

## CHAPTER 2

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# IN THE FIELD

### CHAPTER OUTLINE

- I. Ethnography is the firsthand personal study of a local cultural setting.
  - A. Ethnographers try to understand the whole of a particular culture, not just fragments (e.g. the economy).
  - B. In pursuit of this holistic goal, ethnographers usually spend an extended period of time living with the group they are studying and employ a series of techniques to gather information.
  - C. The early ethnographers conducted research almost exclusively among small-scale, relatively isolated societies, with simple technologies and economics.
- II. Ethnographic Techniques
  - A. Observation and Participant Observation
    - 1. Ethnographers are trained to be aware of and record details from daily events, the significance of which may not be apparent until much later.
    - 2. "Participant observation," as practiced by ethnographers, involves the researcher taking part in the activities being observed.
    - 3. Unlike laboratory research, ethnographers do not isolate variables or attempt to manipulate the outcome of events they are observing.
  - B. Conservation, Interviewing, and Interview Schedules
    - 1. Ethnographic interviews range in formality from undirected conversation, to open-ended interviews focusing on specific topics, to formal interviews using a predetermined schedule of questions.
    - 2. Increasingly, more than one of these methods are used to accomplish complementary ends on a single ethnographic research project.
  - C. The Genealogical Method
    - 1. Early anthropologists identified types of relatedness, such as kinship, descent, and marriage, as being the fundamental organizing principles of nonindustrial societies.
    - 2. The genealogical method of diagramming such kin relations was developed as a formalized means of comparing kin-based societies.
  - D. Key Cultural Consultants are particularly well-informed members of the culture being studied that can provide the ethnographer with some of the most useful or complete information.
  - E. Life Histories are intimate and personal collections of a lifetime of experiences from certain members of the community being studied.
    - 1. Life histories reveal how specific people perceive, react to, and contribute to changes that affect their lives.
    - 2. Since life histories are focused on how different people interpret and deal with similar issues, they can be used to illustrate the diversity within a given community.

- F. Local Beliefs and Perceptions and the Ethnographer**
1. An emic (native-oriented) approach investigates how natives think, categorize the world, express thoughts, and interpret stimuli.
    - a. Emic = "native viewpoint"
    - b. Key cultural consultants are essential for understanding the emic perspective.
  2. An etic (science-oriented) approach emphasizes the categories, interpretations, and features that the anthropologist considers important.

**III. The Evolution of Ethnography**

- A.**
1. Bronislaw Malinowski is generally considered the father of ethnography.
    - a. He did salvage ethnography, recording cultural diversity that was threatened by westernization.
    - b. His ethnographies were scientific accounts of unknown people and places.
  2. Ethnographic realism
    - a. The writer's goal was to produce an accurate, objective, scientific account of the study's community.
    - b. The writer's authority was rooted in his or her personal research experience with that community.
  3. Malinowski believed that all aspects of culture were linked and intertwined, making it impossible to write about just one cultural feature without discussing how it relates to others.
  4. Malinowski argued that understanding the emic perspective, the native's point of view, was the primary goal of ethnography.
  5. Interpretive anthropologists believe that ethnographers should describe and interpret that which is meaningful to the natives.
    - a. Geertz argues that cultures are texts that natives constantly "read" and that ethnographers must decipher.
    - b. Meanings in a given culture are carried by public symbolic forms, including words, rituals, and customs.
  6. Experimental anthropologists, like Marcus and Fischer, have begun to question the traditional goals, methods, and styles of ethnographic realism and salvage ethnography.
    - a. Ethnographies should be viewed as both works of art and works of science.
    - b. The ethnographer functions as the mediator who communicates information from the natives to the readers.
  7. The early ethnographies were often written in the *ethnographic present*, a romanticized timelessness before westernization, that gave the ethnographies and eternal, unchanging quality.
    - a. Today, anthropologists understand that this is an unrealistic construct that inaccurately portrayed the natives as isolated and cut off from the rest of the world.
    - b. Ethnographers today recognize that cultures constantly change and that this quality must be represented in the ethnography.
- B. Problem-Oriented Ethnography**
1. Ethnographers typically address a specific problem or set of problems, within the context of broader depictions of cultures.
  2. Variables with the most significant relationship to the problem being addressed are given priority in the analysis.
- C. Longitudinal Research** is the long-term study of a community, region, society, or culture based on a series of repeated visits.
1. Longitudinal research study has become increasingly common among ethnographic studies, as repeat visits to field sites have become easier.
  2. Such studies may also encompass multiple, related sites.

- D. Team Research involves a series of ethnographers conducting complimentary research in a given community, culture, or region.

#### **IV. Survey Research**

- A. Anthropologists working in large-scale societies are increasingly using survey methodologies to complement more traditional ethnographic techniques.
  - 1. Survey involves drawing a study group or sample from the larger study population, collecting impersonal data, and performing statistical analyses on these data.
  - 2. By studying a properly selected and representative sample, social scientists can make accurate inferences about the larger population.
- B. Survey research is considerably more impersonal than ethnography.
  - 1. Survey researchers call the people who make up their study sample respondents.
  - 2. Respondents answer a series of formally administered questions.
- C. Anthropology in Complex Societies
  - 1. Anthropologists rely increasingly on a variety of different field methodologies to accommodate demand for a greater breadth of applicability of results.
  - 2. The core contribution of ethnology remains the qualitative data that results from close, long-term, in-depth contact between ethnographer and subjects.