriptive information, in which you attempt to accurately document factual data [e.g., date and time] and the settings, actions, behaviors, and conversations that you observe; and,

Reflective information, in which you record your emotions, thoughts/theories, ideas, questions, and concerns as you are conducting the observation.

[40] This section is adapted with permission from the author, Robert Labaree of *Organizing Your Social Sciences Research Paper* https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/fieldnotes

Field notes should be fleshed out as soon as possible after an observation is completed. Your initial notes may be recorded in cryptic form and, unless additional detail is added as soon as possible after the observation, important facts and opportunities for fully interpreting the data may be lost

So what do our fieldnotes look like. Here are some guidelines to help you.

- ✓ Be accurate. You only get one chance to observe a particular moment in time so, before you conduct your observations, practice taking notes in a setting that is similar to your observation site in regards to number of people, the environment, and social dynamics. This will help you develop your own style of transcribing observations quickly and accurately.
- ✓ Be organized. Taking accurate notes while you are actively observing can be difficult. It is therefore important that you plan ahead how you will document your observation study [e.g., strictly chronologically or according to specific prompts]. Notes that are disorganized will make it more difficult for you to interpret the data.
- ✓ Be descriptive. Use descriptive words to document what you observe. For example, instead of noting that a classroom appears "comfortable," state that the classroom includes soft lighting and cushioned chairs that can be moved around by the study participants. Being descriptive means supplying yourself with enough factual evidence that you don't end up making assumptions about what you meant when you write the final report. Others may not reach the same conclusions you do (ie. comfortable), but if you have detailed field notes, they can at least see what you did.
- ✓ Focus on the research problem. Since it's impossible to document everything you observe, include the greatest detail about aspects of the research problem and the theoretical constructs underpinning your research; avoid cluttering your notes with irrelevant information. For example, if the purpose of your study is to observe the discursive interactions between nursing home staff and the family members of residents, then it would only be necessary to document the setting in detail if it in some way directly influenced those interactions [e.g., there is a private room available for discussions between staff and family members].
- ✓ Record insights and thoughts. As you observe, be thinking about the underlying meaning of what you observe and record your thoughts and ideas accordingly. This will help if you to ask questions or seek clarification from participants after the observation. To avoid any confusion, subsequent comments from participants should be included in a separate, reflective part of your field notes and not merged with the descriptive notes.

Here are some general guidelines for taking descriptive notes:

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| Describe the physical setting. |
| Describe the social environment and the way in which participants interacted within the setting. This may include patterns of interactions, frequency of interactions, direction of communication patterns [including non-verbal communication], and patterns of specific behavioral events, such as, conflicts, decision-making, or collaboration. |
| Describe the participants and their roles in the setting. |
| Describe, as best you can, the meaning of what was observed from the perspectives of the participants. |

| |
|---|
| Record exact quotes or close approximations of comments that relate directly to the purpose of the study. |
| Describe any impact you might have had on the situation you observed [important!]. |
| And here are some general guidelines for the reflective content: |
| Note ideas, impressions, thoughts, and/or any criticisms you have about what you observed. |
| Include any unanswered questions or concerns that have arisen from analyzing the observation data. |
| Clarify points and/or correct mistakes and misunderstandings in other parts of field notes. |
| Include insights about what you have observed and speculate as to why you believe specific phenomenon occurred. |
| Record any thoughts that you may have regarding any future observations. |

## Templates for Fieldnotes

So how to you actually capture your notes. There are lots of templates and ways that ethnographers use. You want to find the one that is best for you. Here are some examples to check out.

Here is a blog that shares one ethnographer's process- https://anthropod.net/2013/08/14/a-template-for-writing-fieldnotes/

And here is another template that you can take into the field- https://www.silearning.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/ethnographic-fieldnotes.pdf

## Storing your Notes

Once you collect your data (be it in words, pictures and videos), you want to find a safe and secure way to store it. If you save your notes and pictures electronically be sure that they are password protected and backed-up. For written notes, find a secure and locked file cabinet to keep them in. Remember the notes are your data—without them you do not have an ethnographic research project.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we learned the ways that ethnographers gather data when they are in field sites to conduct research. We explored how ethnographers collect their data, the role of field notes, and guidelines to create and store your field notes.

## Key Terms

Field sites
Triangulation
Field notes
Jottings

## Chapter Questions

1. What are some examples of field sites that you would be interested in studying using ethnography?
2. What are some key things you should do as an ethnographer before you enter a field site to conduct research and prepare for collecting field notes?
3. What are ways researchers engage all five senses in a field site to collect field notes?

4. What are some guidelines researchers use to collect field notes?
5. What are some guidelines researchers follow to store their fieldnotes ethically and safely?

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# Observations

Nicole Kras, Ph.D.

Conducting observations is an essential component of ethnographic research. It provides the researcher the opportunity to observe and learn from his or her surroundings and gain insights that may not be possible from relying on others to transmit the information. While conducting an observation, the researcher will often find that patterns begin to emerge, questions arise and become more specific, and hypotheses begin to form and guide the researcher into formulating results based on the observations made (Griffiths, et.al, 2012).

When conducting an observation, it is important to be aware that people often change their behavior when they know they are being watched as part of a study. This is often referred to as the *Hawthorne effect*. This term was coined after a series of experiments conducted by Elton Mayo and his colleagues from 1929-1932 at plant called Western Electric's Hawthorne Works near Chicago (Spielman, et.al., 2019). The researchers in the study were initially researching the effects of the physical work environment such as the level of lighting in the plant, but their research ended up shedding light on psychological effects in the workplace. They discovered that the employees work performance improved when they were being observed by the supervisors and researchers. The Hawthorne effect is unavoidable in some instances because subjects may know they are being observed. As we learned from the Hawthorne studies, the knowledge of being observed can lead to altered behaviors.


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|---|
| **Hawthorne Studies**<br>Learn more about the Hawthorne Studies here [Hawthorne Electric Plant Studies] |

Results from observations are often qualitative and rely on the researcher's perspective. While conducting observations, it is important for the researcher to stay as objective as possible and refrain from *observer bias*. Observer bias is when researchers "unconsciously skew their observations to fit their research goals or expectations" (Spielman, et.al., 2019, p.45).

## Types of Observations

There are different types of observations. Some types of unobtrusive observations such as informal observations, are common in everyday life, while other types of observations, such as participant-observation, are more systematic and part of the research process. Observations, like other forms of data collection, have strengths and limitations.

### Unobtrusive Observation

Informal observation occurs when observations are made without any systematic process for observing or assessing accuracy of what we observed (Blackstone, 2012). People frequently partake in this type of observation in their daily lives. This type of research is what is frequently referred to as *people watching*. Some examples are observing people who are walking around the mall while waiting for a friend, sitting on a crowded subway and observing the people who are on the train, or observing people engaging in holiday activities in a park. Since informal observations are done without any systematic process, the findings are not always accurate.

The term selective observation is used to describe when an individual sees only those patterns that he or she wants to see or when people assume that only the patterns they have experienced directly exist (Blackstone, 2012). An example of selective observation would be a person who visits New York City for the first time and gets into a minor car accident that wasn't her fault. This person now believes that all New York City drivers are "bad drivers." Her claim is inaccurate and based solely on her own experiences.

Naturalistic observation is a research method that involves observing people or animals in their natural environments. When conducting a naturalistic observation, it is important for researchers to be as discreet as possible. People will often behave differently if they know they are being observed and researchers want to collect the most accurate information possible**.** An example of naturalistic observation would be a researcher who attends professional hockey games to make observations and collect data on the behaviors of participants watching the game. This would provide the researcher the ability to make first-hand observations and not have to rely on others to convey the information.

*Strengths***.** A strength of naturalistic observations is the *validity* of the information collected. Validity means that the data the researcher is collecting is a true representation of the information he or she is measuring. Ideally participants in a naturalistic observation will not know they are being observed, so it is presumed that they are displaying authentic behaviors. Additionally, while conducting naturalistic observations the researcher can gain insights that may not be possible from relying on others to convey the information.

*Limitations.* There are several limitations of naturalistic observation. One limitation of this type of observation is that the environment and the individuals being observed cannot be controlled (Spielman, et.al., 2019). For example, a researcher wants to observe the behaviors of children on a playground. There are several external factors that the researcher cannot control such as the temperature or the number of kids on the playground that day. There could also be unique circumstances that happen during the observation, such as a swarm of bees that fly through the playground or a rainstorm that starts unexpectedly. Uncontrollable events like these can impact the data being collected by the researcher.

While naturalistic observation is an effective method to collect data to describe what is going on in a particular environment, a limitation of this method is that it does not explain or get to the cause of *why* this behavior is happening. Additionally, because observation studies do not involve random samples of the population, their results often cannot readily be generalized to the larger population. Participant Observation

When conducting ethnographic researcher, researchers may partake in what is called *participant observation*. Participant observation is when "researchers join people and participate in a group's routine activities for the purpose of observing them within that context" (Griffiths, et.al, 2012, p.3). An example of this may be a researcher working as a cashier to study and gain insight into the working environment of a large retail chain. Often times researchers engaging in this type of observation do not disclose their true identities, so not to compromise their research. This can be challenging for a few reasons. One is reason is that it may take the researcher time to gain access to a certain organization or population. Another reason is that it may also take time for the researcher to adjust to the new environment. During this type of observation, is important for researchers to do their best not to disrupt the environment of the people or places they are studying (Griffiths, et.al, 2012).

Strengths. A strength of this type of research is that being a participant-observer provides the opportunity to be fully immersed in the environment and gain a first-hand perspective about what life is like for the people they are studying. The researcher can gain information that may not have been able to be collected through other methods and only though this first-hand perspective.

Limitations**.** A limitation to this approach is that a participant who is actively involved with the environment he or she is studying, may miss something by not sitting back and observing the environment (Griffiths, et.al, 2012). Another limitation is that there is the potential that the researcher and the people they are studying find themselves in situations that they feel uncomfortable in for various reasons. You will learn more about participant-observations in the next chapter.

| | |
|---|---|
| Informal Observation | Observations are made without any systematic process for observing or assessing accuracy of what we observed |
| Selective Observation | When an individual sees only those patterns that want to see or when we assume that only the patterns we have experienced directly exist |
| Naturalistic Observation | A research method that involves observing people or animals in their natural environments |
| Participant-Observation | When researchers join people and participate in a group's routine activities for the purpose of observing them within that context" |

## Observation in Action

### Ethnographies of Work

At Guttman Community College, students in a course called *Ethnographies of Work,* have opportunities to become researchers and conduct their own naturalistic observations. For example, students are asked as part of their semester-long career exploration research project to visit a workplace of interest and observe the work environment of a career of interest to them. Through this observation students begin to learn about the culture of their workplace and use observation data they collected to help them answer their research questions about the world of work.

Another example is that Guttman students in the *Ethnographies of Work* course have the opportunity to practice their research skills while conducting observations throughout New York City. Students visit places such as Grand Central Station, Times Square, and Bryant Park to conduct observations and then use their findings to connect to course readings and complete reflective writing assignments.


What Should I Observe?

When you are conducting an observation, it can often be difficult to know exactly what you should be observing and what observations you should be recording. This often depends on the research question you are investigating or the assignment you are completing, but below is a template that students use in my *Ethnographies of Work* course to help guide them in taking their fieldnotes when they are conducting their observations. Please refer to the chapter on data collection for more information on this process.

| **Description of Field Observation** | **Description of the Setting/Atmosphere** | **Description of People (Include specific demographic information)** | **Description of Activities** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Date:<br><br>Location:<br><br>Time: | | | |
| **Key Events** | **Emerging Questions** | **Reflections** | **Additional Comments** |
| | | | |

## Chapter Key Points

- Observations are essential to ethnographic research.
- Observations allow the researcher to learn from his or her surroundings and gain insights that may not be possible from relying on others to transmit the information.
- There are different types of observations that ethnographic researchers can conduct such as naturalistic observations or participant-observations.
- As with all research methods, there are strengths and limitations that the researcher needs to consider while using this method to collect data.

## Questions

1. Why are observations essential to ethnographic research?
2. Identify the strengths and limitations of conducting observations.
3. Compare and contrast participant observation and naturalistic observation.
4. What challenges do you anticipate while conducting your own observations? How can you try in minimize them?
5. What can you do as an ethnographer to reduce *observer bias*?

## Key Terms

- Hawthorne effect
- Observer bias
- Validity
- Participant Observation

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# Sensory Ethnography

Tom Martin, PhD

If you have made it this far into this textbook, you will be quite familiar with the idea of 'participant observation', the mainstay of the ethnographic method. Watching people, talking with them, and actively engaging in social practices are the participatory techniques through which the ethnographer learns to see the world as his or her participants do, rich with socially constructed and historically situated meaning. Yet the focus on *seeing* the world as your participants do sometimes eclipses the other sensory modes that people employ to make sense of social and material interactions. Especially in the ethnography of work, it is important to understand how your participants understand non-visual information, such as the textures of the materials they use or the feeling of the tools they operate. This embodied understanding cannot be adequately examined just by watching another person's body; in these cases, ethnographic data collection requires feeling, hearing, smelling, and tasting the physical world as well. Throughout this chapter, these non-visual methods of data collection will be collectively referred to as the techniques of *sensory ethnography*.

Sensory ethnography is not totally distinct from the rest of ethnography, as there is no such thing as 'non-sensory' ethnography. After all, the ethnographer always uses his or her eyes and ears during fieldwork, relying on the senses of sight and sound to form observations. The term 'sensory ethnography' is meant to remind the researcher that a myriad of other senses exist as well, many of which are routinely overlooked in studies of the social and cultural world. In this chapter, we will consider what these senses are, how they can be recorded, and how they might play into ethnographic explorations of particular kinds of work.

## What are the 'senses'?

You probably remember the classic five senses from your grade-school science class: touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste. These five senses are going to be the backbone of any sensory ethnography, which puts your whole body into conversation with the world around it. How do things sound? Music can play a big part in many cultures, and if you cannot describe how the music sounds, you will not be able to produce a full portrait of how that culture operates. How do things taste? Again, food can play a significant role in people's lives, and being able to describe how different foods taste can allow you fully depict the cultures that eat those foods.

### Sight as sense

'Now wait' you might be thinking:. 'You said sight is one of the five senses. So isn't observation already sensory ethnography?'. Yes, you are correct – all ethnographic data, including the simplest visual observations, comes from paying attention to one's body. When you observe your research participants, you necessarily rely on your eyes, so you have therefore already started practicing sensory ethnography. Most sensory ethnographers, however, go beyond just describing what they see, talking instead about what it feels like for them to see certain things.

