

SOC 323
ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

Spring, 2005

Arnie Arluke

Overview

This course is an introduction to ethnographic methods. Ethnographic research means that the researcher obtains data by involving herself/himself in the lives and activities of the persons or setting being studied. The skills taught in the course are observation, interviewing, data recording, data analysis, and presentation of results. You will conduct a research project that combines your natural skills as an observer of the social world and your to-be-learned field expertise.

Contact

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Required Readings:

Analyzing Social Settings, by John Lofland and Lyn Lofland, 3rd edition (LL)

Brute Force, by Arnie Arluke

Xerox packet of articles at Gnomon copy

Assignments

Assignments must be typed, double spaced, and turned in as hard copies and not emailed as attachments. Late assignments will not be accepted without a written excuse. Please keep backup copies. Include your name, assignment number, and purpose (e.g., Assignment #1: Getting Wet).

Grading

Maximum points	<u>100</u>
Participation:	8 (regular, voluntary contributions)
<u>Assignments: 5 point (5-10 pages); 2 point (2-4 pages)</u>	52
# 1 getting wet	2
# 2 possible sites	2
# 3 maps/artifacts/site description	5
# 4 complete observation	5
# 5 focus	2
# 6 participant observation	5
# 7 interview guide & interview	5
# 8 interview(s)	5
# 9 interview(s)	5
#10 domain analysis	2
#11 focus group interview	5

#12 essay analysis	2
#13 paper outline	2
#14 class presentation	5
Final paper and portfolio	40
Extra credit interview	5

Attendance and your grade

Excused absences must have a note from a physician or nurse, court official, coach, or family member.

- 2 unexcused absences, no affect on your grade
- 3 unexcused absences, lowers your grade one letter
- 4 unexcused absences, lowers your grade two letters
- 5 unexcused absences, lowers your grade three letters
- 6 unexcused absences, lowers your grade four letters

I. PRE-FIELDWORK

- Jan. 5: Overview of Course
Reading: Arluke, Introduction
- Jan. 6: Getting Wet: Seeing Culture and Caseing Sites
- Jan. 10: Criteria for Picking a Setting
Reading: Lofland, Chapters 1 & 2
- Jan. 12: Entrance and Ethics
Reading: Lofland, Chapters 3
- Jan. 13: **Assignment #1:** Getting Wet: Ruggles Station
- Jan. 17: Holiday
- Jan. 19: Fieldnotes: Mechanics, Artifacts, Site Description, and Maps
Reading: Lofland pp. 66-78, 89-98
- Jan. 20: **Assignment #2:** Possible settings

II. FIELDWORK/DATA COLLECTION

- Jan. 24: Field Notes: Observing Cultural Data and Inference
Reading: Steve Taylor, "Field Notes: Study of Institutional Attendants"
- Jan. 26: Field Notes: Observing Self
- Jan. 27: **Assignment # 3:** Artifacts, Site Description, and maps
- Jan. 31: Focusing: Units

	Reading: Lofland, Chapter 6 and 7
Feb. 1:	Focusing: Processes Reading: Prus, "Generic Social Processes"
Feb. 2:	Assignment #4: Complete Observation
Feb. 7:	Validity: Interpretation and Reality Reading: Clifford Gertz, "Thick Description"
Feb. 9:	Validity: Fieldworker, Case Study, and Sampling Errors
Feb. 10:	Assignment #5: Focus
Feb. 7:	Interview Guides, Recording, and Transcribing Reading: Lofland, pp. 78-89
Feb 9:	Interviewer Skills
Feb 10:	Assignment #6: Participant Observation
Feb. 14:	Informants: Approaching, Picking, and Training
Feb. 16:	Interview Dramaturgy
Feb. 17:	Assignment #7: Guide and Interview
Feb. 21:	Subjects: Dealing with Different Groups, Reluctance, and Lying
Feb. 23:	Subjects and Self: Getting Along Reading: Lofland, Chapter 4
Feb. 24:	Assignment #8: Interview(s)
Feb. 28:	Spring break
Mar. 1:	break
Mar. 3:	break
Mar. 7:	Ethnography in Context
Mar. 9:	Focus Groups
Mar 10:	Assignment #9: Interview(s)
III. ANALYSIS AND WRITING	
Mar. 14:	Domain Analysis Reading: Lofland, Chapter 9
Mar. 16:	Essay Analysis
Mar. 17:	Assignment #10: Single Domain Analysis
Mar. 21:	Assignment #11: Focus Group Interview and Conference to Review Analysis
Mar. 23:	conference
Mar. 24:	conference

