

Chapter 10

Qualitative Field Research
Fieldwork/ethnography

Fieldnotes

- fieldnotes will constitute a major part of the data on which later conclusions will be based.
- Fieldnotes should be written as soon as possible after leaving the fieldsite, immediately if possible. Even though we may not think so when we are participating and observing, we are all very likely to forget important details unless we write them down very quickly.

List of Important things to include in Notes- Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (1997)

- Date, time, and place of observation
- Specific facts, numbers, details of what happens at the site
- Sensory impressions: sights, sounds, textures, smells, tastes
- Personal responses to the fact of recording fieldnotes
- Specific words, phrases, summaries of conversations, and insider language
- Questions about people or behaviors at the site for future investigation
- Page numbers to help keep observations in order

Key ideas on fieldnotes

- Jottings
 - are the brief words or phrases written down while at the fieldsite or in a situation about which more complete notes will be written later.
- Description
 - of everything we can remember about the occasion you are writing about

Key ideas on fieldnotes

- Analysis
 - What questions do you have to help focus your observation on subsequent visits? Can you begin to draw preliminary connections or potential conclusions based on what you learned?
- Reflections
 - on what you learned of a personal nature. What was it like for you to be doing this research?

Fieldwork

- Take out a piece of paper.
- Record your observations (you will be turning this in, so keep that in mind).
- Try to record everything you can observe.
- Be sure to describe the setting with as much detail as possible.
- Saying Maureen looks happy is not descriptive. Maureen is smiling is descriptive.

Field notes

- How successful were you at capturing “everything”?
- What did you tend to focus on?
- What did you miss?
- What was with the “stranger”?

Assignment 5.1 due Aug. 7th

- You need to type a two page paper about your fieldwork.
- Tell a story about your fieldwork. Your experience with fieldwork. What issues or problems did you have? What would you do differently next time? What did you miss?

Structured Interviews and Survey's

- Quantitative
- Interview schedule
 - A list of questions in the order they should be asked
- Written questions and responses
- Designed to be quantified.
 - How many people answered yes?

Topics for Field Research

- Attitudes and behaviors best understood in a natural setting.
- Social processes over time.
- How social actors view/interpret/understand their world.

Field Research Paradigms

- Naturalism- telling peoples stories the way they really are; objective reality to be discovered
- Ethnomethodology-social reality is constructed daily through interaction; we make sense out of other peoples world

Observer roles

- Complete participant- you are a member
 - Seriously people use this “going native”
- Participant as observer-doing research and telling people
 - Participant is important as well as researcher
- Observer as participant –happens to participate
- Complete observer- does not become a part of the scene

Field Research Paradigms

- Grounded theory-inductive; empirical with a systematic set of procedures for developing theory
- Case studies and the extended case method- Lay out what we expect to find before we enter the field (reveals bias and lack of information); modifying existing theory

Field Research Paradigms

- Institutional ethnography- use personal info to uncover power relations; links micro of personal with the macro of institutions
- Participatory action research- limit distinction between researcher and researched; subjects define and design the study

Preparing for Field Work

- Fill in your knowledge of the subject.
- Discuss the group you plan to research with an informant.
- Develop an identity with the people to be studied.
- Realize that your initial contact with the group can influence your observations.

Interviewing

Develop questions

Interview- conversation

Memoing

writing personal reactions to research

Transcribing

Analyzing

Guidelines - Taking Research Notes

- Don't trust your memory. Take notes while you observe.
 - Theoretical saturation- things become familiar and repetitive.
- Take sketchy notes in the field and rewrite them later, filling in the details.
 - Type up notes if possible

Guidelines - Taking Research Notes

- Record everything.
 - Things that don't seem important may turn out to be significant.
 - Context, location, setting, timing are all important components of describing your setting
- Realize that most of your field notes will not be reflected in your final project.

Strengths of Field Research

- Permits a great depth of understanding.
- Flexibility - research may be modified at any time.
- Inexpensive
- Has more validity than surveys or experiments.

Weaknesses of Field Research

- Qualitative and not appropriate for statistical descriptions of populations.
- Has potential problems with reliability since field research methods are often personal.
- Not generalizable to the population
- Can generalize to theory

Is It Ethical?

- To be in a situation but not commit yourself wholeheartedly to it?
- To be strategic in your relations with others?
- To take sides or avoid taking sides in a factionalized situation?

Is It Ethical?

- To "pay" people with tradeoffs for access to their lives and minds?
- To "use" people as allies or informants in order to gain entrée to other people or to elusive understandings?

I plan on telling my respondents about my research agenda. Do you think this will?

1. Have no impact on how respondents act.
2. Will make respondents think about their actions.
3. Will make respondents self-conscious about their actions.
4. Will cause respondents to change their actions around me.
5. I don't know or care.