For the purposes of this chapter, we can call this a difference between *perception* and *sensation* (Armstrong, 1962). Take these two excerpts as examples to illustrate the difference, starting with Eugene Cooper's description of learning to do historic Chinese woodcarving:

> …my boss, under pressure to keep me productively occupied, and not wishing to assign me any work too far beyond my limited capabilities, gave me a piece to work on that had already been begun by someone else. It was really poorly done, and for a while I wondered who was responsible. Slowly, *a déjà vu* took shape; the piece was really familiar. I had started it three months before. (Cooper, 1989, p. 145)

In this passage, Cooper tells us what it was like to *perceive* the work piece in front of him; in other words, he tells us about how he recognizes the object, rather than how it feels to see it. This kind of perceptual description is common in conventional participant observation, where the ethnographer is concerned with reporting what is happening in a particular place, and not how his or her body reacts to incoming sensations.

By contrast, consider this passage by Erin O'Connor, from an article in which she describes her experience of learning to blow glass:

> I was interested in… turning and turning the glass, watching the configuration swim in the brilliant red, feeling the warmth simultaneously… I wondered if there were glassblowers who just stand [there] with the glass, never ever completing one object… At the time, this visual fantasia seemed brilliant, inspiring like a muse, and I thought surely that it must be a salient aspect of the glassblower's pleasure of practicing her craft. (O'Connor, 2005, p. 197)

Like Cooper, O'Connor is telling us about what she saw when she was at work, learning her craft. Unlike Cooper, however, O'Connor focuses on what it felt like as the light and heat emanating from the materials reached her body, rather than just relating judgments about the appearance of the finished product. She focuses on her visual *sensation* of the glass-blowing process, the 'brilliant red' and the 'visual fantasia'. This kind of description is the hallmark of the sensory ethnographer, who is concerned with the lived experience of the body in social and cultural practices.

## Unfamiliar senses

Most people can confidently tell you about their experience of the 'big five' senses: touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste. While the sensory ethnographer does rely heavily on these commonly understood senses, he or she should also examine other sensations that arise in the body. Consider the following senses, as described by philosopher Mark Paterson (2007):

- *Proprioception*, or "the body's position felt as muscular tension" (p. 4). Imagine you are lying face-down on the ground, starting to do a push-up. The muscles in your upper back contract as you push against the floor, and the muscles in your upper arms fight against the weight of your body as your torso slowly rises. Even with your eyes closed, these sensations tell you where your body is in relation to the world around it.

- *Kinaesthesia*, “the sense of the movement of body and limbs” (p. 4). When you are running, dancing, or playing a sport, you perceive the movement in your arms and legs without and visual clues to indicate that they are moving. You sense your muscles expanding and contracting in constant, reliable patterns, which you interpret as movement through space. In addition, the momentum you perceive as you speed up, stop short, or turn a corner signals to your body that your direction has changed, allowing you to perceive your bodily movement even when you are not in control of it (e.g., while riding in a car).

- *Vestibular Sense,* which relates *“*a sense of balance derived from information in the inner ear” (p. 4). If you have ever been on a boat in choppy water, you are already very familiar with the *vestibular sense*, which can be uniquely unsettling. Closing your eyes when you feel seasick does not make you feel better, because you still sense the up-and-down movement of the boat, even if you cannot see the rising and falling seas. Likewise, if you close your eyes while riding your bike, you will sense the moment you begin to fall off, since the body has this mechanism for determining when it is upright.

To consider the role of these other bodily senses in human action, take a look at this passage from Caroline Potter’s sensory ethnography of a dance studio:

> Phrases employed by contemporary dance instructors such as ‘melt into the floor’, ‘feel the weight of the head’, and ‘anchor the [heavy] pelvis into the ground’ prompted students to bring the body’s relationship with gravity to explicit attention. A focal point for this attention was ‘the center’, a conceptual area of the torso where the dancing body’s ‘connected’ movements are meant to originate. In classical ballet the center is indicated in the region of the rib cage and is used for ‘pulling up’, the action of lifting the upper torso away from the pelvis to give the appearance of lightness in the upper body, creating an ethereal quality to the movement. In contrast, contemporary dancers tend to indicate a lower position of the center, in the region of the pelvis, which translates to movement qualities of ‘weight’ and ‘groundedness’ (Potter, 2008, p. 450; edited for American spelling).

Which senses do you recognize Potter relying upon, outside of the ‘classic five’?

## Whose senses?

As you may have noticed from the ethnographies quoted above, there are two main ways to conduct a sensory-ethnographic observation. The first way is to closely examine your own experience of your body, normally while conducting some  kind of culturally situated practice; we can call that *sensory introspection.* The second way is to ask someone else to describe their sensory experience to you, which is called *sensory-ethnographic interview.*

### Sensory introspection

Introspection has a long history in psychology, where it was a popular research method until the beginning of the twentieth century (Titchener, 1987). Eventually, introspection was abandoned by psychologists in favor of observational experiments, which were thought to be better at demonstrating cause-and-effect relationships (Locke, 2009). As ethnographers, however, we are not primarily concerned with discovering hard and fast laws that govern human behavior, as many psychologists are. Instead, we are interested in exploring the nuances of human experience and the intersection between experience and culture. As a consequence, introspection is still well-suited to ethnographic investigation.

So what exactly is introspection? Think of it as simply reflecting on the sensations that arise in your body – how they feel, where they come from, and what they mean. Imagine doing a sensory ethnography of learning to ride a bike. At first, you would probably experience an unintelligible storm of sensations as you twist your handlebars back and forth until you fall over. As you start to get the hang of it, however, you take note of particular sensations and relate them to different outcomes in performance. You might notice that you are much less wobbly at higher speeds, as if the bike starts to pull you upright as you go faster. You may notice that when you turn to one side or the other, the momentum in your body tries to carry you forward, and you need to lean into the turn to stay on the bike. You could even notice that pressing the brakes too hard suddenly pushes all your weight forward, causing you to feel yourself sailing over the handlebars and through the air – until, of course, you feel the texture of the pavement as it makes contact with your body.

All of the thoughts that you recorded in your ethnography of riding a bicycle are introspective, in that they record your first-person bodily experience. This kind of sensory auto-ethnography comes naturally when you are learning something new, since you are already listening very intently to your body and relating new sensations to the performance of the task at hand. Sports, dance, and craft skills are all great topics for introspective ethnography, since they require you to spend a lot of time focused on sensations in your body and their relationship to the goals you are trying to achieve. While experiencing these new sensations comes naturally, though, capturing them in language presents a more difficult challenge. What did it feel like when you first fell off the bike, versus when you fell off it for the tenth time? Did you have time to reflect on the feeling of your body in space as you were falling, or were you too busy worrying about hitting the ground? Are you able to reflect on these experiences in the past, or are they clouded by the passage of time?

At the beginning of this section, it was noted that psychologists rarely use introspective methods these days because they are not considered adequately reliable. While questions of reliability are less pressing for ethnographers, given the relative emphasis on interpretation over objectivity, you will still need to convince the reader that you really felt what you say you felt. Providing 'evidence' of sensory experience is nearly impossible, but you can put your readers at ease by taking these factors, as explained by Lincoln and Guba (1985), into account:

- *Credibility:* Show the reader that you did everything necessary to support credible observations of your own experience. If you are writing about learning ballet, your results are unlikely to seem credible if you only attend one dance class; make sure to attend as many sessions as it takes for you to really 'get a feel' for the activity.

- *Dependability:* Make sure to be specific about how you recorded your experience, from start to finish. If you took notes, tell the reader when and how, and explain whether you suspect your memory of the experience changed between when it happened and when you wrote it down. The better your reader can follow your process of documentation and analysis, the more dependable your work will appear.

- *Confirmability*: Is your sensory-ethnographic study something that other people could repeat? Something very common, like learning to throw clay pots, is an excellent topic for a sensory ethnography, since many readers will be able to confirm that you were likely to have felt what you report feeling.

### Sensory-ethnographic interview

Sensory-ethnographic interviewing is, as you may have guessed, interviewing other people about their sensory experience. In a way, sensory interviews are easier to conduct than sensory introspection, since you do not need to interpret the sensations arising in your own body, which can be a tricky task. On the other hand, sensory interviews just push this problem of introspection onto another person, who is much less likely to have thought through all of the prickly questions around sensory ethnography in the level of detail that you have (once you have finished this chapter, that is).

The key to a successful sensory-ethnographic interview, as with all interviews, is preparation. Begin by thinking hard about the questions you want to include on your interview schedule. If you are asking a potter what it feels like to throw pots, the question “What does it feel like to throw pots?” is not going to cut it; your interviewee will undoubtedly be confused, and give you a vague answer (e.g., “It feels great!”). You might start instead by asking about the steps in the process, having the person narrate the construction of pottery from start to finish. At each step of their description, ask specific probing questions, exploring what movements they use to achieve different goals. Once your conversation reaches that level of specificity, you can start to ask questions about sensation, like asking how the potter knows the clay is mixed well enough that it is ready to work. Finally, do not discount responses that initially seem disappointing. If someone tells you “I just know – that’s how it feels to me”, write this down and think of how to probe it more deeply in a follow-up interview.

Sarah Pink (2009) suggests conducting sensory-ethnographic interviews while doing the same activity that your interviewee is describing, as this co-participation ensures that the experience will be fresh in the person’s mind. Furthermore, by participating alongside the interviewee, you are given a frame of reference for understanding what he or she is describing; in Pink’s example of riding bicycles together with the person you are interviewing (p. 85), it is easy to imagine the interviewee pointing to parts of your bike as you both ride along, or telling you to pay attention to certain sensory experiences that they recognize as important. Just remember to be careful in whatever you are doing – if you are a novice and the interviewee is an expert in whatever activity you have chosen to study, make sure you can safely keep up!

## Sensory research topics in the world of work

Now that you have a handle on what sensory ethnography is, you might be asking yourself what it has to do with an *Ethnographies of Work* course. Most likely, your study of the world of work will not involve riding a bicycle or doing ballet. But work, no matter what kind, always involves the human body in one way or another, and your ethnographies will be improved by asking how the senses are engaged within the workplace. Take the following research topics as examples of how sensory ethnography can illuminate a study of work:

- *Embodied skills:* Skilled practical work often involves seeing, feeling, hearing, or otherwise sensorially encountering tools and materials in ways that only experts in particular trades can understand (Roth, 2012). You might be interested in asking craftspeople, construction workers, or professional artists how they perceive the materials that they work with, as well as how they developed this kind of understanding. If you have the time and resources, you may even be interested in learning the basics of a new trade yourself – apprenticing oneself to master craftsperson is a time-honored anthropological tradition (see Coy, 1989).

- *Painful professions:* One unfortunate truth about the world of work is that some jobs have negative effects on the bodies of the people who carry them out. Manual trades are often repetitive and physically demanding, leading to both chronic and acute injuries. As an ethnographer of work, you will sometimes need to explore how particular jobs damage workers' bodies, and what daily work feels like for someone who has developed arthritis, back pain, or repetitive stress injuries from problems on the job. These negative consequences can be less obvious as well; a waitress who is required to wear a short skirt in a heavily air-conditioned restaurant will undoubted have a lot to say about the sensory aspects of her job.

- *Vivid environments:* Even if your research questions are not primarily focused on sensory data, consider adding some sensory texture to your descriptions of the ethnographic setting. For example, if the site you are investigating is very loud or very quiet, let the readers know, so that they can better imagine being there. Describing the temperature, the ambient smells, or the textures of commonly encountered surfaces will help the reader experience the world as you perceive it. For example, how comfortable are the chairs in the office you are observing? Does the room smell like freshly-brewed coffee, or carpet-cleaning chemicals? All of this description will help to put your reader into the space you are describing – and you may even discover meaningful connections between sensory data and cultural experience that you had not previously considered.

## Conclusion

Remember that participant observation – the ethnographer's classic technique – is not necessarily limited to visual observation. Investigating certain questions about the world of work will require you to employ your whole body as a research instrument, examining the sounds, smells, and physical textures of the workplace. Once you start asking these questions, a raft of interesting challenges will arise: How do you capture your embodied experience in the moment? How do you describe fleeting sensations, or the sense of your body's position in space? These challenges are what make sensory ethnography illuminating and interesting – not to mention, fun to conduct!

This short chapter is meant as a quick introduction to the idea of sensory ethnography, rather than a complete how-to manual. If you want to explore this topic further, take a look at the reference list below for in-depth exploration of sensory theories and methods. In particular, Sarah Pink's *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2009) provides an excellent introduction for the beginner embodied ethnographer.

In summary:

- Think about using your whole body to gather data while conducting a workplace ethnography

- Consider senses past the 'classic five', including your senses of balance and bodily movement

- Make sure to have a plan for making *credible*, *dependable*, and *confirmable* observations. Convince the reader that you put enough time and energy into your fieldwork to make believable claims about your sensory experience.

## Study Questions

6. What is the difference between *sensation* and *perception*?

7. What bodily senses can you use to conduct ethnographic research?

8. When is introspective sensory research appropriate, and when are sensory interviews a better choice?

9. How can you convince the reader that you actually experienced the sensations that you report in your ethnography?

10. What topics would you like to explore from a sensory perspective? Would sensory methods could help you to conduct your workplace ethnographies?

## Key Terms

*Sensory ethnography:* A mode of ethnographic observation that takes sensory data into account, including (but not limited to) the sensations of touch, hearing, and smell, as well as the roles that these senses play in cultural and social interactions.

*Sensation:* Feelings arising from interactions between the environment and the physical body. Examples include the sense of heat, brightness, pain, or movement. Sensations are raw physical input, rather than interpretations of what the input represents (compare *perception*).

*Perception:* Interpretation of sensory input signaling the presence of meaningful objects or events. For example, the *perception* of a coffee mug is based on interpretation of the *sensation* of light reflecting off it and hitting the eye. Perception is generally instantaneous, rather than consciously considered.

*Proprioception:* The perception of the position of the body, interpreted through the sensation of muscular tension.

*Kinaesthesia:* The perception of bodily movement; closely linked to *proprioception.*

*Vestibular Sense:* The perception of bodily balance, interpreted through sensations arising in the inner ear.

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# Participant-observation in ethnography

by Maureen E. Sheridan

## Introduction

Ethnographic field research is a qualitative method of data collection to observe, interact, and understand how people develop within their proximal environment. Ethnographic methods are techniques used to collect data and may include methods like interviews, participant-observation, mapping, focus groups, or surveys (Mannik & McGarray, 2017). When a researcher speaks about being in “the field,” they are describing how it feels to be at a location examining the everyday lives of the people they are studying.

