

# Chapter 3

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## Doing Cultural Anthropology

# Chapter Outline

- Ethnography and Fieldwork
- Ethnography in Historical Perspective
- Changing Directions in Ethnography
- Ethnographic Data and Cross Cultural Comparisons

# Chapter Outline

- Special Issues in Contemporary Ethnography
- Ethnical Considerations in Fieldwork
- New Roles for the Ethnographer

# Ethnography

- The major research tool of cultural anthropology; includes both fieldwork among people in society and the written results of fieldwork.
- Ethnographic method  
The intensive study of a particular society and culture as the basis for generating anthropological theory.

# Fieldwork

- Firsthand exploration of a society and culture.
- Develops a holistic perspective about a culture.
- Reveals the difference between what people say they do and what they do.

# Fieldwork Techniques

- Participant observation
- Photography and filming
- Recording life histories
- Using historical archives

# Participant-observation

- The fieldwork technique that involves gathering cultural data by observing people's behavior and participating in their lives.
  - Key Consultant  
A person particularly knowledgeable about his or her own culture who is a major source of the anthropologist's information.
  - Genealogy  
A family history; a chart of family relationships.

# Ethnography in History

- Anthropology began in the late 19th Century as a comparative science.
- Ethnographers concentrated on small-scale, technologically simpler societies.
- Cultures were placed on evolutionary scales of cultural development.

# Boas and Malinowski

- Franz Boas, the father of American anthropology, insisted that grasping the whole of a culture could be achieved only through fieldwork.
- Bronislaw Malinowski suggested the main goal for an ethnographer was to obtain the native's point of view.

# Boas and Malinowski

- Both set high standards for fieldwork.
- The major criterion of good ethnography was that it grasp the native point of view objectively and without bias.
- This goal was based on positivism, an empirical scientific approach that dominated the 19th and most of the 20th centuries.

# Positivism

- A philosophical system concerned with positive facts and phenomenon and excluding speculation on origins or ultimate causes.

# Empirical Science

- Approach to understanding phenomena based on attempts to observe and record a presumed objective reality.

# Postmodernism

- Theory that focuses on issues of power and voice.
- Postmodernists suggest anthropological accounts are partial truths and reflect the background, training, and social position of their authors.

# Feminist Anthropology

- Questions gender bias in ethnography and cultural theory.
- Men, who had limited access to women's lives, performed much of the fieldwork.
- Ignoring women's perspectives perpetuates the oppression of women.
- **Andocentric bias** - Distortion in theory and ethnography caused by excessive focus on male activities or male perceptions of female activities.

# Question

- Cultural anthropological research of the late 19th and much of the 20th C. was based on the ideal of observing and recording an "objective reality." This scientific view is known as
  - a) moral relativism.
  - b) positivism.
  - c) postmodernism.
  - d) Marxism.
  - e) Darwinism.

# Answer: b

- Cultural anthropological research of the late 19th and much of the 20th C. was based on the ideal of observing and recording an "objective reality." This scientific view is known as **positivism**.

# Cross-Cultural Comparison

- Use statistics to test generalizations about culture and human behavior.
- **Cross-cultural survey** - A research method that uses statistical correlations of traits from many different cultures to test generalizations about culture and human behavior.
- Human Relations Area File (HRAF) - ethnographic database including cultural descriptions of more than 300 cultures.

# Question

- Strengths of the cross-cultural survey method may be characterized by all **except** which of the following statements?
  - a) prevents generalizations about all cultures, or "human nature," by those who have experience with only one or two cultures
  - b) provides a causal explanation for unusual behaviors reported in some world societies
  - c) may put statistics of one society, such as the divorce rate, into a larger comparative perspective
  - d) examines specific meanings of a cultural practice as held within one society

# Answer: b

- Strengths of the cross-cultural survey method may be characterized by all **except** the following statement:
  - Provides a causal explanation for unusual behaviors reported in some world societies.

# Native Anthropology

- Study of one's own society.
- Anthropologists must maintain the social distance of the outsider.
- Becoming more common as native cultures disappear.

# Collaborative Ethnography

- Ethnography that gives priority to cultural consultants on the topic, methodology, and written results of ethnographic research.

# M. N. Srinivas: The Ideal Anthropological Journey: Thrice Born

1. We are born into our original culture.
2. We move away from a familiar place to a far place to do field research.
3. We turn back to our native land and find the familiar has become exotic.

# Ethical Fieldwork

Anthropologists must:

- Obtain consent of the people to be studied.
- Protect them from risk.
- Respect their privacy and dignity.

# Question

- Which one of the following does **not** characterize American Anthropological Association guidelines regarding ethical principles for fieldworkers?
  - a) Community members need to give permission for the research being conducted.
  - b) Researchers must not put community members at risk, as when a study is conducted on activities considered by the authorities as illegal.
  - c) The anthropologist at times may take on an advocacy role to help a community.
  - d) Counterinsurgency is acceptable in cases of national security.

# Answer: d

- The following does **not** characterize American Anthropological Association guidelines regarding ethical principles for fieldworkers:
  - Counterinsurgency is acceptable in cases of national security.

# Quick Quiz

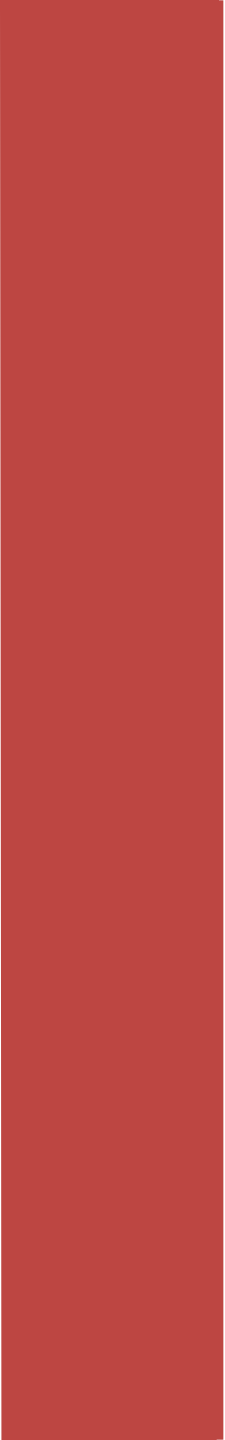


# 1. Participant-observation

- a) means that people who are the subjects of a study observe their own behavior.
- b) is carried out in a laboratory setting.
- c) is an intensive field research method, in which the investigator lives among the subjects of study.
- d) is another way of describing a telephone survey technique of collecting data.
- e) is perhaps the least demanding type of field study in anthropology.

# Answer: c

- **Participant-observation is an intensive field research method, in which the investigator lives among the subjects of study.**

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2. The philosophy that there is no single objective reality but rather many partial truths or cultural constructions, depending on one's frame of reference is known as
    - a) holism.
    - b) postmodernism.
    - c) globalism.
    - d) fundamentalism.
    - e) positivism.

# Answer: b

- The philosophy that there is no single objective reality but rather many partial truths or cultural constructions, depending on one's frame of reference is known as **postmodernism**.

3. The ethnographic database used most frequently to statistically test relationships between two or more culture traits across world cultures is
- a) the Human Relations Area Files.
  - b) the Summer Institute of Linguistics.
  - c) the Smithsonian Records.
  - d) the National Institute of Mental Health.
  - e) ISKON.

# Answer: a

- The ethnographic database used most frequently to statistically test relationships between two or more culture traits across world cultures is **the Human Relations Area Files**.