

Ethnography

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Ethnography is a way of doing research framed within particular ontological, epistemic and methodology traditions and also a accounting of the data gathered throughout the process. Its a way of doing research which is focused on observing through a lens of "human culture " and a "way of looking " which is a result of situated, long-term and in-depth fieldwork. Ethnography is decidedly a social science research method which heavily relies on up-close and personal experience and where possible participation, not just observation (Ryan Elbert Zabala Gan) The main methods of doing research present in ethnography typically involve interviewing and observing people that participate in the field that is being researched. These two activities function as the core data-gathering which will be analyzed and used to formulate a report. Ethnographic research's primary purpose is formulating a cultural interpretation of the dealings and ways people behave within a certain social construct According to Hymes(1974) ethnography has a critically reflective, democratizing and praxis-oriented stance, meaning that it relies more on practical application of a theory. Ethnography is a way of seeing which serves a purpose of understanding for people who think the way things are is not enough of a reason for the way these things are (Hymes, 1974).

Ethnography adheres to a certain set of core values which always should be considered when conducting ethnographic research. These values are : Access, Thick Description, "When In Rome ", multiple interpretations. Access is simply having a way of accessing the cultural field that you are researching and being able to reach out to people involved. Thick Description deals with the way the gathered information is described, it is of great importance that the information is detailed and exceeds simple superficial descriptions. Ethnographic reports should strive to delve into the meat of things and really uncover the inner workings and processes of a social setting. The phrase "when in Rome " is a well-known phrase and has the same meaning in ethnography as it has in different contexts, when doing research you should strive to act as the people do and make sure that you don't stand out. This of-course may have some ethical implications and these always are to be taken into consideration, sometimes ethnographic research requires the act of "going undercover " or lying about your identity. If interviews aren't needed researchers must strive to be a fly on the wall and be virtually invisible. Multiple interpretations are a necessity when doing ethnographic research because it's important to gather data about people from various layers of a field to get a clear insight on how certain actors function within their setting. Since without knowing this information it is impossible to clearly determine why people behave as they do and why interactions are the way they are.

One of the big differences of ethnographic research opposed to more quantitative research methods are the methods used to gather data. As John van Maanen (1996) said - "When used as a method, ethnography typically refers to fieldwork (alternatively, participant-observation) conducted by a single investigator who 'lives with and lives like' those who are studied, usually for a year or more."

Quantative research often relies on data gathered through surveys and statistical analysis, while qualitative ethnographic analysis gathered from participating and observing closely,

is often significantly more difficult to come by. Data gathered from qualitative ethnographic research often has more color and deals more with “why things are” as opposed to simply looking at how “things are”. which is often the main purpose of quantitative research.

A interesting ethnographic study is the study Nancy Scheper-Hughes did in the field of organ trafficking. The unique conditions the research was conducted in required a approach not entirely traditional with what is usual in the field of ethnography. One of the examples was that Hughes initially didn't have easy access to the field which made doing field-work more difficult to conduct. This was eventually overcome by immersing herself into the field which came with dangers of it's own. She herself deemed her research as not traditional because of the means she had to make use of to get access to the field. When looking at it further it becomes obvious that despite the untraditional way Hughes got access to the field, her research still adhered to the principles that are paramount for proper ethnographic research. By going undercover she was able to talk to people who are insiders in the field of organ-trafficking, giving her access to information that she would never have access to otherwise. This allowed her to follow the principle of "thick description", this becomes apparent when reading, Hughes report is written with a lot of detail and is not superficially describing her observations. Hughes describes the processes ,involved with the illegal organ trafficking and transplantation, in a very detailed manner. She also followed the principle of "when in rome" very well , she managed to one of the "romans" and passed herself off as someone who is a part of the organ trafficking world. Scheper also managed to get multiple interpretations during her research. This is noticeable because she talked to a variety of actors in the organ-trafficking scenes being , buyers, sellers and the unlicensed doctors performing the transplantation. Thus despite the way she got access to the field she did manage to follow the principles and was able to conduct a proper ethnographic study. (Nancy Scheper-Hughes, 2004).

Ethnographic research revolves around observing and participating to understand why things are the way they are. To reach this level of understanding it's important that ethnographic research adheres to the principles of thick description , access, when in Rome and multiple interpretations. It is a method of doing research which is more involved and in-depth then other more quantitative oriented methods which often solemnly look at raw data and statistics. It's a method of research which is highly critically reflective and flexible while also requiring a huge commitment from the person conducting the research, because there is no way to get in-depth data regarding the workings of a subculture without having been part of it for a long period of time. Which is why when one wants to conduct ethnographic research, he should get ready to buckle up.