

Class 4 - Sept 28

Thursday, September 28, 2017

8:34 AM

What is Ethnography?

Ethno: people, folks

Graphy: describe something

- Often used to study people
- Borrows from naturalism in that it's about us observing natural, everyday things in our space
- Interested in exploring a Morpheus of social experience - ex. Children playing
- Interested in the experiences of the people within the cultures they're studying
- Make meaning re a whole bunch of diff things from those experiences.
- Deviant subcultures often the source of observation
- Don't typically enter situations for short amounts of time - usually immersed for long periods of time. Can typically live in these communities in order to gain an intimate understanding of the people and communities in which they're interested in gaining further knowledge. Ethnographer is there to develop relationships and speak to the complexity of the social, spatial, economic, and emotional realities of that setting.
- Speaking to these complexities allows you to speak to the concepts ex. Play, criminal, crime, etc.
- When you're deeply immersed, you'll have interpretive sensitivity, which can only be done over long periods of time
- You need to be good at listening to what is said, but even better at watching what they do
- The explicit knowledge (things ppl say and do), and also tacit knowledge (the unspoken cultural norms, what's allowed/not, what's dangerous/safe, good/bad, etc.)
- Not producing summaries but the nitty gritty specifics - nothing standardized or aggregate or generalizable - interested in the thick descriptions of the people and the relations.

- Reflexivity: reflecting on your feelings in the moment in order to make sense of how it may contribute to your interpretations of the data.
- You're always being careful not to start with a theory, but letting the theory come from the thick description

Features of Participant Observation:

- *Insider standpoint*: "human meaning and interaction as viewed from the perspective of insiders of a setting" (Jorgensen, 1989: 13).
- *Everyday life*: "location in the here and now of everyday life situations and settings" (Jorgensen, 1989: 13). Nothing manufactured.
- *Emergent theorising*: Concepts and theories emerge from research process. "From the ground up"
- *Flexibility*: Research is "open-ended, flexible and opportunistic" (Jorgensen, 1989: 14).
- *Case study approach*: Focus on a single case (or small number of comparative cases).

1. Unfocused/focused observation:

- Observation begins as soon as you make contact with the field.
- Begin with unfocused observation of *general features* of space, artefacts, participants, interactions, behaviours (as well as personal evaluation and personal experience) while suspending your assumptions.
- With familiarity, you move to focused observation of the specific thing that you're researching.
- You never stop engaging in unfocused observation!

Goals of Observation:

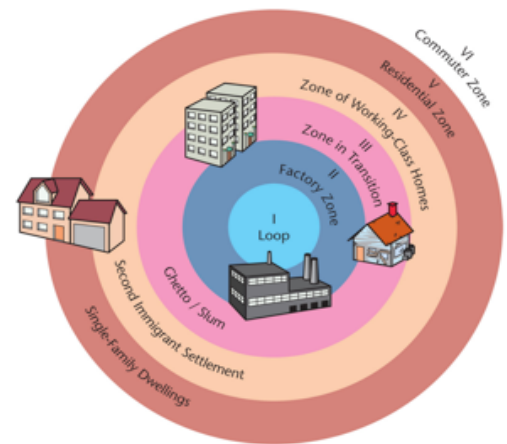
- Allowing sensory take over
- Participant observation using an "open-ended entry" is to get a sense of the field and refine research question.
- Getting a refined sense of the space - will start general and start to get more specific

Initial observations help focus later observations

- Initial observations help focus later observations.
- Observation aims at the complexity of existence and inner workings of a setting:
 - “only through sharing in the daily lives of a group can the researcher fully understand the behaviour that is being manifested” (Jackson, 1999: 123).

History of Ethnography in Crim

- **Chicago School-** first qualitative studies that relied on an ethnographic style of fieldwork, where a bunch of sociologists in Chicago decided to turn the city into their own lab. They went out and immersed themselves in the city - lived in diff parts, plopped selves in cafes and communities, interviewed ppl in depth and focused on race and ethnic relations, crime and deviance



- Made maps and realized the city is organized in very interesting ways like a tree trunk and tree rings. Talked to people in these rings and understand that certain zones of the city were more unstable and had more disorganization. People were more displaced in certain places
- Crime more about disorganization and poverty than people being inherently criminal
- Ethnography of the city as a “laboratory” for social research (Faris 1967: 52)
- One of very first was John Howard - ethnography of prisons in Britain - went to prisons, lived in them, talked to prisoners and exposed how horrific prison life was. He recorded every single detail he could see
- Groups of interacting people can include people interacting w authority figures, etc.