Participant-observation is an indispensable component of the ethnographic research process because the researcher is in an active state of participation while at the same time passively observing their subjects (Murchison, 2010; Tombro, 2016). In examining ethnography, it is important to acknowledge that participation and observation are equally important to accurately gather data yet can be construed as contradictory principles. The ethnographer not only observes and assembles notes and field maps throughout the process, they also benefit from having gained a first-hand account of a lived experience. Working side by side daily with participants in a research environment allows the ethnographer to gain first-hand knowledge about the environment under investigation. In other words, to make the most out of the ethnographic research process, the participant-observer must practice the art of balancing both participation and observation, which can be difficult at times (Mannik & McGarray, 2017; Murchison, 2010).

Frequently individuals think that the ethnographic research process of participation and observation are easy tasks because the researcher seems to be simply surveying their subjects in a less formal or structured way. It might even seem an easy or fun task with little interjection on the part of the researcher. Whatever the case may appear to be, one should note that successful participant-observation requires that researchers develop a way to first check their personal bias at the start of the investigation and to observe and participate within the environment in an unfettered and unbiased way (Anderson, 2011; Tombro, 2016). The role of the ethnographer is not to guess what they might find, it involves rather, researching the behavior of their participants and their surrounding environment objectively which occurs over an extended period.

Equally important to note is that an ethnographic study consumes the researcher's and participants time as it occurs over an extended period of weeks, months, or even years. The ethnographic method takes resources from the ethnographer's own energies as they become an active participant while simultaneously observing the process itself. Observing specific groups of individuals in their own environment cuts to the root of an ethnographer's mission. But this cannot happen within a vacuum. The trick to successful participant-observation is to remain objective and observant while, at the same time, becoming involved in a hands-on, first-hand experience. It is imperative to remain objective in one's role (Tombro, 2016; Van Mannen, 2003).

In this chapter, we see that the role of participant-observer can be challenging as the ethnographer navigates the research process within a socially constructed environment. It has been noted that most researchers do not choose the ethnographic method as a research method. Instead, they may choose observation, interviews, surveys, or focus groups to understand the phenomenon under investigation. Ethnographic research requires a long-term commitment of weeks, months, or years, and commands the researcher's active interest in the process at hand. The ability to communicate effectively with participants about the reasons for and the process of how the study will occur is critical in gaining not only participants' trust but their shared enthusiasm as well.

## Reconciling Participation and Observation

Some experts argue that the ethnographic research strategy cannot be reconciled with the participant-observation method. Participant-observation appears to have contradictory principles that cannot be equitably negotiated. The ethnographer may have a more difficult time to plan for research because the process not only requires solid preparation and purpose, but the actual participant-observation takes place over an extended period of weeks, months, or years. Ethnographic research requires that the participant-observer maintain an objective stance and remain a detached observer. The researcher must not intentionally try to redirect or influence the environment or participants under examination. A challenge the ethnographer faces is that, although the researcher must keep a neutral frame of mind and avoid bringing personal bias into the equation, their direct participation in the study involves them on a personal level. This happens when their own lived experience mixes with the environment and reacts to the subjects and environment involved (Alasuutari, 1995; Murchison, 2010; Tombro, 2016).

In order to drill down and gain access to the personal experiences of a society or culture in action, the ethnographer must become involved on a personal level to some degree. It has been argued that participant-observation involves acquiring important first-hand knowledge of the subjects being studied but it can cause the ethnographer to involuntarily abandon their objective stance. When this occurs, the ethnographer may experience social or cultural empathy that could sway the conclusions of the investigation. The researcher must be cognizant of keeping an open mind and not to prejudge anything he/she/they witnesses (Murchison, 2010).

While all this may be necessary, there is the opposite assumption that a researcher who becomes a "participant" cannot maintain the ability to capture and acknowledge the larger picture. Instead, the ethnographer may absorb the experience of events and may not have the ability to remain objective once they have immersed themselves in the study over a period of time. This can occur when concentrated experiences and emotions have actively ensued over a prolonged time period. The first-hand experience of the ethnographer can change the long-term perception of their environment when they continue to act as a participant-observer long term (Ladner, 2014; Murchison, 2010).

## The Importance of Allocating Sufficient Time

Ethnographic research methods require the participant-observer to spend considerable time at their field site. Ethnography happens over a period of weeks, months, or years. Spending time in the field helps facilitate better data collection and helps the ethnographer develop a deeper sense of the events or culture under investigation. During an ethnographic study, participant-observation allows the researcher to meet with and speak to all levels of employees or members of society, not just a select few chosen by leadership ranks. Most times there is a direct correlation between the quality of the study when compared with the amount of time spent in the field. It has been noted though that over time the research relationship evolves as participants become more familiar with the study and comfortable with the relationship they have formed with the ethnographer (Geertz, 2000; Murchison, 2010; Tombro, 2016). Therefore, allowing for extra time necessitates that the ethnographer plans their project timing and deadlines carefully to allow for a full investigation of the phenomena under consideration.

Another thing to keep in mind is the fact that most of the time ethnographers work under deadlines or departure dates. The goal then should be to ensure that the researcher's time is optimized within the structure of these deadlines. It has been noted that when a researcher first chooses to use the ethnographic method and has not developed enough experience with this approach, they may delay the start of the participant-observation process. This stems from a real lack of knowledge on what to expect from the process and how to approach the social nature of the study (Averill, 2006; Tombro, 2016). The ethnographer may even stall fieldwork due to apprehension or a lack of confidence. However, procrastination is detrimental to an ethnographer's research study because precious time is lost. This can result in reduced research opportunities and outcomes. It is important to remember that planning and timing are critical aspects of any successful ethnographic venture.

## Communicating with Participants to Execute the Research Process

The ethnographer puts a lot of work into their project and starts out with an exciting set of ideas. The researcher should keep in mind that building on this enthusiasm during the first stages of the research process is an important first step. Participants are commonly perceptive and inquisitive when it comes to ethnographic projects and their purpose (Alasuutari, 1995; Tombro, 2016; Van Maanen, 2003). You may receive countless questions about your research project including queries about how the idea to organize the study originated, what the utility of the project is, why this audience, or why you chose to evaluate this environment rather than another. As a research expert, the investigator must be prepared to answer these questions and to clarify your commitment to the process. As a researcher, you will likely have fairly lengthy responses to the questions delivered, but you should also be ready to provide relatively short versions of the answers as well (Murchison, 2010).

## Avoiding Deceptiveness and Misrepresentation

We have already learned that deception and misrepresentation are not acceptable practices. When you begin your field research, you should keep in mind the importance of avoiding miscommunication and deception with the process and to demonstrate a sincere interest in the phenomena under investigation to your participants (Bryman, 2004; Murchison, 2010). To get participants to fully engage in the process and assist you with your research, you should be able to explain and your own interest with clear examples. The ethnographer knows that potential participants are acknowledging the study if they tell you that they are excited and committed to the process.

The main thing to remember is to exhibit your own genuine interest in the process. It is important to communicate fully to your participants about the sacrifices both of you will be making throughout the process. This can be achieved by spending time to educate and communicate with participants about the process prior to getting started. When participants understand the reasoning behind the project, they are more likely to understand the potential advantages that complement your research process and become supportive within the group or social unit. When explaining your research process in diverse situations, you may discover that the explanations can lead to interesting conversations that help shape or even sometimes redirect the project. This exchange is part of the engaged nature of ethnographic research (Geertz, 2003; Murchison, 2010).

## Getting Started

Getting ready to enter the field or environment under investigation, it is important to be prepared for the unknown. In ethnographic research, there can be many unknowns, so how does one prepare for this? When deciding how to approach a research project, many researchers turn to research books and journals found in their local libraries or bookstores. The most important thing to remember when approaching ethnographic research is to just get started! Once your research begins, it will reduce much of the fear and apprehension of observing living participants (Ladner, 2014; Murchison, 2010; Tombro, 2016). If you have decided to go into the field where you are a non-native, either in your appearance or in speaking the language, you may feel out of place. Keeping in mind that the first step in the ethnographic research process is usually the most difficult will help the ethnographer alleviate stress and launch the process.

Something to consider when preparing for your research project is to make sure you have a well-developed research plan prior to beginning your research (Bryman, 2004; Creswell, 1994; Murchison, 2010; Tombro, 2016). Having a well thought out and prepared research plan allows the ethnographer to feel better prepared to face the research process and can reduce some of the uncertainty they may feel. The ethnographer's participant-observer role relinquishes a lot of the control over to the research environment and participants at hand. This is something that the ethnographer must reconcile amongst the preparation in the research plan and its implementation.

Equally important to note is confronting the pressure involved with conducting your research project in a familiar environment. If this is the case, the ethnographer performs the research in a familiar place. If so the researcher may face various expectations from participants that could create a sense of apprehension about their own role as researcher. The preliminary stage of your research is important because it sets the tone for the research that follows. It also creates first impressions that can be hard to change (Creswell, 1994; Ladner, 2014). It is important to note that facing these fears head on will help guard against stalling your project and instead get you started. It is important to note that getting started is the biggest hurdle to overcome. Once the process has begun and you have completed your first participant-observation, you will discover that your stress is alleviated and that the process will become easier moving forward.

Fieldwork means being visible to your participants and to personally collect data through hand-written note taking and ethnographic mapping. The ethnographer as participant is always there taking notes, making observations, and acting as the primary research instrument to navigate the complexity of being within the social environment (Ladner, 2014).

The use of recording devices are not always a viable option, so the researcher must be prepared to have pen and paper ready at all times. Passive observation within a framework of active participation makes the whole process a delicate balance to reconcile between observer and participant.

It is also important to remember that at the beginning of the process, most participants will be curious and excited to begin. It is imperative to build upon this beginner's enthusiasm to capture the trust and cooperation of the participants and to also maintain momentum as your move forward. As the research expert, the ethnographer should be prepared to respond to questions and be able to explain your dedication to the process. A researcher should prepare both longer or shorter responses to the possible questions asked due to differences in time constraints and the audience at hand (Murchison, 2010; Van Mannen, 2003).

### Routine versus unexpected behavior and conversations

A challenging task in ethnography comes in the form of sorting the routine or regular things observed versus the extraordinary or unique items observed. Many researchers in the past have been drawn to emphasizing the extraordinary discoveries as they made for a better story and captured a more exotic appeal over time. However, the downside to overemphasizing things is that the data collected, which is a primary goal in ethnography, can sometimes lead to being counterproductive as most humans cannot relate to the cultural or social phenomena being documented. Yet, focusing solely on regular or routine aspects of cultural or social phenomena under investigation shifts the focus of the reader to miss important variations between the social lives of different cultures and environments.

"A good ethnographer recognizes that there are patterns of behavior and shared sets of symbols and structures that shape possibilities" (Murchison, 2010). Identifying distinctive interests and peculiarities and the role that creative and inventive ways social attitudes or conflicts can stimulate significant variety within the way groups interact is also significant. Therefore, the researcher should plan to identify both the regular and the extraordinary aspects of the phenomena under investigation. The outcome of the data collected may emphasize one dimension over another, but they must be reconciled against what needs to be addressed in both the routine and extraordinary. When conducting participant-observation and writing notes and creating ethnographic maps, you should remember to pay attention to any repetition and to that which is unique.

### Paying Attention to Repetition

In the beginning of the participant-observation the ethnographer will not be able to identify that a particular action or occurrence happens every time or that certain words or symbols always appear until they have been observing long enough to identify multiple similar events or discussions. It is important to keep in mind that being aware of signs of repetition is important from the outset. The researcher must pay attention to things that repeat so that the study can proceed as a more functionally effective observation. The faster that the ethnographer grasps the idea of separating out shared practices and customs such as greetings, friendliness, and gracious manners, the more likely he/she/they will be able to find a degree of acceptance and rapport within the group.

A lot of the experience gained over time occurs through observation of repetitive practices, any types of imitated behaviors and a bit of trial and error. In situations where the researcher comes to a field site as an obvious outsider, they should try to ensure their first instinct is to observe. That way the ethnographer has the opportunity to observe and learn the appropriate manners or behavior of a particular situation to better blend in with the group and develop trust among the participants. Developing a default pause to see how others are react or respond to a particular situation with help determine whether a certain behavior or approach is appropriate for the group dynamic. Becoming a student who learns through observation is helpful in determining what is acceptable or not in a given situation.

If the ethnographer is entering a familiar environment, he/she/they should still pay close attention to repeated behaviors and communications.  The researcher may find that some aspects of a culture or environment become so routine that most participants are no longer consciously aware of their behaviors or actions. The process of participant-observation can sometimes reveal that some conventions that exist or certain expectations derived by the researcher about the environment may require that the research perspective may need to change in order to blend in slightly different behaviors, customs, or responses.

Aside from becoming a more effective participant-observer, paying closer attention to details of repetition allows the ethnographer to study the central features of shared cultural and social systems. It is known that individuals repeat things for a reason, which is to say that they are usually important aspects of a culture or society. Therefore, noticing repetitive events, behaviors, phrases, or symbols can shed light on the most important shared social and cultural components of the environment under study.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we reviewed how to create a foundation for productive participant-observation. With this knowledge, we can start to understand how the participant-observation process evolves into a well-detailed research study. One that accurately reflects what the participant-observer uncovered about the environment under investigation (Murchison, 2010; Tombro, 2016; Van Mannen, 2003). Ethnographic research requires a long-term commitment of weeks, months, or years, and commands the researcher's active interest in the process at hand. This chapter also pointed out that the role of participant-observer can be challenging. As a participant, the researcher maintains an active role, yet, as an observer, the researcher upholds a passive role. Attempting to reconcile both becomes a challenge. As the ethnographer circumnavigates the research process of a socially constructed environment, it is important they maintain the ability to communicate effectively with participants. Quite often, there is much curiosity and excitement about the reasons behind the ethnographer's reasons and choice for the specific research study and participants will usually express their excitement at the outset of the project. Ensuring good communication and commitment in the beginning of the process helps participants understand the reasons and/or benefits of performing the study.

A good explanation and demonstration of commitment on the part of the researcher helps gain not only participants' trust but their shared enthusiasm too. Hopefully, this chapter helped both new and seasoned researchers to gain a glimpse into the work involved in the ethnographic method and to understand how the process evolves into a well-detailed research study over time (Murchison, 2010; Tombro, 2016; Van Mannen, 2003).

## Chapter Overview

- Analyze and discuss the delicate balance between participant - observation and its contradictory paradox.
- How to create a practical approach to combining participation and observation.
- The importance of planning to ensure successful ethnographic fieldwork.
- Explain why ethnographers depend on participants in research execution.
- Discuss the importance of communicating the purpose and choice of your research topic with participants.
- Learn to avoid deception in communicating your mission with participants.
- Understand the importance of noting repeating and dissimilar patterns presented in the course of participant - observation.