Mar. 28: Writing and Presenting Research: Mechanics and Style
Reading: Lofland, Chapters 8 and 10; Steve Taylor, "Doin' a Job"
Mar. 30: Voice and Authority
Mar. 31: **Assignment #12:** Essay Analysis

Apr 4: **Assignment #13:** Paper Outline and Conference for Presentation and Paper
Apr 6: conference
Apr 7: conference

Apr 11: **Assignment #14:** Presentations
Apr 13: presentations

Note: The plan for lectures is subject to change as the course evolves. Notes from missed lectures must be obtained from classmates.

Lecture 1. Introduction

An idea of what is to come and whether this course is a good fit for you.

I. Readings:

Good news, relatively light readings, but discussing reading part of class participation grade, to give you more time in the field and to write up results. Lofland book, Brute Force, and a few articles.

II. Prerequisites (few formal prereqs but attitude and personality extremely important)

A. Course work

1. intro soc or intro anthro—basic concepts.
2. A traditional methods course is helpful for the contrast, but not necessary.
3. Modern theory course that discusses microsociology

B. Attitude

Contradictions (ambiguities) of the ethnographer (can teach and acquire these skills, but art comes from individual's ability to balance oppositions):

1. Split self: insider outsider dilemma, marginal native. Thinking and seeing sociologically but also seeing things from a lay perspective
2. Being both assertive and passive: Must be able to be a fly on the wall in the field but at other times approach strangers and befriend them. Also in class need to be assertive--cannot be shy because of class participation (everyone must talk on regular basis-seminaring, will go around the room).
3. Patience and ability to cope with ambiguity as ideas takes shape over time (unstructured) and then ability to impose structure on emerging ideas
4. Make familiar strange and the strange familiar. Find the everyday interesting. Success and fun of your study depends less on how exotic your setting is and more on your ability to make it sociologically interesting
5. Interest in details but also ability to abstract from details and generalize from them and see patterns in them
6. Intuitiveness but also analytic skills

Other qualities:

1. ability to write and set things down on paper. Cannot be a perfectionist or

suffer from block because need to write quickly and spontaneously many weeks.

2. ability to handle feedback and guidance (not as criticism) and to give it to others

3. ability to work in group (nature of team work, loose group). Will form 4 person teams next week. Trend in ethnography is to work in collaborative teams. More efficient and more valid. Teams will be loose in the sense that members will be doing a lot of independent work in the field and on the final paper so that their grade is not primarily tied to team members.

4. Ability to stay on top of weekly assignments and not defer work. Course is based around weekly progress. I don't want to harang people and play the role of the heavy. Must look ahead and think about whether you will be able to do the work each week despite other classes with exams, for instance.

III. Grading and teams

IV. Organization and topics

History and Nature of Ethnography

I. Terms (order-broadest and most commonly used first)

qualitative methods (includes ethnography and other methods like content and historical analysis)

fieldwork (sometimes used in social work, but shared with anthro and soc). The term “field” is important. Refers to scope of one’s study. The field in traditional anthropology could be an entire country, or at least a large scale community. The field now has increasingly narrowed and become more local. Can be as narrow and common as an elevator. Refers to the area defined by the researcher as culturally and sociologically interesting.

ethnography (somewhat more in anthrop)

participant observation (somewhat more in soc)

naturalistic observation

interpretive methods

All have the idea that the researcher is observing in situ (studying a phenomena in its own context). The use of extended field research, including direct observation and often interviewing, to produce a description of a people and their culture or a setting and its culture.

II. History and Development

A. Non academic

1. Foreign officers in colonial outposts. Partly for administrative and bookkeeping purposes.

2. Explorers and naturalists

3. Social reformers and journalists expose oppression of working

class

(1880-1930)

a. “social surveyors” (e.g., Charles Booth). Studied East London poor. Observed conditions they lived in. Reported statistical tables about food they ate and clothes they owned, wages they earned, housing conditions, illnesses. But to arouse public opinion, they described journalistically what they found, so change would occur.

b. “muckrackers” (e.g., George Orwell write a book about unemployed miners that was half ethnographic, later Down and Out in Paris and London) They were added by writing of journalists who also focused on the conditions of the poor. But none of this associated with sociology.

B. Academic traditions

1. Early anthropologists documented exotic life styles:

a. No longer armchair research. But first did not live among the natives or even near them. And did not participate in their way of life. They were more collectors of artifacts and observed a few ceremonies, questioned just a few. They also did not record their method. Radcliffe-Brown. In a hurry, little time or money.