- Concentrated on two, often interrelated, sets of phenomena:
 - race and ethnic relations
 - crime and deviance
- Demonstrated that the issues associated with poverty grew from the social context, not from individual deficiencies or problems.
- Judge the culture by the standards they had - white people would go to lands with other ethnicities, make judgments about them based on their own biases (not reflexive re biases), and they'd have an ethnocentric view of those cultures. They were trying to make sense but didn't have the knowledge to be unbiased.
 - Ethnocentrism partially why we have colonization as it is - early ethnographic studies helped justify colonization

2. Selecting a Setting

- The relationship between the research question and setting is dynamic and evolving.
- Consider the promise and limitations of any setting.
- Consider questions of access and opportunities for participant roles.
- **For paper:** How did you pick your site? How did you determine it was the best one for you?
 1. Rich data source - lot of webs of social relations, that's going to be a site that's rich in data
 2. Should be unfamiliar - you can SEE more when the setting is unfamiliar to you
 3. Suitability - are there going to be conflicts you won't be able to get around? Will you feel unsafe conducting this research? Is it a public or private space (accessibility)? Will you have access - ascriptive limits (ex. Black man trying to research KKK - won't be able to)

3. Determine level of involvement

- Continuum from utterly involved, completely immersed, all the way to complete observant where you're imbedded but detached
 - **Types of Observation:**
 - Observation is a method of qualitative research that involves the systematic observation of a social setting in order to generate data.
 - Observational methods appear on a continuum from direct observation to participant observation, defined by the level of participation in the setting by the researcher.
 - Participant observation “demands first hand involvement in the social world chosen for study... to hear, see and begin to experience reality as the participants do” (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 140).
 - Complete Participant becomes a full-fledged member of the group in which he/she is studying and essentially convert and you "go native" - might be covert,
 - Complete Observer doesn't interact w participants - covert, tolerated observer. Good for public places
 - Participant-as-observer: presence known, usually have something in common w people they're studying.
 - Observer-as-participant: Make presence known but don't necessarily try to become one, limited interactions bc there's a meaningful diff between them and the group they're studying
 - Your specific role may change over the course of your studies

4. Gaining Access

- Develop a plan/storyline - how you're going to approach your participants and tell them what you wanna do (or not), but make yourself known to them.
- Establish relationships with & obtain permission from Gatekeepers, which vary depending on settings. Gatekeepers are the people who have formal/informal power to deny you access.
- You can't enter a setting where the gatekeepers tell you how they want the results to end up
- Ethically good to find a gatekeeper - they can give you legitimacy and are a good

source of this.

- Gain support from sponsors & informants - people within community, not necessarily power holders, but people who can vouch for you who also lend legitimacy. They have deep ties to the group you're interested in. Sponsors will get you deeper in and be w you through the process. Informants go another level, to give you the details re what's happening beyond your own observations and notes. You want to **avoid** interpretations - your own, informant's, etc. What you're most interested in is details (ex. Who is that, what are they wearing, etc.). Interpretation comes MUCH later.
- Develop rapport & trust - the amount of data you get will be determined by the level of space - the more rapport/trust, the longer you last and the more intimate the details.
 - The more time you spend, the more data you have
 - Empathy is the ability to see and experience something from someone else's perspective. Need this as an ethnographer to truly experience the relations of the people you're studying - not sympathy or that you agree/approve of situations.
- Incorporate: establishing role in group

5. What should I observe?

- Minimally, participant observers should attend to the following dimensions, both in terms of what is **ordinary** and extraordinary:
 - Space
 - Artefacts ("things"/ "stuff")
 - Participants
 - Interactions
 - Behaviours
 - Personal evaluations
 - Personal experience
 - Minutia is what you make meaning from.