## KEY TERMS

- Ethnographic methods
- Participant-observer
- Time commitment
- Objective stance
- Social or cultural awareness
- Key Participants

## Chapter Questions

1. Why is it important for an ethnographer to begin a project by observing first?
2. Explain the contradiction caused by the idea of participant-observation?
3. What is the importance of communicating the reasons for your research study to participants when you start the process?
4. Why is it a good idea to avoid misrepresentation and deceptive practices when interacting with groups of participants?
5. Do you think it is important to identify and categorize routine or regular occurrences or only the extraordinary and unique? Give your opinion on this topic.
6. Why is repetition important to note? What is the usefulness of identifying things that repeat or that are unique?
7. Demonstrate through several examples the significance of maintaining trust and enthusiasm throughout the research process.
8. Why do many researchers avoid the participant-observation approach?
9. Give an example of when a research study should be conducted with the ethnographic method.
10. Discuss the importance of planning to ensure successful ethnographic fieldwork. Give examples.

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# Conducting Interviews

Samuel Finesurrey

## Introduction

Interviews illuminate powerful and textured depictions of events that help us more fully understand individuals and communities, historical perspectives and the present, struggles and joy. Interviews are an exchange between two or more people where a researcher designs a set of questions to gather information on one or more topics (Blackstone, 2012). Interviews provide ethnographic researchers the opportunity to engage and question, with an eye toward understanding a community or group being studied. An interview can reveal the roots of a cultural tradition or communal mindset by unraveling an assortment of shared and individual experiences, emotions and memories. For example, interviewers may ask their interviewees "what was something that surprised you after joining your union?" or "can you tell us the story of the first time you participated in a strike?" Interviews can reveal details that help unlock the ways your informants see themselves fitting into the world around them, as well as how they communicate in that world.

Varied in type, interviews offer a unique opportunity in ethnographic work to empower your informants to share and preserve their truths, while providing an essential research tool in building ethnographies. Often, with interviews, we are able to recover hidden stories, secrets of the past, or untold journeys that have yet to make it into the history textbooks. It is important to remember while your ethnography is built around your analysis, interviews are co-constructed; that is, they are a form of knowledge produced by both the interviewer and the interviewee.

## Types of Interviews

*Qualitative interviews* are the most common interviews in ethnographic work. A qualitative interview is organized by *open-ended questions* that seek in-depth explanations of traditions, experiences and perceptions. These are generally *semi-structured interviews* where the interviewer starts with a list of open-ended questions, but will not strictly follow the agenda they prepared. A semi-structured format is useful for qualitative interviews because it provides room for follow-up questions and illuminate the “why” and “how” of a participant’s experience. Qualitative interviews excavate material that is typically inaccessible through *quantitative* interviews, *structured interviews* or *surveys*, which gather responses through close-ended questions, or collect numerical data from participants. Qualitative interviews enable participants to offer free-formed responses, as opposed to selecting from a short list of choices constructed by you, the ethnographer. They offer the flexibility to propose questions that arise in conversation, seek clarification and allow the space for unique and detailed stories to be told. (Griffiths, 2017; Blackstone, 2012) Qualitative interviews seek narratives, not statistics; not just how many or how often, but “How did that feel?” or “What happened after that?” The benefit of qualitative interviews is that they allow you as the interviewer to access the narrative most important to your interviewee through the process of open-ended responses. Further, as opposed to quantitative interviews, structured interviews or surveys, qualitative interviews give you the ability to break from a set list of questions. (Murchinson, 2010) Qualitative interviews are extremely important as they allow informants to become participants who can “co-construct” the project of understanding their culture.

Often *informal interviews*, which may feel more like conversations, are appropriate in the context of ethnographic research as people can be wary of being recorded when broaching difficult experiences. Informal interviews are often casual exchanges with informants to gather background information for your project, and often in preparation for a *formal interview*. Informal interviews are often *unstructured*, meaning they allow the discussion to freely venture from subject to subject, often without a written list of questions to guide the conversation. In unstructured interviewers the interviewer is following the interviewee as they tell their story. Informal interviews improve formal interviews that take place later as you become more knowledgeable about your respondent's experience, informed on what they care about, while developing the ability to ask more relevant, fruitful, and directed questions. (Murchinson, 2010) Often held in elevators or hallways, over coffee or in a spontaneous meeting without the aid of a recording device, informal interviews can aid exploratory research, or fill in missing gaps later in the process. It is very important in formal or informal interviews to honor the story you are hearing, to show empathy, to ask questions, but never suggest that you are judging what the respondent is telling you.

Formal qualitative interviews are the most demanding form of interview for both you, as the interviewer, and for the participant(s), but they are also potentially the most rewarding. They offer the opportunity to gather depth, details, and anecdotes for your project, and are better when conducted toward the end of your research, once you know the appropriate questions to ask you informant. These interviews are often recorded, and preserved, depending on the designs of the professor and the comfort of your participants. (Blackstone, 2012) You are asking the participant to share with you their time and memories, often about emotionally exhausting experiences. It is important to remember that an interview is a vulnerable experience. Your informant is sitting down and responding to an organized list of open-ended questions that could bring back painful, intimate and buried memories. Even questions that seem simple, like "tell me about growing up with your family," can be difficult if someone did not have an easy family life, did not grow up with their family, if a parent was ill, in another country, incarcerated or abusive. “Tell me about your job,” can also cause a strong reaction from your interviewee if the work your informant does is dangerous, if there is discrimination in the workplace, or if they are treated badly by management. While these interviews have the potential to offer you important information, it is key to remember your informant is trusting you with their story. You must handle the interaction with the respect and care it deserves. The intimacy of this exchange requires significant preparation by you, the ethnographer.

## Preparing for an Interview

The interview preparation process takes time, thought, and effort. You should create an environment where your interviewee feels comfortable to share their truth, and one that also accommodates your goal of conducting a clear, organized and useful interview. The six key steps in preparation include: identifying your informant, setting a time and place, conducting background research, formulating a list of questions, prepping *informed consent forms*, and preparing for a recording.

First, you need to find someone to interview. This often takes place in the context of *participant-observation* through conversations with informants. (Murchinson, 2010) People in and around your ethnographic study can serve as useful participants in your project, or they can nominate others to participate. Your interview will offer interviewees an opportunity to share their truth, something many participants will enjoy. Still, when asking people to participate in your projects, it’s important to show appreciation for their willingness to aid you in this ethnography and to be honest about how the interview may be used and preserved. This is true for both formal and informal interviews.

If you have an informant who has agreed to meet for a formal interview, you need to verify the time, date, and location of the interview. The location can determine the tone of the interview, for instance being interviewed in a law office would likely elicit a dramatically different set of responses than an interview held at their workplace, in a park, or the informant's home. We want to make sure your interviewee is relaxed, but also that there will not be a lot of background noise that may make the recording hard to hear. You can offer to conduct the interview in English or another language you and the interviewee both speak.  If people want to use words from their original language – even if you are not fluent – tell them they can, and then ask for a translation. You want your informant to be as comfortable as possible with every aspect of this process.

Third, you want to conduct background research about the historical and cultural context of the respondent and their story. Consider asking your informant some preliminary questions through an informal interview, or when setting up the time, to help you prepare for a conversation about their life. You can ask something like, "What should I learn about before I interview you so I can really appreciate your experience?" This process is also helpful as it allows informants to get a sense of what you will be asking and to begin recalling their experiences. After setting up the interview, look online, in books, journals, magazines, newspapers and in archives to become more informed about your participant's worldview. You want to make sure you can ask about, and explain competing understandings of the context in which the story of your interviewee takes place. If you were studying political attitudes that coal miners hold of President Donald Trump, you would have to also study his presidency, his actions on the environment, healthcare and workers' rights to understand why they might have concerns, or admire his policies.

Next, formulate a list of questions you will be asking. This is called a *guide*, *schedule* or *frame*. If you are interviewing multiple people for your ethnography, you want to be sure to ask everyone a similar set of questions, and then lots of specific follow-ups that are particular to each informant. This is what makes your interview semi-structured. Everyone gets the same basic questions, but with each respondent the interview travels in a unique direction. When thinking of these questions, keep in mind who your interviewee is and what insights they might, or might not be able to offer. Having a guide prepared for the interview helps give you as the interviewer confidence in your ability to remember the key questions and topics you are hoping to broach with your interviewee. You may be passionate about your topic of study, or nervous at the prospect of questioning your informant. A guide allows you to frame your questions in the best way possible, while serving as a tool to make sure the interview accomplishes what you set out to accomplish. For instance, if you have formed a positive or negative opinion of President Trump from your background research, you would not want to reveal that to your informant. Thus, you would not ask either, "what do you like about President Trump?" or "what don't you like about President Trump?"  But you might say, "can you give me your impressions of President Trump?" and then follow up with, "are there aspects of his leadership you like, and aspects you don't like very much?"

It's extremely important to take time in preparing your guide for the interview, keeping in mind the tone you want to set from the beginning and the order in which you want to present your questions. Practice prepared questions with a friend, family member, or in the mirror so that when you enter the interview you are not nervous or distracted, but are able to focus on being an *active listener,* paying attention to the subtleties in tone and word-selection of your informant. (Blackstone, 2012)   During the interview, as an *active listener*, you will be taking notes that will lead to follow-up questions based on the responses of your informant. Never look bored, or like you want to get onto the next question (even if you do!) Try to make eye contact and show through your body language that you are interested in what they are saying. If someone gets sad or teary, agitated or starts to laugh, let them have these emotions without judgment. Feel free to ask them "Do you need a break?" "Are you ok? Sorry if these questions are difficult," or "Do you feel able to continue, or should we stop?"

For semi-structured, or formal qualitative interviews you should be asking open-ended questions, and avoid questions that will elicit yes or no responses. To create an open-ended question, make sure you are gathering stories or addressing the "how" and "why" of a subject. While it's important to know the one-word responses to questions like "Where are you from?" this is the sort of information that can be gathered through an informal interview, a survey or a quantitative interview. Formal qualitative interviews offer an opportunity to ask open-ended questions that will go beyond inquiring, "Where are you from?" to ask "Tell me a story about where you are from?" or "Why did you chose to leave where you are from to come to New York City?" Through open-ended questions you can gather significantly more detailed responses.

In some classes you will be required to fill out paper work with your interviewee that affirms their willingness to participate in your ethnography. You should print out and organize the informed consent forms that you will be presenting to your informants. These forms are designed to give the interviewee an opportunity to declare in what context they are comfortable with their oral history being used. You should have the forms prepared beforehand, as they will explain the project to informants and ask their permission to use the contents of the interview. It is helpful to practice how you are going to introduce these consent forms to your interviewees. Depending on your goal, or that of your professor, you may be preserving this interview not only for your ethnography, but also for people to look back on in the future. For this reason, you need to make sure you have the proper paperwork to get permission to either use or archive your interview.

People need to be able to opt out of certain questions if they are uncomfortable; they might want the tape recorder turned off if they are giving you sensitive information they do not want recorded. Perhaps they are anxious about you recording and making public their immigration status, why they quit their job, or a personal trauma they experienced, but they still feel you should know.

Finally, before the interview, if you plan to preserve the recording, you must make sure you have audio equipment and it is working properly. For most interviews, cellphones are perfectly acceptable recording devices. Both Apple and Android phones have applications that generally serve the purposes of this project. Recording the interview is extremely helpful in the ethnographic process and offers possibilities for preserving the historic artifacts created with your informants. If permission is given to record the interview, this allows you to focus on active listening, as opposed to writing down every significant observation made by your participant. While taking notes is still a pivotal part of the interview process, even while that interview is being recorded, simultaneously recording the interview allows you time to formulate new questions and think about the informant’s key points, as opposed to endlessly jotting down whole phrases or ideas.

## Conducting an Interview

*Think about what it would be like to be formally interviewed by someone studying you or your community:*

*What would you want to convey?*
*What might you want to hide?*
*What do you hope the interviewer will learn about you?*
*Do you want to be able to review the final project?*
*Do you want to know where the interview will end up?*

Ideally you will record the interview to come back to and build upon for your ethnography. After turning on the recording device, and testing to be sure that it is recording, begin the formal interview by stating your name, the date, the name of your interviewee and the location of the interview. Then on the tape you will ask your interviewee for permission to record the interview, either exclusively to use for class work, or to have their interview preserved and archived. If you are not recording the interview, informed consent forms are still helpful as they help your interviewee understand how the information they give you will be used. Explain what you are doing, why you selected this informant, how special you think their story will be. You can tell them that there are no right or wrong answers.

The first few minutes are important for setting the tone of the interview. You want to make sure your informant is comfortable so they are as open and honest as possible. You generally should not start the interview with difficult questions that will make your interviewee uneasy. You would not start with a question like, "Tell me about the time you felt most hopeless when working at the factory." Instead, start light, ask something like, "Tell me something about yourself that I would not know by looking at you?" "How did you become interested in working at that factory?" or "How did you imagine your career path when you were a child?" The first few questions are extremely important. If you make your interviewee uncomfortable at the beginning of the interview you will get less in-depth and candid responses than if you work your way up to the more difficult questions. (Murchinson, 2010) Starting slow can be a great way to get into a rhythm for both you and your informant.

You should attempt to remain respectful of your informant's narrative, even if it provokes anger, doubt or suspicion in you. You must be careful not to ask questions that give away your opinions on an issue you are asking about. Do not say, for instance, "This seems like a really nice place to work" or "You seem really frustrated with your boss." Something more like, "How do you feel about working here?" or "If someone you cared about wanted a job here, what would you tell them?" Oftentimes interviewees will look for cues on how you feel about their answer to a particular question. If you show that you either approve or disapprove of their response, it will likely change the way the interviewee responds to future questions.

Further, you must be aware that interviewees may knowingly or unwittingly evade a question, exaggerate a story, provide incomplete information, or lie. This does not mean you should shy away from asking challenging or difficult questions. However, it is important to remember people generally want to present themselves in the best light possible. If you think someone may be misleading you, you can ask something like, "You mentioned you were the best athlete in your school, do you think all the other students would agree?" You may get more detail, you may not, or you may be interviewing the best athlete in the school!

What you hear from your interviewee is subjective, but it is this person's truth; or at least what they want you to know. Often the interviewee will present an *ideal,* as opposed to *real* versions of themselves and their culture. Like any primary source, what your informant says during the interview offers you important insights into their worldview. Still, you must always be aware of your interviewee's lens. Their narrative is shaped by their experiences and the historical moment in which they live. Always ask yourself how might the informant be attempting to shape your opinion with their explanation of events, traditions, daily routines, and personal experiences. Whether their perspective supports or challenges your conclusions, you must recognize the possibilities, as well as the limitations of this interview. (Murchinson, 2010) Your interviewee cannot give you objective truth, therefore, your projects should not uncritically use anything that the interviewee said. Any assertions or insights that the interview provides should be backed up by other sources of information. We must utilize interviews as only one significant part of an ethnographic study. (Esterberg, 2002)

You, as the interviewer must guide, but not direct the interview. You need to allow the informants to tell their stories, but make sure the interview does not stray too far from your topic so it remains useful to your ethnography. People might wander off topic, let them go for a bit, but always, delicately, get back to your questions. Something like, “That’s interesting. Can we go back to talk more about how your political views were formed?” If you do not understand a response, it is okay to ask your interviewee to explain what they mean. You can say, “Sorry I did not get that,” or “Can you explain that a bit more, I am not sure I understand.”

