

# The form of research known as ethnography



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Ethnography is a signifier of research concentrating on the sociology of intending through close field observation of sociocultural phenomena.

Typically, the ethnographer focuses on a community ( non needfully geographic, sing besides work, leisure, and other communities ) , choosing sources who are known to hold an overview of the activities of the community. Such sources are asked to place other sources representative of the community, utilizing concatenation trying to obtain a impregnation of sources in all empirical countries of probe. Informants are interviewed multiple times, utilizing information from old sources to arouse elucidation and deeper responses upon re-interview. This procedure is intended to uncover common cultural apprehensions related to the phenomena under survey. These subjective but corporate apprehensions on a topic ( ex. , stratification ) are frequently interpreted to be more important than nonsubjective informations ( ex. , income derived functions ) .

It should be noted that descriptive anthropology may be approached from the point of position of art and cultural saving, and as a descriptive instead than analytic enterprise. The remarks here, nevertheless, concentrate on societal scientific discipline analytic facets. In this focal point, descriptive anthropology is a subdivision of cultural anthropology.

Related information is contained in the subdivisions on content analysis and on instance survey research.

## Key Concepts and Footings

The ethnographic method starts with choice of a civilization, reappraisal of the literature referring to the civilization, and designation of variables of involvement — typically variables perceived as important by members of the civilization. The ethnographer so goes about deriving entryway, which in bend sets the phase for cultural submergence of the ethnographer in the civilization. It is non unusual for ethnographers to populate in the civilization for months or even old ages. The in-between phases of the ethnographic method involve deriving sources, utilizing them to derive yet more sources in a chaining procedure, and assemblage of informations in the signifier of experimental transcripts and interview recordings. Data analysis and theory development come at the terminal, though theories may emerge from cultural submergence and theory-articulation by members of the civilization. However, the ethnographic research worker strives to avoid theoretical prepossessions and alternatively to bring on theory from the positions of the members of the civilization and from observation. The research worker may seek proof of induced theories by traveling back to members of the civilization for their reaction.

Definition. A popular definition of descriptive anthropology is found in Hammersley and Atkinson ( 1995: 1 ) , who write of descriptive anthropology, “ We see the term as mentioning chiefly to a peculiar method or sets of methods. In its most characteristic signifier it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people ‘ s lives for an drawn-out period of clip, watching what happens, listening to what is said, inquiring questionsaa,→ ” in fact, roll uping whatever informations are

available to throw visible radiation on the issues that are the focal point of the research. More late, Johnson ( 2000: 111 ) defines ethnography as “ a descriptive history of societal life and civilization in a peculiar societal system based on elaborate observations of what people really do. ”

Ethnographic methodological analysiss vary and some ethnographers advocate usage of structured observation agendas by which 1 may code ascertained behaviours or cultural artefacts for intents of subsequently statistical analysis. Coding and subsequent statistical analysis is treated in Hodson ( 1999 ) . See besides Denzin and Lincoln ( 1994 ) .

Macro-ethnography is the survey of broadly-defined cultural groupings, such as “ the English ” or “ New Yorkers. ”

Micro-ethnography is the survey of narrowly-defined cultural groupings, such as “ local authorities GIS specializers ” or “ members of Congress. ”

Emic position is the ethnographic research attack to the manner the members of the given civilization perceive their universe. The emic position is normally the chief focal point of descriptive anthropology.

Etic position, is the ethnographic research attack to the manner non-members ( foreigners ) perceive and interpret behaviours and phenomena associated with a given civilization.

Situational decrease refers to the position of ethnographers that societal constructions and societal kineticss emerge from and may be reduced analytically to the accrued effects of microsituational interactions ( Collins 1981, 1988 ) . Put another manner, the universe is best understood in

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microcosm. Situational decrease, Collins ( 1981b: 93 ) wrote, “ . . . produces an through empirical observation stronger theory, on any degree of analysis, by exposing the real-life state of affairss and behaviours that make up its phenomena. In peculiar, it introduces through empirical observation existent causal forces in the form of human existences using energy. It enables us to detect which macro-concepts and accounts are through empirical observation groundable, and which are non... ”

Symbols, ever a focal point of ethnographic research, are any material artefact of a civilization, such as art, vesture, or even engineering. The ethnographer strives to understand the cultural intensions associated with symbols. Technology, for case, may be interpreted in footings of how it relates to an implied program to convey about a different coveted province for the civilization.