Image of anthropologist living like natives, but he did not. Did not trust personal observation, too much interpretation. So trained natives to collect data about themselves (customs, myths), or used white men who lived with the Indians and spoke their native languages. So he learned little of their native language and did not observe or take part in native life.



- b. Later group observed and entered real social situations, for long periods, to monitor and describe naturally occurring behavior to uncover culture and values. And lived more like the people they studied. Birth of participant observation.
- c. This involved watching people behave, listening to what they say, engaging in conversations after learning native language, and adopting their lifestyle to fit in. Copious notes, photos, artifacts. But also report about how they did their method. Icon of method, Mead in Samoa, 1928.



- d. True strangers in every way

2. Chicago School, 1910 to 1960

a. First generation (1910-1920)

1. George Herbert Mead (social philosophy) where does mind come from? Emancipated it from psychologists and saw it as a product of interaction, but did nothing empirical

2. Robert Parks (journalism, crowd behavior, city as a laboratory to study immigrants' adaptation)

3. W. I. Thomas (adaptation of immigrants to city)

b. Second generation (1920-1940) (class down strangers)

1. Somewhat strangers because they were rural, middle class protestants studying urban working class, often ethnically and religiously very different. So they were class, ethnic, racial or religious strangers.

2. Examples: Thieves, hobos, gangs, taxi-dance hall workers

c. Third generation (1940-1960)

1. Class-up strangers.

Everett Hughes, student of Park and Thomas.

Interested in middle and upper class occupations. Graduate student population changed to more who were upwardly mobile first generation immigrants who wanted to rise above their parents' occupational and class level.

Examples: Clergymen,

lawyers, chiropractors,

school teachers, physicians

2. Non-strangers

Some students broke from tradition of studying strange groups and studied what they were doing to make a living while in graduate school. Less strangers because they studied occupations they already were doing—farthest evolution from early anthropologists because they were studying the familiar. Significantly widens the range of possible subjects and settings, but raises the question of how you make the familiar strange.

Examples: jazz musicians, taxi drivers, factory assembly line workers

- variables
3. Rise of survey and experimental sociology 1940 to 1970
 - a. objectivity by reducing researchers' impact on subjects
 - b. reduction of behavior and attitudes into enumerated variables
 - c. large, random samples to generalize
 - d. external reality can be captured exactly (positivism)
 - e. degrading of ethnography as not science, but handmaiden to questionnaire construction. Stigmatized as:
 1. "Subjective" (personal opinion, or all in the ethnographer's "head" because he/she is not objective—not removed from the scene being studied)
 2. "Anecdotal" (single case study can't tell us about others) Anecdote suggests little story of not much importance, can't trust its accuracy
 3. "Just descriptive" (demeans importance of description and suggests that ethnography cannot explain things)

4. Defense of ethnography (1960 - present): (in shadow of quantitative methods, ethnography forced to define and defend itself. Seven features have become associated with it)

a. It is holistic

1) Locates individual actors and acts within a larger web of social significance. Acts and actors explained by larger cultural picture. Sum is greater than individual parts.

2) Early anthropological/sociological ethnography focused on entire cultures or whole communities. (Much time, money)

3) Recent ethnography more likely to focus on single subculture, or localize a phenomenon or process within a subculture (less time and money) (e.g., culture of animal experimentation is part of larger culture of biomedical research, which is part of larger culture of science)

4) Also refers to written report. Gives reader a picture of what the setting would be like if one were actually in it. Can visualize the action, the actors and their interactions, and the place

b. Its goal is to understand members' experience (Aka, "native's point of view," "group's perspective")
This refers to how a group understands their social world, how they explain, rationalize, make sense of things, how they behave in their world, and cope with problems they face

1) This can be a macro ethnography (wide focus on general culture or large community) or a micro or mini ethnography (small group or single relatively small setting). Either one includes essential features of culture including verbal and nonverbal language, norms and

values, material culture and physical artifacts, symbols, and social structure. (e.g., can identify all these elements on an elevator, or in the building housing the elevator, or in the larger subculture within which the building exists as a member—as in a dorm elevator, versus the dorm, versus on campus student housing, versus the university)

2) But in either case, the kind of meaning and experience studied can be complex, changing, and contradictory. Trick is inferring it accurately from observations, interviews, and own experience, since even the best of informants usually can't get it all right for everyone in the setting.