As an interviewer, you should also make sure that you do not finish the sentences of interviewees. Try to be comfortable in silence after asking a question. This is one of the most difficult, but important parts of the interviewing process. By doing this you are giving interviewee time to think and craft a response in their mind. This is essential to seeing the world as your interviewee is explaining it. If you are asking about a delicate topic, sometimes you can offer a wide-range of possible responses so that respondents feel free to say something not so positive. For instance, “can you tell me about your growing up–some people have wonderful stories about family, some have difficult stories, some have both. How would you describe the family situation in which you grew up?” or “I wanted to ask you about your job. Some people are really focused on what they like about their work, others complain about aspects and lots of people seem to feel mixed. How would you describe your work situation?"

Throughout the interview, take notes on insights you find interesting or important, words or phrases you find to be compelling, or questions you want to follow up on. This exercise both helps you formulate follow-up questions and will remind you later of your preliminary thoughts. Some interviewers take two-column notes; writing notes on a page with a line down the middle. On the left they jot down notes of what was said verbatim and on the right they write follow-up questions, ideas for future research, or comments for when they revise their notes at a later date.

| Comments | Questions/Idea/Comments |
|---|---|
| Raised by grandmother in Poland | When did they immigrate to the U.S.?<br><br>Why was she raised by grandmother? |
| My school was all white, even though Black and Latino kids lived in the neighborhood. | Find out how schools became racially segregated in this neighborhood. |
| At my job, lots of the women left because of sexual harassment and racial harassment – they brought a lawsuit - it was reported in the *Daily News* | Seems very important for her development as an activist.<br><br>Check *Daily News* February 2011 for mention of gender/race lawsuit at this Walmart. |

While it's extremely important to have prepared a range of topics and questions, especially in formal interviews, you must also be an active listener, adjusting your questions and creating new follow-up questions based on the responses of your informant. If you find yourself too focused on your next question, you might miss something crucial in your informants' response. What you missed could have altered your line of questioning, or help you realize you are making assumptions that do not apply to your interviewee. (Murchinson, 2010) Being an active listener is not an easy task, but it is essential to being a good interviewer.

> *Interviewers are consistently forced to reexamine their preconceived understandings of the people they are interviewing. For instance, Dr. Michelle Fine "once asked a high school drop out in New York City, 'when you were in school, were you the kind of student who participated a lot?' and Desiree, the interviewee responded, 'Not me I was a good kid.'" Fine explains, "I realized that I had assumed participation was a 'good student,' but in her school, or experience, being silent and compliant was the sign of a "good student.'"*
> Fine, *Just Research in Contentious Times*, 7.

Be careful around particularly sensitive topics such as immigration status, illicit activities, gender, sexuality, religious race or class identity, abuse, money, and politics. If we engage in this line of questioning we must make sure the interviewee is prepared for these types of questions, that they fit into subject of the interview, and that the informant knows they do not have to answer any questions they are not comfortable answering. It is completely acceptable to say, "I have some questions that may be delicate. If you would rather not answer, just tell me, that's fine."

After finishing your list of questions, it is advisable to ask the interviewee, "Is there anything I should have asked, but didn't?" or something like, "I am going to interview many people like yourself. What questions would you be interested in asking others like you?" These types of questions can give us additional insight into the most critical topics according to the interviewee. Sometimes the answers to these types of questions are quite revealing and will often lead to a new set of questions. You should be prepared for this type of question to extend the interview.

Before you leave, make sure your informant has signed all of the necessary *informed consent forms.* Then ask if your informant has any pictures, journal entries, newspaper clippings, or other primary documents that they would be willing to lend you for your ethnography. This will help verify and expand upon the information they shared with you during the interview process, but this new data may also lead to a follow up interview. Offer to send your interviewee a copy of the recording, or the resulting ethnography. Finally, follow-up the interview with a note of thanks.

## Evaluating Information from Interview

Immediately after you part ways with your informant you should jot down any thoughts, questions, or ideas you took from the interview. By taking these notes, you can place what you just felt and heard in conversation with the larger ethnographic project. In the next day or two, listen to the recording. It is extremely helpful to take detailed notes on significant ideas and quotes to use for your ethnography while the interview is fresh in your mind.

In many cases *transcribing* the interview is the best way to start the evaluation process. A transcription is a typed-up version of the interview that either you, or someone else creates while listening to the recording. The best transcriptions document every word spoken during the recording including comments like [laughing] or [um….], words in other languages, or not in standard English. This makes it easier for you to *code* the interview, to mark patterns, commonalities and differences between events described by an individual, or in comparison to other narratives collected. It is best practice to transcribe the interview word-for-word for both use in your ethnography and to make it accessible for a wider audience. Further, if you have the time, it is best to transcribe the interview yourself. You will remember important details by listening again while transcribing yourself, details that a professional transcriber might miss because they did not experience the interview. (Blackstone, 2012) If your interviewee has an accent or speaks in a language other than English, you will likely transcribe fewer errors than a professional transcriber. The text will serve as an important source for your ethnography, as well as a potential historical artifact for future researchers. Often, interviewees want a copy of their interview for themselves, their children, or their grandchildren.

## Preserving the Interview

By conducting an interview you become a producer of knowledge, influencing the ways a community, culture or individual is understood. Thus, the interview process is a tremendous opportunity, but it is also a great responsibility for interviewers, as you have been entrusted with someone else’s story. If you are archiving your interviews for future researchers, you have produced a primary source that documents the story of the person, community, or culture you were studying. The interview also reveals the types of questions people were interested in during the time you lived. Often the consent forms you have collected will allow you or your professor to archive this recorded interview in some sort of collection. When appropriate, you should discuss with your professor ways to make sure this testimony can be used by future researchers and can be of use to the person, family, and community who contributed the interview. And of course, be very careful never to archive information that you have not received permission to archive or information that would make a respondent vulnerable.

Interviews are crucial methods for documenting the history of the present. They allow us to gather stories about how people live in the world today so that we better understand the range of experiences of the present moment and so that people in the future have a record of everyday, non-elite experiences in the 21$^{st}$ century.

## Chapter Summary

- The chapter outlined distinct kinds of interviews.
- This chapter covered the best practices in prepping for interviews.
- It detailed how best to conduct an interview.

- It explained the process of evaluating interviews.
- This chapter explored how best to *archive* your interviews as a way to preserve them and educate future generations.

## Chapter Questions:

1. Why are interviews useful in ethnographic work?
2. What are the different types of interviews and when is each useful toward building a strong ethnography?
3. What are the six steps to preparing for an interview?
4. What sort of background is useful before the interview?
5. Why is it important to think about your informant's point of view?
6. How would you explain the difference between *real* and *ideal* culture?
7. How does a *guide, schedule* or *frame* help make you an *active listener*? How does a recording the interview help make you an *active listener*? How does being an *active listener* improve the interview process?
8. Why are *informed consent forms* important?
9. How should you start an interview?
10. Why is it important to frame questions in a neutral way?
11. What types of notes are useful when you are recording an interview?
12. Write a paragraph detailing the how a subject that requires sensitivity might come up within the context of your interview and how might you address this subject with your interviewee.
13. Come up with five open-ended questions to ask an interviewee, on topics related to your class?

## Key Terms

  - Qualitative Interviews

- Informal Interviews
- Formal Interviews.
- Interview Guide/Schedule/Frame
- Semi-Structured Interviews
- Unstructured Interviews
- Active Listener
- Open-Ended Questions
- Ideal Culture
- Real Culture
- Informed Consent Forms
- Transcribing
- Code

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Coding Qualitative Data
Camila Torres Rivera

## You've gathered all your data carefully so …now what?

Qualitative researchers often ask the same question at this point in the process...now what? It can be daunting to look over your massive collection of interviews, field notes, and transcripts and not know how to begin to use it to answer your research question. While you have have gathered important information, the connections of this information to your research question may not be completely clear. Organizing the raw data in a way that makes sense to you will require you to read and re-read your raw data carefully and patiently. While there are various ways to prepare data for analysis, this chapter will focus on a commonly used method called coding.

## What are codes?

A **code** is a word or short phrase that assigns an attribute (e.g. translation, feeling, category, summary, idea) to a section of text (Saldaña, 2015). **Coding** is the act of assigning a code to a section of raw data text for interpretive purposes to gain meaning (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). The purpose of coding is to filter and organize the raw data so it will be easier to detect patterns or sequences, to identify themes, and to build theories to answer the research question (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997).

Let's look at a simple coding example for a portion of an interview conducted to learn the value of the open-access music site called *SoundCloud*. The interview, organized in a table format below, has two key features - the columns and the rows. The right column has the transcript of the interview; the left column has codes aligned with the related text. When you read, you should read across the entire row (i.e. the question and the question codes together) and then read the next row the same way (i.e. the answer and the answer codes together).

| **Interview Transcript** | **Codes** |
|---|---|
| Question: Let's start by getting some background on *SoundClou*d – when and why did SoundCloud start? What hole was there in the online music distribution field that needed filling? | *purpose<br>*audience |
| Answer: S*oundCloud* was founded in 2007, mostly as a response to the problem of moving around large music files. At the time, the options for sending around audio files, which can be uncompressed and very large, were a combination of e-mailing and large file transmission sites, or clunky FTPs. To make it worse, there weren't any really elegant solutions for public distribution either. Musicians have a need to send around audio all the time: privately, like between band members or with producers or A&R guys, and publicly, when trying to give fans access to your tracks. This was the problem *SoundCloud* stepped in to solve. | *solution<br>*efficiency<br>*accessible<br>*streamline process<br>*industry issue<br>*accessible<br>*common practice<br>*accessible |

The eight unique codes in the right column (accessible was used three times) are attributes that are associated with the 135 words of the text. Rather than just reading the 135 words and hoping to remember what we read, assigning codes now gives us the following advantages:

- The codes left a trail of the thought process during the reading.
- We will be able to find the ideas later
- We will be able to associate related sections of the data to each other
- We know how many times the same attribute was used and which were primary and secondary.

## How do ethnographers prepare for coding?

The purpose of qualitative research is to answer a research question. Therefore, before we begin to work with the raw data, we must be certain that we are also focused on this goal. Aside from concentrating on the research question, ethnographers should consider other factors in their coding such as their approach to the research, topics, and efficiency. (text box 1 goes here)

## Research approach: Deductive vs. Inductive.

a) **Inductive research** is more commonly used in qualitative studies (Bogden and Biklen, 1997). The inductive research approach consists of the researcher reading the data and developing theories based on what appears in the raw data rather than any preconceived notions. The researcher will develop codes DURING the reading of the data and connect ideas in their mind through a process called **open coding**. Open-coding is a reactive and iterative process between the data and the researcher. In other words, open-coding documents the researcher's reactions to data as the researcher continuously interacts with the data. As an example, imagine the researcher is reading a transcript and something they read strikes them as familiar, or unusual, or obvious, the data then causes a natural, spontaneous reaction within the researcher. In this case, the researcher would create a code to mark that section of text for future reference and/or analysis.

b) In some circumstances, a researcher may want to know if certain predetermined ideas exist in the data. Sometimes a researcher will already have some experience with a topic and they want to further their understanding on this topic. When the researcher wants to use the raw data to prove their ideas or hypothesis, they engage in **deductive research**. The researcher will create a code BEFORE they start the coding process and search the data for examples of the code. In this case, the predetermined code is referred to as a **priori code**. In previous chapters, we discussed how ethical research requires value neutrality. While deductive research and priori codes are not automatically introducing bias into the coding, the researcher should be especially careful that they only code a section of text with a priori code when there is a very clear connection between the priori code and text. Using both of these methods can help lessen potential biases.

## Coding Families

Some codes are used so often in qualitative data analysis that it is almost expected that they will be mentioned at some point in the analysis regardless of the subject matter. **Coding families** are not codes - rather, they are categories that suggest different ways in which coding can be accomplished or may be necessary (Glaser, 1978; Bogden & Biklen, 1997). Because coding families describe large, overarching concepts (i.e. definitions, settings, language structure, etc.), there are usually significant overlaps between coding families. As always, the selection of a coding family should be determined by how the coding family lends itself to answering the research question.

Using the same *SoundCloud* interview raw data we used in earlier in this chapter, let's look at how different coding families relate to the same text.

| |
|---|
| **Answer:** *SoundCloud* was founded in 2007, mostly as a response to the problem of moving around large music files. At the time, the options for sending around audio files, which can be uncompressed and very large, were a combination of e-mailing and large file transmission sites, or clunky FTPs. To make it worse, there weren't any really elegant solutions for public distribution either. Musicians have a need to send around audio all the time: privately, like between band members or with producers or A&R guys, and publicly, when trying to give fans access to your tracks. This was the problem SoundCloud stepped in to solve. |

| **Coding Family** | **Purpose** | **Example from *SoundCloud* Interview (Raw Data)** | **This section of text fits this coding family because...** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Setting/Context Codes | To sort general information about the data (e.g. place, context, participants). | *SoundCloud* was founded in 2007. | By stating the year that *SoundCloud* was founded, it gives the reader context as to when this program was created in relation to other world events or technological advances. |
| Definition of the Situation Codes | To explain how the participant understands a situation | At the time, the options for sending around audio files, which can be uncompressed and very large, were a combination of e-mailing and large file transmission sites, or clunky FTPs. To make it worse, there weren't any really elegant solutions for public distribution either. Musicians have a need to send around audio | The participant is explaining the situation from his point of view. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | all the time: privately, like between band members or with producers or A&R guys, and publicly, when trying to give fans access to your tracks. This was the problem *SoundCloud* stepped in to solve. | |
| Perspectives held by subjects | To identify opinions | ...clunky FTPs. To make it worse, there weren't any really elegant solutions for public distribution either. | The subject uses opinionated language like "clunky" and "elegant" to describe loading audio files prior to the creation of *SoundCloud*. |
| Process codes | To identify sequences of events, or changes over time | At the time, the options for sending around audio files, which can be uncompressed and very large, were a combination of e-mailing and large file transmission sites, or clunky FTPs. | The subject describes the process or sequence formally used to upload audio files. |
| Activity codes | To identify regularly occurring behaviors | .... sending around audio files.... e-mailing...send around audio | The subject describes activities. |
| Theoretical codes | To draw conclusions from the research | …*SoundCloud* stepped into solve | The subject describes how the technology addressed the problem |

Notice that the same text could be used as an example for several of coding families. However, you should use the research question as a guide when selecting some coding families over others. For example, if the research question asks, *"How do musicians interact with technology?"*, we may decide that the word "interact" in the research question relates most to the "activity code" family. However, if the research question asks, *"What problems do musicians face in the Music Industry?"*, we may decide that the word "problem" in the question relates to "the definition of situation code" family and/or "the perspective codes" family. There may be times in your research where you will have to focus more on one type of code over others, although you should strive to use all of them.