Cultural patterning is the observation of cultural forms organizing relationships affecting two or more symbols. Ethnographic research is holistic, believing that symbols can non be understood in isolation but alternatively are elements of a whole. One method of patterning is conceptual function, utilizing the footings of members of the civilization themselves to associate symbols across varied signifiers of behaviour and in varied contexts. Another method is to concentrate on acquisition procedures, in order to understand how a civilization transmits what it perceives to be of import across coevalss. A 3rd method is to concentrate on approving procedures, in order to understand which cultural elements are officially ( ex. , lawfully ) prescribed or proscribed and which are informally prescribed or

proscribed, and of these which are enforced through countenance and which are unenforced.

Tacit cognition is deeply-embedded cultural beliefs which are assumed in a civilization 's manner of comprehending the universe, so much so that such cognition is seldom or ne'er discussed explicitly by members of the civilization, but instead must be inferred by the ethnographer.

## **Premises**

Ethnography assumes the chief research involvement is chiefly affected by community cultural apprehensions. The methodological analysis virtually assures that common cultural apprehensions will be identified for the research involvement at manus. Interpretation is disposed to put great weight on the causal importance of such cultural apprehensions. There is a possibility that an ethnographic focal point will overrate the function of cultural perceptual experiences and undervalue the causal function of nonsubjective forces.

Ethnography assumes an ability to place the relevant community of involvement. In some scenes, this can be hard. Community, formal organisation, informal group, and individual-level perceptual experiences may all play a causal function in the topic under survey, and the importance of these may change by clip, topographic point, and issue. There is a possibility that an ethnographic focal point may overrate the function of community civilization and undervalue the causal function of single psychological or of sub-community ( or for that affair, extra-community ) forces.

Ethnography assumes the research worker is capable of understanding the cultural mores of the population under survey, has mastered the linguistic communication or proficient slang of the civilization, and has based findings on comprehensive cognition of the civilization. There is a danger that the research worker may present bias toward positions of his or her ain civilization.

While non built-in to the method, cross-cultural ethnographic research runs the hazard of falsely presuming that given steps have the same significance across civilizations.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Is n't ethnography a subjective instead than scientific societal scientific discipline research method?**

Choice of sources is non based on the research worker ' s personal judgements but on designations made by community members. Likewise, decisions about cultural apprehensions of the phenomena of involvements are non personal penetrations of the research worker, or even of peculiar community members, but are positions cross-validated through repeated, in-depth interviews with a wide cross-section of representative sources.

Ethnographers may besides formalize findings through conventional archival research, audience with experts, usage of studies, and other techniques non alone to ethnography. At the same clip, ethnographic interviews are far more in-depth than study research. Ethnographers respond to charges of subjectiveness by stressing that their attack eschews preconceived models and derives intending from the community informants themselves, whereas

study instruments frequently reflect the conceptual classes preconceived by the research worker prior to existent brush with respondents.

### **What are the Human Relations Area Files ( HRAF ) ?**

The Human Relations Area Files ( HRAF ) , based at Yale University, are a big aggregation of pre-coded ethnographic field surveies of some 350 civilizations. Originally available merely on microfiche, aggregation subsets are now available on CD-ROM. Examples of coded topics include matrimony, household, offense, instruction, faith, and warfare. The research worker must code variables of involvement to travel beyond the precoding done by HRAF. Hundreds of articles have been based on the HRAF cultural database, and aggregations of coding strategies are documented in Barry and Schlegel, explosive detection systems. ( 1980 ) . The HRAF database is suited for ethnographic coding methods as described in Hodson ( 1999 )