(e.g, what does a mouse mean to people in the lab? Pest to exterminate, a pet to adore, an instrument to experiment on. Also, these means not shared with everyone in the lab social structure. And they changed, depending on frequency of vet visits and nature of experiments).

c. It is naturalistic

1) The hallmark of ethnography is that the researcher is trying to observe behavior in its most normal and natural form. Naturalism refers both to the researcher and those studied. The researcher is directly in the ongoing situation and those being studied are going about their normal business. (Try not to impose on or change whatever group we study)

2) To do that, the ethnographer must meld into the setting in ways that ultimately allow the setting and its members to be unaffected by the ethnographer's presence. This explains ethnographer's need to learn etiquette, and the ropes, dress and speak like the natives

3) This can make for an "intense" experience, from time

commitment, separation from others, and separation and change of self. For example, the bias in anthropology for a long time was that ethnographers could not be domestic and should reside in a foreign community long enough, usually about a year, to become familiar at first hand with both the language and the pattern of daily life. Living elsewhere, e.g. at night, and commuting to the people ("motel ethnography") or traveling through an area without settling down ("tourist ethnography") works against the personal rapport and sense of the prosaic that mark good ethnographic writing.

4) Researchers' concerns predominate in experimental research and survey research. So ethnographers believe that the former researchers seek a level of control that distorts the inquiry process—makes things artificial.

d. It produces highly valid results

1) If naturalism is achieved, good chance that findings are valid.--accurately capturing members' meaning. This is the significance of naturalistic research. Because of the naturalistic approach, the ethnographer should be accurately seeing behavior and understanding thinking of subjects. By blending it, developing rapport, being accepted, ethnographers should reach a point where what they see, hear and experience is one in the same with how group members would think and act were the ethnographer not present.

2) Validity provided by ethnography is especially evident if one studies a group or subject that is highly controversial or sensitive, such that surveys would not likely get at the real meaning of sensitive issues (e.g., study of how people experiment on animals) People more likely to behave in ways they might conceal or mask if observed by outsider, and more likely to talk frankly to ethnographer who is accepted as one of them.

3) May not be able to generalize to all settings of the same type, but insight gained from these highly valid studies exceeds that of deductive, quantitative approaches.

4) Plus, “anecdotal” case studies often have enormous generalizing accuracy (reliability) without randomly sampling other settings

e. It uses an inductive logic or “design” (aka grounded theory)

1) Deductive approach is linear, imposed, and inflexible.

Question externally asked–data gathered–question answered or hypothesis proven

2) Inductive approach is circular, not imposed, and flexible.

General orientation–focus develops–more data collected–model emerges to understand focus–more data collected to refine model–model is modified to take into account new data–more data until model is “saturated”

Initial question is general and vague and subject to change later on. Ethnographer has very general question or curiosity at the beginning of the study. Can be as general as: what is the culture of this group or setting? Takes specific questions from those being studied rather than impose them.

3) New questions emerge over time as more is learned. Questions or hypotheses to pursue emerge from what the ethnographer is learning. These hypotheses are not constructed before entering the field, as are deductive hypotheses.

4) Answers to the question force modification in the model. Rather than trying to prove or disprove these hypotheses, analytic induction has the ethnographer continuously modify their answer or model to accommodate new data. (e.g., there are acceptable and unacceptable mistakes). So you are not proving or disproving, you are elaborating and making more sense out of something.

5) Example: Animal lab study. Started with general orientation, stimulus overload. Many question to focus on. One came from seeing a few new employees quit after being asked to do eye bleeding on mice. So one focus became, why did people uncommit, become uninvolved or in everyday terms, quit. The initial model said that people would quit for ethical reasons at the beginning of their career (shock to their moral system). Collected more data, and saw that people would quit later on and not always for ethical reasons. So model changed to people would quit for ethical reasons early on, but for work related reasons later on. But collected more data, and found some people would quit for ethical reasons later on too. So modified model again, saying that in terms of ethical quitting, there were two basic types (some blown ethically out of the water quickly, while others go through a series of stages of quitting that can take a long time). Data collection stopped when no more stages found in this process of quitting.