Here is a list of some commonly used code families for your work. This is not a complete list of code families, but it can give you some ideas on how to begin your coding work. (resource 1 goes here).

## Selecting Coding Supplies: Paper/Pencil vs. Technology

Ultimately, the researcher will need to physically mark their ideas on the selected text. Deciding whether this should be done using traditional office supplies (e.g. pencils, pens, highlighters, sticky-notes, paper clips, envelopes) or computer programs (e.g. Microsoft Programs like Word or Excel, Google programs like Docs or Sheets, Qualitative Data software) is a personal decision for the researcher. Both types of supplies have their pros and cons so the selection of the coding supply should be made based on efficiency and cost.

Traditional office supplies (e.g. pencils, pens, highlighters, colored pencils, sticky-notes, scissors, paper clips, envelopes, etc.) are inexpensive, are readily available, and require no training. When researchers use office supplies to code, they simply write codes in the margins of the pages of the data, highlight sections of code using colored highlighters or colored pencils, and/or mark pages with sticky-notes. Sometimes, researchers they will assign colors to codes so they can find the related coded text more easily. Sections of text with the same code (or color) can be cut out with scissors and organized into groups with paper clips or envelopes.

There are some drawbacks to consider as well. With traditional office supplies, accounting for all the codes and data manually can become messy and cumbersome. Also, there may be sections of raw data that can be coded with more than one code so those pages would need to be reproduced and coded more than once (once for each code). Finally, there is only one copy of the coded text so if the data is lost the researcher would have to start over.

Using technology to code has advantages and disadvantages too. An advantage to using word processing office technology (e.g. Microsoft Word, Google Docs) is that the data can be duplicated and saved quickly. Sections of text can be coded once, or more times, by using the highlighter or comment features. If sections of text have the same code, they can be cut/pasted into new documents to help organize all the codes into different pages or several different files. Depending on the researcher's familiarity and comfort level, spreadsheet program (e.g. Microsoft Word, Google Sheets) functionality, can be combined to automatically create tables with the duplicated comments and codes. Of course, the premier qualitative research programs (e.g. Qualtrix, Quirkos, MAXQDA) offer the greatest functionality by allowing researchers to do things like click-and-drag sections of data into code folders, keep running counts of codes, and create reminders for the researcher.

Technology is a wonderful tool, but drawbacks to using technology should be considered carefully too. Obviously, the researcher will need access to a computer, electricity and, possibly the internet, to be able to conduct any work. While some programs are free (e.g. Google Docs, Google Sheets), some programs can cost hundreds of dollars (e.g. Microsoft Office, Qualtrix, Quirkos, MAXQDA). Also, some programs are fairly intuitive and easy to use (e.g. MS Word, Google Docs), but some programs are more complex (e.g. MS Excel, Google Sheets) and specialized programs require training (e.g. Qualtrix, Quirkos, MAXQDA).

## The Coding Cycle

After we have made some decisions on how to approach the coding, we can begin the coding cycle. The **coding cycle** is a repeating cycle of three phases: the coding phase, writing memos phase, and reviewing/revising/refining codes phase.

(image 1 goes here)

In the coding phase, the researcher will start to assign codes to the text based on their research question and their other preparation decisions (i.e. inductive vs. deductive research, coding families, efficiency). After a researcher codes a section of text, the researcher writes a **memo**—a short journal entry to document processes, important research notes, and possible theories. After writing their memos, the researcher will review their codes, both old and new, and decide if there should be any revisions to the codes.

As an example of this entire process, and using the S*oundCloud* interview we used previously in this chapter as an example, we can look at each phase of the cycle in more detail. As our preparation, we will be using the data to answer the question "*How are Technology and Equity related within the Music Industry?*" We will use a deductive research approach and apply open-coding processes with no priori codes. We have selected the following coding families as a guide: Settings Codes, Definition of Situations Codes, Perspectives Held By Subjects Codes, Activity Codes, Strategy Codes, and Relationship Codes. The codes will be documented using Microsoft Word's comment feature.

### Coding Phase

As previously described, the interview text shown here was assigned codes using the comment feature on Microsoft Word during the reading of the text. Since some text applied to more than one code, the same section of text was highlighted several times and assigned a different code each time. At the end of the coding period, the text looked like this:

(image 2 goes here)

### Memo Writing Phase

When the researcher stops coding, they must document their experience in a memo. The memos are short journal entries that document the researcher's interaction with the data. Since the memos are written for the researcher's personal use, formal writing (e.g. full sentences, punctuation, paragraphs) are not required. Instead, the researcher will use simple bullets or short phrases to record the experiences quickly.

In our example, we used the benefits of technology to convert the highlighted text with the comments into a table and sort the codes alphabetically. (insert resource 2 here). Most of the codes seemed to be within the Relationship Code Family (i.e. creator, listener, fan, community). A note was made that the researcher wondered if a larger community is related to more opportunities which could result in more equity. (insert textbox 2 here)

**Interview Question:** How are Technology and Equity Related within the Music Industry?
**Memo Date:** January 4, 2020

**Coding families:**
Settings Codes
Definition of Situations Codes
Perspectives Held by Subjects Codes
Activity Codes
Strategy Codes
Relationship Codes

**Accomplishments:**

- The first two questions of the interview were coded.
- The data was coded using MS Word's comment feature and transferred to MS Excel for sorting and organization. Excel sorted codes alphabetically.
- 41 sections of text were assigned codes.

Most frequently used codes: 25 (61%) of codes (*Preliminary code definitions in italics*)

- Access (4) - *Be able to obtain/possess what is needed/valued*
- Community (5) - *Group of like-minded individuals, See value in the same thing (e.g. creators, listeners, technology companies, record labels, etc.)*
- Creator (7) - *Creates audio files (e.g. musician, comic), more active member of community, possesses valued talent/skill*
- Listener/ Fans (4) * Listener and Fans codes were merged. Use "Listener" only. - *More passive than creator, values the sound/talent/skill of creator*
- Solution/Simplify (5) *Solution/Simplify codes were merged. Use "Solution" only. - *Change that leads to more access or equality*

**Improvements to Procedure:**
Use "SC" for Soundcloud throughout coding process
* Listener and Fans codes were merged. Use "Listener" only.
*Solution/Simplify codes were merged. Use "Solution" only.

**Notes:**
The Community has creators, listeners/fans, etc. SC expanded the community and increased access to members of the community (to each other, to music, to opportunities, etc.). Larger community may lead to more access to opportunities which may suggest more equality.

Are there hierarchical levels in the music community (e.g. creators > listeners)? Can additional access change this?

## Reviewing/Revising/Refining Code Phase

The number of times a code appears does not necessarily imply the code is (or is not) important and it is certainly not the only indicator. In qualitative research, the quality of the final research report will be directly linked to the quality of the codes (Saldaña, 2003). While reviewing, revising, and/or refining the codes during the coding cycle, the researcher is making decisions on the importance a particular code may have to their research question. After the researcher reviews their codes carefully, they may decide to refine their codes by merging two (or more) codes into one code, dividing one code into two (or more) codes, renaming a code, or eliminating a code completely. When a researcher decides to merge, unmerge, rename codes, and/or eliminate codes, a note should be added to the memos. In our example, we added a note to the memo that we decided to merge both the "listener/fan" codes and the "solution/simplify" codes with instructions to only use "Listener" and "Solution" in future coding sessions.

Another good practice in the review/revise/refine phase is to begin to conceptualize the codes. The **conceptualization** of a code is creating a definition of the code in specific, concrete terms (Saunders et al, 2018). Future use of a conceptualized code is more intentional because the characteristics of the code are clear and, thus, codes are more easily identified in raw data. Any code conceptualizations or working definitions should always be written in the memo. In our example, code definitions were written in italics next to the most frequently used codes. (insert textbox 3 here)

At this point, the researcher has completed the full cycle one time. The researcher will start the cycle again and continue the cycle with new sections of text. Each time a new section of text is coded, the researcher will follow the same three phases – coding, writing a memo to document the progress, and review/revise/refine their codes.

## Saturation

The coding cycle continues over and over until the researcher believes saturation has occurred. **Saturation** is the point in the research study where no new information seems to emerge from the coding cycle and there appears to be enough information to answer the research question (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). There is no one event or threshold that can alert a researcher when saturation has occurred. When interviews seem predictable, the same codes are being used over and over, and possible answers to the research question seem reasonable, the researcher should decide if further iterations of the cycle will result in any valuable insights or the coding cycle should end.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we learned that the coding cycle is the link between raw data and the theories that will answer the research question. We engaged in a mock coding cycle example to experience how researcher begins to organize their raw data, record their initial reactions to the data, and documents emergent ideas. The key take-aways from the chapter are:

- Coding is the organizational process where researchers assign codes to raw qualitative data in order to answer their research question.
- Coding is a reactive and iterative process between the data and the researcher.
- The research question is the principal guide in preparing to code and selecting codes.
- Coding can be used for either deductive research or inductive research studies. However, it is more commonly used for inductive research studies.

- The coding cycle is comprised of coding, memo writing, and review/revising/refining codes.
- The coding cycle ends when no new information appears to emerge from the raw data. This phenomenon is referred to as saturation.

## Questions

1. How is coding data different than summarizing data?
2. How are the research question and the coding process related?
3. "Coding is reactive and iterative." In your own words, explain the meaning of this statement.
4. What are the advantages of writing memos at the end of each coding phase?
5. What are some clues that may suggest saturation has occurred? Give an example.
6. In your opinion, how does coding help the researcher understand their raw data?

## Key Terms

Code - A word or short phrase that assigns an attribute (e.g. translation, feeling, category, summary, idea) to a section of text.

Coding - The act of assigning a code to a section of raw data text for interpretive purposes to gain meaning.

Coding Cycle - A repeating cycle in which the researcher organizes their data. The coding cycle is comprised of three phases: the coding phase, writing memos phase, and reviewing/revising/refining codes phase

Coding Families - General categories that suggest different ways in which coding can be accomplished.

Conceptualization - Descriptions or definitions of abstract ideas is specific, concrete terms.

Deductive Research - A research approach conducted to further an already existing theory. (The data is used to prove an existing theory).

Inductive Research - A research approach conducted to develop a theory based on what exists in the data. (The theory emerges from the data).

Memo - A short journal entry to document processes, important research notes, and possible theories.

Open-Coding - The assigning of codes to to the raw data without any previously selected codes.

Priori code - A code selected before the start of the coding cycle.

Saturation - The point in the research study where no new information seems to emerge from the coding cycle and there appears to be enough information to answer the research question.

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# Analyzing Ethnographic Data

April Burns

## Introduction

In this chapter, I will outline some principles of data analysis that will guide you in analyzing, interpreting, and writing up your ethnographic research projects. Skilled ethnographers are not unlike creative professionals, such as designers or chefs, in that their work products come together as a result of creativity, sustained effort and giving up some control over the final product. While cooks tend to follow recipes, chefs follow culinary principles, foundational truths about the types of flavors that work well together, and the practices that create delicious dishes. When you follow a recipe, you are limited to a specific dish, you follow someone else's plan based on their priorities and tastes. This can be useful as you learn the fundamentals of cooking. However, it is more liberating and useful to become fluent in the ideas that make cooking a range of dishes (or analyzing a range of social settings) possible. Similarly, these principles and practices of data analysis will open the doors to the meaningful interpretation of all sorts of ethnographic data. Though there may be some recipe-like directions in this chapter, my goal is to instead emphasize the most critical principles of data analysis.

## What is 'analysis' and why do we do it?

You've collected data and begun to put together many of the pieces of a social cultural puzzle, but the pieces by themselves don't yet tell a story. Data analysis is the stage in which you work to put the pieces together to present a picture of the social context that you set out to study. It is the process by which we make sense of all the data that we have collected over the course of a project (Bailey, 2018, p. 159) specifically in order to make some **assertions** about a particular social and cultural space. These assertions should be based on the various data that you have collected including the observations you conducted, the experiences and the interactions you engaged in, and the fieldnotes you wrote documenting such observations, experiences and interactions. Data also include the interviews you conducted and transcribed, the artifacts and official documents you have collected, any photos you have taken and any maps you may have drawn. Brewer (2000) defines analysis as “the process of bringing order to the data, organizing what is there into patterns, categories and descriptive units, and looking for relationships between them” (p. 105). This analysis stage is made possible by our previous data organizing (sometimes called *data reduction*) and engaging in the coding process, both of which facilitate an intimate familiarity with our data. From there, data analysis should move toward ‘interpretation,’ which “involves attaching meaning and significance to the analysis, explaining the patterns, categories and relationships” (Brewer, 2000, p. 105).

Data analysis, like much creative work, is often improvisational and therefore, a “messy” process (Murchison, 2010, p. 181). A successful outcome will likely require you to ‘lean into’ what can feel like a chaotic endeavor. Accepting such ambiguities and uncertainties is part of the process of becoming an ethnographer, indeed a researcher of any sort. While coding and analysis can be a “messy” and thus challenging process (Bailey, 2018, p. 160), keep in mind that we do versions of this a lot in our lives. Consider for example, how we go about cleaning a messy room, desk or closet. We first organize the contents of the room, desk or closet into categories that make sense to us, our purposes, and our lives (e.g., Clean clothes, books). This is like the coding process and the contents of the space are the separate pieces of data we have collected. Think about undertaking such a process for someone else, tidying their closet for them. After organizing/categorizing their stuff, you will likely learn a lot about them and additional questions will have emerged. Why do they have so many pairs of shin guards? What occasions do they wear their formal clothes to? Why are three boxes of letters important enough for them to have kept and organized by month and year? The answers to such hypothetical questions will tell you even more about the lives and experiences of the closet owners. The process by which you become familiar enough with the closet contents to ask questions and work to answer them, and then craft an explanation of the meaning to the closet owner, constitutes the analysis stage.

### Keep in Mind:

Your unique and informed perspective is valuable and could potentially reveal aspects of a social context that previous researchers hadn't considered. As the creative and intellectual force leading this process, you are free to innovate in how you apply these principles to your research and assignments, when and where it makes good sense to do so – as long as you document and explain your reasoning behind such revisions.

### Stages of Analysis:

Coding ➔ analysis begins thru evolving coding ➔ coding moves to identification of key themes ➔ analysis develops thru memo-ing ➔ analysis continues toward interpretation ➔ leading to assertions/theory ➔ written ethnography.

