

# Ethnography/Netnography

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# Ethnography

- The situated and empirical study of lived cultures
- ‘both a research methodology and the product of that research, that is, a written description of a culture which is based on the findings of fieldwork’ (Daymon and Holloway, 2002: 130)
- Concerned with everyday life
  - What people do
  - What people say
  - Meanings that people attribute to cultural practices and artefacts

# Nature of Ethnography

- Qualitative
- Inductive approach
- Epistemologically favours interpretivism.
- Ontologically favours social constructionism.

Instead of seeing culture as an external reality that acts upon and constrains people, it can be taken to be an emergent reality in a continuous state of construction and reconstruction. (Bryman 2001: 18)

# Nature of Ethnography

- Focus on culture and people
  - What people do
  - What people say
  - Meanings that people attribute to cultural practices and artefacts
- ‘Thick’ description (Geertz, 1973)
- A dense and detailed account of experiences and patterns and connections of social relationship that join people together
- Goes beyond the ‘factual’: is both analytical and theoretical

# Types of Ethnography

- Descriptive
- Critical (focus on power, common sense assumption and hidden agenda, giving voice to the disempowered, has a political focus)

# Collecting data

- Fieldwork
- Sampling: key informants
- Participant observation: in a variety of natural settings, different times of the day/week
- Speak like a native, breathe the same air
- Field notes: accounts, fieldwork journal (your own biases)

# Collecting data

- Fieldwork
- The Field is the natural, non-laboratory setting or location where the activities in which a researcher is interested take place. (Schensul *et al.* 1983: 70)
- Puerto Rican street culture; Nature of girls' friendships in two different schools; An analysis of pilots' conversation; Use of humour by mental health workers. (Taylor 2002)
- Access
- Gatekeepers
  - Gatekeepers are those who control access to information, other individuals and setting. (Schensul *et al.* 1983: 77)
  - Formal/bureaucratic and/or Informal
- Sampling: key informants

# Collecting data

- **Participant observation:** in a variety of natural settings, different times of the day/week
- Participant observation is a data collection technique that requires the researcher to be **present** at, **involved** in and **recording** the daily activities with people in the field setting. (Schensul *et al.* 1999: 91)
- Speak like a native, breathe the same air
- Protocol:
  - Modes of dress, body language, forms of address, cultural conventions.
  - To reduce social distance between researcher and researched
- **Unstructured interview**
- Field notes: accounts, fieldwork journal (your own biases)



# Field notes

- Clear description of:
  - Context – the physical setting, temporal setting, historical context.
  - Actors – people involved
  - Activity – what people were doing
  - Cultural artefacts – objects present
  - Communication – what people said, body language & gestures

# Analysis and the report

- Emic (people, inside)/etic (theory, outside) perspectives
- Reports:
  - The realistic tale (aim for objectivity, but also self-reflexive)
  - The confessional tale (personal language)
  - The impressionist tale (creative, artistic)

# Summary

- Ethnography is primarily about:
  - People
  - Groups of people who have some sense of a collective cultural identity
  - People's everyday social and cultural practices
  - How people explain and understand these social and cultural practices.
- It involves:
  - Research that extends over a fairly extensive period of time
  - Immersion in the social and cultural milieu of the group being studied
  - Utilisation of participant observation and in-depth unstructured interviews as the primary methods of data collection

# Netnography

- History
- Definition
- Phases of research
- Ethics
- Case study

# History

- Comes from research practice of psychology, anthropology, sociology, market research, analysis of on-line content
- Web 1.0 (very limited, chat rooms, personal homepages)
- Web 2.0 (almost unlimited, explosion of social networking sites)
- Source of data

# WWW as data

- Websites and webpages
- News sites
- Rating sites
- Forum
- Chat rooms
- Discussion boards
- Blogs

# Definition

- Online ethnography, virtual ethnography, netnography
- Same tools, same approach
- 'An interpretative method devised specifically to investigate the (consumer) behaviour of cultures and communities present on the internet' (Kozinets, 1998)

# What kind of research shall we conduct?

- Present, but also past
- Longitudinal study
- Passive/active researcher



# Design of netnographic research

- Preparation
- Data collection
- Data analysis and interpretation
- Ethics
- Members check

# Preparation

- Learning about phenomenon or/and community
- Preparing research questions
- Defining sources

# Data collection

- Copying data from net
- Observing online interactions

# Data analysis and interpretation

- Classification system
- Coding
- Synthesis/writing

# Ethics

- Disclosure of your id (?)
- Anonymity of subjects
- Incorporate feedback
- Permission before publication

# Members check

- Feedback to community or individuals

# Ethics-undercover or not?

- Is www public or private space?

# Ethics – undercover or not?

- Restricted access – private CMC, you have to disclose your identity as a researcher
- Unrestricted access – you may consider to stay undisclosed
- When?
- Be careful – you may harm people!!!



# Reading

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