6) Allows for discovery that cannot happen with deductive methods. (e.g., Chaos of rare multiple evening deaths—tears apart organization and culture)

f. It considers all groups worthy of study

1) Taylor and Bogdan article makes a big point about studying powerless groups who can easily be ignored and left without a voice. But truth is that they are probably

studied much more often than powerful groups because they are easier to get access to. (e.g., study of lab people began at the bottom, not even in the labs, but in the animal farms. This turned out to be great, but those with most power were relatively invisible except for the rare, somewhat stilted formal interview)

2) Need to give voice to all groups—those that are powerless because they are ignored and usually have no way of giving themselves a voice—and those with power because they can easily tamper with their public image (caretakers and techs loved my work, as do shelter workers, because they no longer feel like they are the only ones feeling certain things—that they are normal for their group)

3) Voice does not mean flattering the group with a favorable, prettified image but providing it with an accurate image of what its members experience. Like therapy in that it holds up a mirror of reality. Not everyone likes what they see (lab veterinarians hated me)

g. It considers no setting too mundane to study

1) Even in the most ordinary, everyday settings, there are the same social processes happening that take place in unusual settings. These are generic social processes. There is interesting sociology going on everywhere.

2) However, in every situation, whether mundane or extraordinary, they are unique ways that these generic social processes are expressed. So the form of the process may be similar, but its content can be quite different.

For example, anyone who feels stigmatized, learns how to justify or excuse their behavior, but the specific kinds of accounts vary depending on the type of wrongdoing

involved.

3) Plus, our understanding of how generic social processes operate can be advanced, whether we study a mundane or exotic situation.

One such process is how people justify or excuse wrongdoings—accounts. But those who study accounts always make them sound infallible—like there is no residual guilt or uneasiness because they focus just on their use in interaction as a tool to manage stigma. But there is an inner world too, and use of these accounting tools may still leave people troubled by their behavior. Example is shelter workers bothered by nightmares, haunting thoughts when driving home, disturbing conversations with outsiders. So the generic process really only works in certain kinds of social interactions.

The question is what constitutes a “field,” “site,” or “setting?”

Exercise 1: Go to Ruggles Station for ten minutes. Come back with a paragraph to discuss what constitutes an ethnographic site at the station? Any spot where there is observable culture. What is the nature of ruggles station culture?

Anywhere there is culture, we can do ethnography. The problem is that culture is complex and different cultures overlap each other, even in relatively small, local scenes. So, difficult to ground your study in a fixed location because there are many possibilities for a micro ethnography. How do you ground your study in a microculture? Possibilities can be endless.

Defining the Field

Traditionally, anthropologists have undertaken ethnographic research in small, bounded villages while living among the village's relatively few inhabitants. These ethnographers may have been one of few non-natives in that part of the world and may have been one of the first non-natives that the villagers had ever seen. It may have taken these researchers a year or more in the field to gain the language skills necessary for communication before becoming able to fashion appropriate guiding questions. These long stretches away from their homelands may have been very stressful.

1. **Today, however, fieldsites can be nearly anywhere.** Research may still focus on village life, but it is also increasingly likely to take place in urban locales or in the native language of the ethnographer. Sometimes the "group" among whom one wants to study does not live in one location, and our main fieldsite will be a workplace (like a bank) or a religious center (like a mosque) or a generic meeting room where some group meets regularly (like a library meeting room where Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, but also other things also take place) or even in cyberspace (like a chat room). "Multi-sited" fieldwork, which allows ethnographers to engage in research in more than one locale for comparative purposes, is also possible.

It is possible to choose a fieldsite first and then to make a guiding question appropriate to the site. It is also possible to start with a question about a certain cultural process and to find a site where that question might be appropriate. Either method for setting up a project can work, as long as the site and the question are relevant to one another. In other words, be careful that your research questions hit on something important about social and cultural life and practices in the group you have chosen.

ethnographer's skills see Bernard, p. 152

coding in class exercise-- (analyze observations and interviews until you have at least 6 categories to share with class. One category must have a typology) Bring in part of first interview and swap with group members to develop categories, and then report to class)

come to class with two possible settings and completed study guide questions about picking and caseing sites. Rank order the two picks. Workshop to discuss barriers and how to manage them

first impressions and learning the ropes, artifacts, maps, folk terms, proxemics

multiple perspectives of the observer--have everyone observe same thing)

within your setting (rationale for finding any difference--different activities, times, people, events?) your observations (for next observational assignment)

(probes, silences, comparisons, examples, contradictions),

See Berg for interview workshop ideas at the end of his interview chapter

(Weiss, p. 78) for managing the interview

(team shares data) for developing codes

Video. Seeing sociologically (waiting for T: setting as a culture, what that means; issues for course; real group. What do you see sociologically? Being curious sociologically)