Ethnographers typically move from observing and recording the concrete actions and interactions of people and groups, to organizing this recorded data, to generating ideas conceptualizing and interpreting these practices, to making assertions that relate to larger social and cultural phenomena. This process is described below.

## Analysis begins with coding

Ethnographers Scott-Jones & Watt (2010) have described ethnographic analysis as a two-stage process first involving the organizing and ordering of your data, and then the analysis proper (Scott-Jones & Watt, 2010, p. 159). In their framing, **coding** heralds the transition between these two stages. Similarly, O'Reilly (2012) distinguishes between the "writing down" (i.e., collecting/recording of data) and "writing up" (i.e., presentation) phases of ethnographic research, locating analysis as the stage in between in between these two phases, although aspects of analysis are present in both stages.

Despite some variation in the number of processes or stages that data analysis is broken down into, the analysis of data generally begins with the "coding cycle" that you read about in the chapter by Torres-Rivera (2019) [add link]. Torres-Rivera describes the coding process as a "repeating cycle of three phases: the coding phase, writing memos phase, and reviewing/revising/refining codes phase" (pg #). In this text, we decouple *coding* from *analysis* but really, coding is the first stage of analysis, and the line between coding and analysis is somewhat subjective. While I won't be rehashing the material in the coding chapter, there are some important aspects of coding, particularly the **iterative** as well as **inductive** aspects outlined by Torres-Rivera, that are worth repeating here as they are also aspects of data analysis overall.

O'Reilly (2012) similarly describes ethnographic research as "**iterative-inductive**," that is, a "practice of doing research, informed by a sophisticated inductivism, in which data collection, analysis and writing up are not discrete phases, but inextricably linked" (p. 180). The 'iterative' aspect means that analysis is ongoing, resembling a spiral process rather than a circular or linear process (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 181), while the 'inductive' aspect means that researchers work to make general assertions from the specifics of their data. This combined "iterative-inductive" concept highlights that a researcher's analytic choices are ongoing, informed by what they learn as they progress through the stages of the research process, from the early decision to pursue a particular research question and choice of a research design, to the identification of certain field sites and coding scheme used to organize data.

## Thematic Analysis:

Codes often begin as descriptive markers of things people say (e.g., in vivo coding) or do (e.g., process coding) (Bailey, 2018, p. 161; Brewer, 2000, p. 110). To transform our coding efforts into analysis, requires that we refine our coded categories, typically through multiple rounds of the coding cycle (Madden, 2017, p. 142), leading to the identification of **key themes** within your data (Brewer, 2000, p. 109; Madden, 2017; Saldaña, 2011, p. 108; Scott-Jones & Watt, 2010, p. 162). While codes can develop into themes, you can also directly code your data for themes, as thematic analysis is a common method of data analysis for ethnographers and other qualitative field researchers (Bailey, 2018). Themes differ from codes in that themes are generally longer phrases that attempt to convey the *manifest* (or apparent) meaning of data as well as the *latent* (or underlying) meanings of data (Saldaña, 2011, p. 108).

According to Madden (2017), a theme "could be a large sociological category, a group behavior, an individual behavior, an aspect of the physical setting or an observation of a mood or feeling (..)" (143). Bailey (2018) breaks down the broad category of themes into two main types: "topical" themes and "overarching" themes.  This distinction is useful because it leads us into an important task of analysis, which is *conceptualization*, which entails moving codes from particular and concrete actions, to a more abstract level of concepts and ideas (Bailey, 2018, p. 165). Conceptualization allows us to later build connections to theory, which in EOW, are typically theories of work and economy. Overarching themes require us to zoom out from the specifics of what people say and do (as captured in codes and topical themes), to highlight those ideas or concepts that these words and actions suggest or represent in overarching themes.

Themes exist in every film you've ever seen and in every book you've ever read. You enjoy specific scenes, characters, plot twists and dialogue, but those specific things are not what the movie is about. When describing a film, we do so in terms of what it means and the messages it conveys: a ‘coming of age story,’ a story of ‘love and loss,’ a story of ‘redemption,’ of ‘moral reckoning,’ of ‘cultural annihilation.’ These broad concepts are versions of overarching themes. We can assign overarching themes to our data as well, though it is rarely a straightforward process and often more than one theme could be assigned. To uncover the overarching themes in a specific piece of data, such as an interview or set of field notes, imagine tweeting or texting its meaning to your social network. How would you summarize the underlying message or meaning of that form of data, in a just sentence or two? To do that, you would have to follow the process below.

### How we identify themes:

While “there is no universal template” for the process of identifying themes (Madden, 2017, p. 145), there are a number of commonly accepted strategies for identifying key themes in your data, including by taking note of how often certain codes or themes show up in the various forms of your data (Bailey, 2018, p. 188; Murchison, 2010, p. 116). Those that show up more frequently warrant consideration because the more that something is observed or spoken about, the greater its potential relevance and impact on the lives you are studying. More than two occurrences in the data also presents a pattern open for interpretation, potentially giving us more information about our research question. This does not mean that *every* phenomenon that happens more than once represents a pattern, or a useful pattern relevant to our research question – a reoccurrence may simply be a coincidence or due to random chance. Still, frequency is an important flag for potential themes.

A fieldwork activity that I assign in my Ethnographies of Work course illustrates this process. Students briefly interviewed seasonal workers at a large holiday market. After collecting student responses to this assignment over the course of a few semesters, I identified the following recurring themes.

**"One thing you learned about seasonal workers at a holiday market?"**

*Seasonal workers*: work long hours and most days

*Seasonal work is:* fast paced & high volume

*Seasonal work is:* Short-term/temporary

*Seasonal workers:* enjoy interacting with diverse & international customers

*Seasonal workers:* enjoy the bustling park environment

*Seasonal workers:* enjoy their jobs and work

*Seasonal work:* Is often a 'side' job rather than a main/only source of income

*Seasonal workers:* sometimes relied on personal contacts to get the job

## Organizing your themes

Because these themes remain at the material level of what workers said and/or do, these are considered "topical" themes representing the apparent meaning, rather than representing overarching (i.e., more conceptual) themes (Bailey, 2018) addressing the latent meaning (Saldaña, 2011). To move topical themes to the conceptual level of overarching themes, we will need to interpret the underlying meaning that these themes embody. There is no easy recipe for such conceptualizing. However, at this point, you may notice that some coded categories cluster together because they are related in some way.

**Revised themes: "One thing you learned about seasonal workers at a holiday market?"**

**JOB QUALITIES:**

- *Seasonal workers*: work long hours and most days
- *Seasonal work is:* fast paced & high volume

- *Seasonal work is:* Short-term/temporary

**FEELINGS ABOUT THE JOB:**

- *Seasonal workers:* enjoy interacting with diverse & international customers
- *Seasonal workers:* enjoy the bustling park environment
- *Seasonal workers:* enjoy their jobs and work

SIDE JOB:

- *Seasonal work:* Is often a ‘side’ job rather than a main income source

NETWORKING:

- *Seasonal workers:* sometimes relied on personal contacts to get the job

Intentionally organizing related categories into an outline format of superordinate and subordinate categories, or into **hierarchies of significance** based on the relative importance of the concept, is a useful way to more finely understand specific phenomena, behavior, or experiences (Saldaña, 2011, p. 108). Creating a **“hierarchy of significance”** (Scott-Jones & Watt, 2010, p. 162) will allow us to consider how such coded categories are related and how they possibly interact (Saldaña, 2011, p. 98). I have thus grouped the topical themes (above) into four categories, with the first two being primary categories based on their prominence in the data, and that make the most immediate sense to me: *job qualities* and *feelings about the job*. The last two themes in my list, addressing how some workers got their job and the role that the job plays in their overall employment, appeared less frequently than the first two sets of themes, and were thus placed lower down the list. But I also wasn’t yet sure how to organize these last two in relation to the other theme categories, so they remained individual topical themes for now.

This basic interpretive framework applied to the student data on seasonal workers allows us to consider each group of themes as its own thematic category, and to further organize these categories in a way that makes clearer conceptual sense and helps us to understand this specific context of work. Looking at the *job qualities* themes, I noticed that 2 out of 3 themes center around the intense demands of this type of work, so I renamed (below) this category "**demanding work**." The short-term aspect of this type of seasonal employment doesn't seem to fit as well in this newly named category, which required me to re-read the data, write notes, and revise my framework. Looking at the second set of themes lead me to rename this category, "**job satisfaction**." Remember that I wasn't sure how to arrange the last two themes in the list, so I labeled them as individual and separate themes: "**networking"** and "**side job**." However, after reevaluation, the *short-term/temporary* theme that I first put under "demanding work," seems to fit better in the "*side job"* category, given that it also references a secondary and contingent aspect of this type of employment.

**DEMANDING WORK:**

*Seasonal workers*: work long hours
*Seasonal work is:* fast paced & high volume

**JOB SATISFACTION:**

*Seasonal workers:* enjoy interacting with diverse & international customers
*Seasonal workers:* enjoy the bustling park environment
*Seasonal workers:* enjoy their jobs and work

**SIDE JOB:**

*Seasonal work is:* Short-term/temporary
*Seasonal work is:* not typically the main income source

**NETWORKING:**

*Seasonal workers:* some got the job through a personal contact

This revised version makes better conceptual sense and allows me see patterns in the data, and to ask questions about the relationship and interaction between these themes, and the degree to which they exist in tension or harmony. In the example above, there seems to be an apparent contradiction between the demands of the job (which are high) and job satisfaction (also high) that workers themselves did not attribute to high (or low) wages. Such contradictions can flag important concepts and dynamics in action. In other words, why might workers enjoy a job they that they also describe as demanding? Encountering such contradictions within your data offers an interesting analytical opportunity (Murchison, 2010, p. 181), as they require an explanation, thus advancing your analysis to the interpretation level (Madden, 2017, p. 151).

Considering the other key themes specifically in relationship to one another (Saldaña, 2011, p. 92) can help explain this contradiction. Perhaps the fact that this job is short term and a source of extra income (the side job theme) mitigates the demanding aspects of the work because workers understand that the work has a finite and foreseeable end. Another explanation may be the fact that many workers reported landing their job through personal connections, putting the demanding nature of the job in the context of existing relationships that workers likely hope to maintain. Thinking – and writing -- about these patterns and relationships also allows me to make some assertions explaining this sociocultural experience.

## Additional ways to identify themes:

It’s also important to consider aspects that are absent or not present in your data. While studying what’s not there may seem counter-intuitive, considering this aspect can lead to some important insights. For example, if you were researching the experiences of new and first-time parents, and you never heard any talk about the difficulties adjusting to the new demands, but witnessed what looked like challenging experiences – this may lead you to ask questions about why people haven’t discussed such expected experiences. Or consider the experience of working in a fast paced and high-pressure occupational field, such as the seasonal holiday market, while none of your participants specifically mentioned stress management, might lead you to questions about why such expected issues haven't surfaced.

Another way that a theme can be identified lies not in how often it comes up in the data, but instead stands out because something you observed people say or do seems to hold particular meaning for the people you are studying. This may include a critical incident, a vivid case, or a strong emotional response observed.

Let's not forget the importance of your research question, which acts as a north star for researchers, guiding your coding and analysis, and centering the final written product. It may be that the question you are interested in answering doesn't frequently emerge in your data, so it is important that you intentionally evaluate your data for themes related to your research question. Your research question is a guide but a flexible one, one that you should be open to revising and refining to reflect the insights you are gaining from the analytic process. Your data and analysis may suggest that you haven't got the right question and you may choose to revise the research question that you started out with (Murchison, 2010, p. 120). Your final ethnographic paper should center around addressing your revised research question.

### Analytic Memos: "one of the most useful and powerful sense-making tools at hand" (Miles, et al, 2019, p. 89).

A strong analysis depends on the quality and quantity of the data that you have collected, but it also depends on the level of effort you put into the analytic practice of coding and memo-ing. **Analytic memos**, described as a, "brief or extended narrative that documents the researcher's reflections and thinking processes about the data" (Miles, et al, 2019, p. 88), is an integral aspect of data analysis. Writing isn't just for the final presentation of your work, it is also a means of developing your work. Writing is thinking, and as a “sense-making tool,” memo writing encourages “little conceptual epiphanies” (Miles et al, 2019, p. 89).

Analytic memos are informal and open-ended written explorations of what you are learning from your data and what you still need to learn (Saldana, 2011, p. 98). Consequently, there is no need to worry about grammar, spelling or even full sentences at first as *you* are the primary audience for these memos. The priority is to document and process the insights that you are gaining. Memos can and should later be revised, extended, combined and edited as they may ultimately make their way into your final public writing.

### Memo early and often.

As soon as you begin going into the field and collecting data, you should also begin writing analytic memos (Murchison, 2010). In your ongoing memo writing, it is recommended that you keep a running list of the all the things you have learned about your research setting and question, the things you still want to learn (i.e., emerging questions) and the things that you still need to do (Murchison, 2010). Any of these lists can productively be organized into a hierarchy of significance, from most to least important, leading to increasingly deeper levels of analysis, a more focused research question, and ultimately to a refined understanding of an area of inquiry.

Your early analytic memos will likely be descriptive in nature, which is a fine place to begin your analysis. According to O’Reilly (2012), describing your ethnographic findings “is a crucial phase of the analysis of your data, that often does not reveal itself to you until you start to write things up” (p. 193-194). Writing detailed descriptions of key settings, events, people, and/or exemplary cases are useful and easy entry points into your analysis (Brewer, 2000, p. 111-114; O’Reilly, 2012, p. 193). Jamie Woodcock’s (2017) research in an urban call center in the

UK is a good example of the way many ethnographers use detailed descriptions to invite readers into their analysis.

In a chronological narrative, Woodcock (2017) tells the story of his entry into the world of telemarketing, describing his process of getting work at a British call center and detailing what his training was like. He presents three especially difficult customer calls to illustrate the emotionally challenging nature of the call center work. His ‘thick description’ lays the conceptual groundwork for the rest of his ethnography, including his theoretical framing, which includes a discussion of Taylorism/scientific management and emotional labor demands.

Memos should always be dated so you know where in your analytic process each memo is situated. Memos should also be titled and subtitled – this is important because titles (especially the main memo title) summarize the content and/or purpose of the memo, while a more descriptive subtitle narrows your focus to a small area of analysis. Dating and titling will also help you locate and organize your collection of analytic memos later on. A rich collection of memos allows you to look for relationships and patterns across different types of data, such as field notes and interview transcripts as well as within a specific piece of data, such as a long interview or set of field notes. It is especially important to memo after each round of coding, as doing so is an essential part of the iterative coding/analysis process described earlier in the chapter, a process that is hindered if you don’t consistently put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) (Saldana, 2011, p. 102). Fully engaging this iterative process requires that you describe and reflect on what you are gleaning from the data and how such insights shape your coding, and in turn, document additional insights gained from your more complex coding.