6. Use Your Senses

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- Observation requires all your senses: Sight, hearing, smell, touch, and sometimes even taste!

7. Mental Awareness

- *Suspend your judgement:* Separate your judgements from what you observe.
- *Make the ordinary extraordinary:* The routine, banal and mundane require your attention.
- *Be reflexive:* Reflect on your subjectivities, your place/role in the setting, your interactions, your impact and your ethical responsibilities. Your mental awareness is about your biases, but also your safety, your emotional health in the study, etc.
- Becoming mentally aware of own judgments
- Focus on the details.

8. In the field: Presentation of self

- Determine your level of disclosure - are you able to present your authentic self, or is your being in the field going to be a lie? Will you embody something that you're not? Will you tell them true stories, what your hobbies/interests are, etc. This issue of disclosure is navigated all the time. Revealing these deeper levels helps develop main sources of trust.
- You'll also constantly be managing your impression on others. You're always going to be asking yourself what to wear - a matter of access, of how much info you're going to get based on your demonstration of self.
- Respect yourself and those being studied - will the people you're observing be uncomfortable? Will you?
- Participant observers may need to adapt to the research setting in terms of dress, demeanour and "props".
- These adaptations are to enable "entree" to the field, and put participants at ease.
- Also adapting behaviour.

9. In the field: Embodiment

- The researcher's embodiment in terms of race, class, sex, gender, physical and non-physical features etc. shape the entree.
- The researcher's embodiment can limit, complicate or facilitate access and acceptance as an insider.

Ethics In Observational Research

- In the past, researchers believed that participant observation required only *general* ethical behaviour.
- Today, participant observation requires informed consent (i.e., the "respect for persons" principle).
- Informed consent for a *whole setting* is complicated, and is shaped by power dynamics between regular members and gatekeepers/sponsors.
- Very hard to maintain anonymity while giving all these specific details required of ethnography

Jottings: Early Incriptions

- Jottings are idiosyncratic! But, some tips:
 - Always use paper and pencil/pen. Never use a computer/tablet.
 - Draw diagrams of the space.
 - Use your own system of shorthand.
- Remember you are trying to fit in, so make your jottings subtly and never in front of participants unless you can do it without drawing attention to yourself or making people uncomfortable.
- All about the details!

Fieldnotes: Incriptions

- Inscriptions are “written representations of what has been observed” (Warren and Karner, 2015: 103) - everything written down - could be half an hour of observing and 7 pages of inscriptions
- Fieldnotes should be:
 - “Thick”: Richly descriptive.
 - In narrative form (full, grammatically correct sentences).
 - Organised in relation to time, and place when relevant.
 - Exclude real names.
 - Include close paraphrasing and verbatim quotes in quotation marks.
- Do your fieldnotes immediately after exiting the setting. Audio-recording is not a substitute for fieldnotes.
- Never use an audio-recorder in the field setting itself.
- Never take photographs of people without permission.
- Taking photos of spaces/things should not be disruptive or violate privacy.

Participatory Action Research

- **Participatory action research (PAR)** is a form of community-based research that often aims to identify the needs and priorities of the group under study.
- About changing the conditions for organizations
- It attempts to translate findings into a form that can influence social policy or effect interventions to improve the situation of the group.
- Therefore, PAR also seeks to undermine the hierarchy of credibility by working with marginalized groups.
 - The researcher gives some control over the process to the participants.

Characteristics of PAR:

- Involves collaboration between researchers and participants in all phases of research

- Progresses through active involvement
- Reflects and mobilizes participants' desires and needs
- Emphasizes co-construction of knowledge
- Promotes self- and critical awareness leading to individual, collective, and/or social change
- Addresses issues of oppression

Leaving the field:

- When you can no longer learn anything new from your setting, it is time to leave the field. How can you do so in a detached and safe way?
- Conventional wisdom suggests that you should leave the setting in a manner that would not make the entrance of a future researcher difficult.
 - In some situations, you can simply stop going to the site.
 - If you have established relationships with your participants, you must take more care in deciding how to leave the field.
- In general, you should always try to leave your participants feeling positive about their experiences in your study.