## Interpretation

While descriptive writing is a fine way to start a memo, it shouldn't be the end point of your memoing practice. Instead, memos are a means of moving you toward the interpretation stage of the analytic process by (Bailey, 2018; Madden, 2017, p. 152). Researchers aim to use their acquired insider perspective, in interaction with their outsider status and information gathering efforts, to offer useful interpretations of the data they've collected and constructed. Madden (2017) describes interpretation as "moving from idea to explanation, from data to story, and in many cases from confusion to meaning" (p. 149). Bailey (2018, p. 200), referring to priorities set by Braun and Clark (2006), reminds us that interpretation requires ethnographers to go beyond description to explain the meaning of our identified themes, to point out the beliefs and assumptions that are embedded in identified themes and why it matters, and lastly, to suggest what conditions are associated with the emergence of this theme/concept. This is an opportunity for you to discuss the meaning(s) that you give to your research data, and to explain why you think people behave and think in specific ways (Madden, 2017, p. 151).

## Assertion Development

Writing memos allow you to converse with your research literature, data, and the insights you documented and developed in earlier memos, and consequently well positions you to make some **assertions** about the specific sociocultural setting that you are studying. Making an assertion means declaring or asserting something as truth. You are offering a plausible explanation of the cultural phenomena and/or group experience you have studied that defending this argument with evidence. It is important to acknowledge the many possible, and perhaps competing, perspectives that explain a situation (Brewer, 2000). But as Brewer (2000) points out "some things are less true than others" (p. 122), and some interpretations are more credible and convincing, and thus carry more weight. You're aim is not to prove your point, but to show how your explanation makes good sense (Saldaña, 2011, p. 125).

## Negative Cases/Outliers

Data that are distinct from the majority of responses are called **outliers**, while data that doesn't conform to the boundaries of your assertions are known as "negative cases." These examples have interpretive value and should also be considered in your analysis. Negative cases/outliers can show variation and diversity within a social cultural setting and keep us from essentializing the experience of one person or a group of persons (Brewer, 2000, p. 109; Saldaña, 2001, p. 101).

## When you feel stuck

To be successful in almost any endeavor, you must be willing to be uncomfortable – and analyzing data is uncomfortable. Moving into the data analysis stage can be overwhelming, and you may feel like you don't know where to start or stop. You may wonder whether you have crafted the most relevant or useful codes, worry that you aren't addressing your research question, or even whether your research question is even any good. You may question your fieldwork and data collection practices (e.g., not enough data, too much data, the quality of the data). These self-questions, while uncomfortable, are actually good signs that you are in the middle of data analysis. The ethnographic researcher's challenge is to not let such anxieties stop you from doing the analytic work required for a meaningful product. So accept the discomfort, know that it is temporary and is just part of the process that will move you to insights later.

## Chapter Summary:

- Data analysis is the process by which we make sense of all the data that we have collected over the course of a project, allowing the researcher to make some assertions about a particular social and cultural space.
- Data analysis is an iterative-inductive process. The ‘iterative’ aspect means that analysis is ongoing, while the ‘inductive’ aspect means that researchers work to make general assertions from the specifics of their data.
- The analysis of data generally begins with the coding process and ends with interpretive assertions, and sometimes theory development, within ethnographic writing.
- Thematic analysis is a common method of data analysis for ethnographers and other qualitative field researchers.
- Themes can be separated into “topical” and “overarching” themes or organized into an outline format of superordinate and subordinate categories, or hierarchies of significance, based on the relative importance of the concept.
- The practice of writing analytic memos after each round of coding, documenting the researcher’s reflections and thinking processes about the data, is an essential part of the data analysis process.

## Questions:

1. What are some ways to identify key themes in your ethnographic record?
2. Explain the difference between a topical theme and an overarching theme?
3. What is the value of writing analytic memos in the data analysis process?

4. How might you use this memo writing practice in your other coursework? In the workplace or professional setting?
5. What is the value of considering negative cases and contradictions in the data?
6. How can a researcher bring their own values and priorities into an ethnographic analysis?

## Key Terms:

Analytic Memos

Conceptualization

Hierarchies of significance

Interpretation

Iterative-inductive

Key Themes

Overarching theme

Stages of analysis

Thematic analysis

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## Glossary

- **Active Listener** – Someone who is visibly engaged through eye contact and body language, pays attention to the subtleties in tone and word-selection the informant and take notes that will lead to follow-up questions based on the responses of the interviewee.
- **Anonymity**—a research subject has anonymity when there is no way to connect them to the specific data they supplied.
- **Autoethnography**—A reflective process that engages the personal stories of the researcher to understand the larger context
- **Bias** - *Bias* is defined as any tendency which prevents unprejudiced consideration of a question. In *research*, *bias* occurs when "systematic error [is] introduced into sampling or testing by selecting or encouraging one outcome or answer over others."
- **Building rapport** - You build rapport when you develop mutual trust, friendship and affinity with someone.
- **Code** – The marking of patterns, commonalities and differences between events described by an individual, or in comparison to other narratives collected.
- **Code of ethics**—A code of ethics directs people or organizations in making decisions that are in line with their values
- **Confidentiality**—a research subject has confidentiality if their identities are known by the researchers but protected from exposure
- **Cultural Norms**- the shared expectations and rules of behavior and practice within a particular culture or society
- **Cultural Relativism**- the concept that people's beliefs and practices should be understood based on their own cultural norms and not judged based on those of another culture
- **Debriefing**—following the end of a research project, debriefing is recommended or required to ensure no harm has come to research subjects
- **Deception**—not revealing the true nature, purpose or process of a research study
- **Empathy**- the ability to deeply understand and share the feelings of another through their perspective or point of view
- **Epiphanies**—some event or occurrence that changes the perspective, direction or understanding of the person to whom it occurs
- **Ethnocentrism**- using the cultural norms of your own culture to evaluate and judge the beliefs and practices of another culture
- **Ethnographer** - A researcher who studies a phenomenon with first-hand experience through methods of survey, interviews, observation, mapping, among others. This is done over a longer period of time.
- **Ethnographic methods** - Techniques used for data collection in research projects that can be qualitative or quantitative. Ethnographic methods include interviews, participant-observation, focus groups, mapping, or surveys.
- **Ethnography** - A research method that employs a strategy that includes both active participation and passive observation. Ethnography is writing about people over time.
- **Field notes** the notes created by the researcher to remember and record the behaviors, activities, events, and other features of an observation
- **Field sites** --the location or environment an ethnographer is studying

- **Formal Interviews** –Interviews where an interviewee is asked a list of prepared, generally open-ended questions to gather details and anecdotes that provide depth to respective projects.
- **Hawthorne effect**—When people often change their behavior when they know they are being watched as part of a study
- **Ideal Culture** – The way a group hopes others perceive their community or society.
- **Immersion**- the research method in which ethnographers completely surrounds themselves in a culture they are studying to gain in depth knowledge about it
- **Informal Interviews** – Casual exchanges with informants to gather background information for your project and often in preparation for a formal interview.
- **Informed Consent Forms** – Forms designed to give the interviewee an opportunity to declare in what context they are comfortable with their oral history being used.
- **Informed consent**—research participants must have an understanding of the research project before giving their consent
- **Institutional Review Board**—the group of people who review research to ensure that it the benefits outweigh the risks to human subjects
- **Interview Guide/Schedule/Fram**e – A list of questions prepared beforehand to organize an interview.
- **Jottings** notes that are taken in the field that then get developed into fieldnotes
- **Key Participants -** The object or persons under investigation.
- **Mapping -** In qualitative market research, mapping involves asking interviewees or group participants to sort or 'map' objects (or representations of objects) according to how they are seen or thought of.
- **Objective stance -** Researchers must make sure to keep an open and objective mind and not bring any preconceived outcomes or notions to the study.
- **Objectivity -** the quality or character of being objective: lack of favoritism toward one side or another.
- **Observer bias**—When researchers unconsciously skew their observations to fit their research goals or expectations
- **Open-Ended Questions** – Questions that avoid yes/no responses by seeking stories or the “why and “how”.
- **Participant Observation:** When researchers join people and participate in a group’s routine activities for the purpose of observing them within that context
- **Participant-observer** - A participant-observer is a researcher who utilizes ethnography as a way to document data. They become both an active participant and a passive observer.
- **Participant-observer -** A participant-observer is a researcher who utilizes ethnography as a way to document data. They become both an active participant and a passive observer.
- **Qualitative Interviews** – Organized by open-ended questions that seek in-depth explanations of traditions, experiences and perceptions. They provide space for follow-up questions and illuminate the “why” and “how” of a participant’s experience.
- **Real Culture** – The way a group, community or society actually functions.

- **Research strategy** - A step-by-step plan of action that gives direction to a researcher's thoughts and efforts and enables them to conduct research systematically and on schedule to produce quality results and detailed reporting.
- **Research subjects** - A *research subject* is a person who decides to participate in a *research study.*
- **Semi-Structured Interviews** – An interview that flexibly follows a list of open-ended questions, while providing space for follow-up questions that illuminate the "why" and "how" of a particular participant's unique experience.
- **Social or cultural awareness** - Researching a culture prior to beginning the study, if possible.
- **Time commitment** - Ethnography requires the research study to happen over a longer period of time. Hence, making ethnography a less desirable method when conducting single incident research topics.
- **Transcribing** – A typed-up version of the interview that either you, or someone else creates by listening to the recording.
- **Triangulation** using a variety of methods to gather data in one field site to study to same thing.
- **Unstructured Interviews** – Interviews that allow the discussion to freely venture from subject to subject, often without a written list of questions to guide the conversation
- **Validity**—The data the researcher is collecting is a true representation of the information he or she is measuring
- **Value neutrality**—not allowing your biases to have an effect on the outcomes of your research
- **Value-centered**—allowing personal values to dictate which direction is taken
- **Western/Non-Western**- refers to cultures with belief systems and societal structures that originate from or are influenced by Europe (including, broadly, the United States)/refers to cultures with belief systems and societal structures that did not originate through European influence (NOTE: these are general terms and no society is completely Western or non-Western in a globalized world)

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# Author Biographies

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### Mary Gatta

Dr. Mary Gatta joined the faculty as an Associate Professor of Sociology at Stella and Charles Guttman Community College at CUNY in August, 2015. Prior to her appointment at CUNY, Mary served as a Senior Scholar at Wider Opportunities for Women in Washington DC, and as Director of Gender and Workforce Policy at the Center for Women and Work, and Assistant Professor of Labor Studies at Rutgers University. In addition, she recently served on New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy's Labor and Workforce Development Transition Team. At Guttman, Mary teaches social science courses and served as the Faculty Coordinator of Ethnographies of Work, a key component of Guttman’s First Year Experience. In addition, Mary has lead a series of evaluation of workforce and education programs including US Department of Labor programs, New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development programs, along with various education and workforce programs. Her book Waiting on Retirement: Aging and Economic Insecurity in Low Wage Work, on the experiences of older low wage workers as they march toward a semblance of retirement, was released in October 2018 from Stanford University Press. Mary has explored the experiences of women as they navigate One-Stop Career Centers, which led to Mary’s book, All I Want Is a Job! Unemployed Women Navigating the Public Workforce System. She is also the author of Not Just Getting By: The New Era of Flexible Workforce Development and Juggling Food and Feelings: Emotional Balance in the Workplace and is the editor of A US Skills System for the 21st Century: Innovations in Workforce Education and Development. In addition to books Mary has published numerous academic articles, policy papers and op-eds.

### Alia R. Tyner-Mullings


Dr. Alia R. Tyner-Mullings is an Associate Professor of Sociology and founding faculty member at Stella and Charles Guttman Community College. Dr. Tyner-Mullings earned a doctorate in sociology at the CUNY Graduate Center, where she researched alternative educational models. She has taught graduate and undergraduate courses on sociology, deviance, statistics, and education. After finishing her doctorate, she was a post-doctoral fellow at Teachers College, Columbia University, in the Sociology and Education Program and then an assistant professor at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. A former high school math teacher, Dr. Tyner-Mullings serves on assessment committees for three small high schools. She has also worked as a statistical or academic consultant for several colleges and universities. Her research interests include the sociology of education, communities, sports, and cultural studies. Dr. Tyner-Mullings recently authored Enter the Alternative School: Critical Answers to Questions in Urban Education (Paradigm Publishers, 2014), an in-depth examination of public school alternatives to traditional educational models. She is also the co-editor of Critical Small Schools: Beyond Privatization in New York City Urban Educational Reform (Information Age, 2012) and co-author of Writing for Emerging Sociologists (Sage Publications, Inc., 2013).

## Additional Authors

### Kristina Baines


Dr. Kristina Baines is a sociocultural anthropologist whose research focuses on the relationship between traditional ecological practices and health in indigenous communities, primarily in Belize and the US. She is committed to using innovative methods in her teaching and also in making anthropology relevant and accessible to a wide audience. She is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Guttman Community College, CUNY and Director of Anthropology for Cool Anthropology.

Samuel Finesurrey

 Dr. Samuel Finesurrey, an adjunct professor at Guttman Community College, collaborated with students to found the Guttman Community College Undergraduate Oral History Project. He received his Ph.D. in Cuban History with a specialization in Oral Histories from University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill in 2018. Utilizing his background in Oral Histories, Finesurrey became the Director of Oral Histories on a five year longitudinal inquiry by faculty, undergraduates and high schoolers studying Latinx students moving through the New York City's public high schools. Further, Finesurrey has served as an advisor who, with a select group of his students participated in the Texas based HBCU Truth & Reconciliation Oral History Project, led by Black Christian organizations and Historically Black Colleges, dedicated to gathering stories of marginalized communities. By working with undergraduates and youth researchers to collect and archive oral histories Finesurrey seeks to encourage students to become producers of knowledge and scholar-activists who focus on social (in)justice, racial, gendered and transnational journeys, in building a new local digital canon. This kind of academic engagement revealed to students and Finesurrey not only the relevance of historical study to their own lives, but also the diversity of experiences existing within the same classroom, campus community, city and region.

Nicole Kras

 Nicole Kras, Ph.D., HS-BCP is an Assistant Professor of Human Services and Program Coordinator at Guttman Community College, City University of New York. She received a BA in psychology and a MA in art therapy from Albertus Magnus College and a MS in education and a Certificate of Advance Graduate Study as a Classroom Teacher Specialist from Southern Connecticut State University. Nicole received her Ph.D. in adult learning and development from Lesley University. Her current areas of research are exploring the benefits of nature-based experiences on community college campuses and human services program design and development.

Maureen Sheridan

[No bio included]