

Hi there, I'm Megan Breen from the Collaborative Humanities Investigating Religion and Power Lab, or the CHIRP Lab. Today I'm going to be talking about What is Ethnography.

Ethnography is central to our research here at the CHIRP Lab. And this video is an introduction to kind of delve into how this is foundational to the research we do here. There's also other Key Concept videos on our Youtube page and linked in our website that you can check out that discuss Key Concepts that we also use such as Religion, Power, the relationship between them, and power dynamics.

Today I'm going to be going over four main things.

So, first of all, the definition of ethnography. What is it exactly? Second, Methodology. How are ethnographic studies conducted? Third we're going to talk about the state of the field and how the field of ethnographic writing has changed. And then lastly, I'm going to present a current example so that I can really illustrate for you how this may look in the future and in our current field.

Let's start with "What Exactly Is Ethnography?"

Ethnography is a research strategy that allows researchers to explore and examine the cultures and societies that are a fundamental part of the human experience.

The ethnographer collects data and gains insight through firsthand involvement with research subjects or informants.

So we really need to pay attention to "firsthand" here. That's going to be the different between ethnographic research and archival or source research.

We you're looking at a diary or simple numbers, that is going to be a lot more different that what you're going to get from ethnographic research.

Ethnographic research is able to present a more full picture, and when you're on the ground you can really gain those unique experiences that may not be possible from other types of source material.

Next, let's talk about methodology. So, how do you do ethnography? There's three main types.

Methods that are used depend heavily on what the subject of study is.

So, the key is to really mix and match these to best fit with the goal of the research question is.

Let's start at the top here with participant observation. So this is on the ground research where the researcher attends events, or engages the community in other ways relevant to their research and builds rapport and relationships.

So here you are stepping into that community. You are getting yourself involved and you are on the ground trying to gain a picture of the subject you are studying.

Second, interviews. A method and space for the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the topic of research from a person or people.

So this allows kind of a Q and A type in letting them lead the conversation in a mix to try to gain a full understanding from a person who is a part of that community or related to them in some capacity.

Lastly, maps and charts. This one may seem like it wouldn't be ethnographic, but it can be utilized in ethnographic research to show spacial relations, social interactions, family trees and ancestry, or flow diagrams.

So this is another way that there is some firsthand experience you can gain from this. You can discover the relationships that are present in a community through looking at those spacial relations and family trees and ancestry.

Next let's talk about how ethnographic writing has evolved. So, there is expansion of perspectives studied, previously it's a largely male dominated field and did not show holistic representations of other cultures largely. And focused a lot on a male perspective of the culture that they're studying.

Second, rejection of colonist and social Darwinist beliefs and attitudes. In older ethnographic writing it is present that there is a lot of dehumanizing or simplifying of another culture. Ethnographic writing has evolved past that and we seek to not over-simplify or dehumanize the culture that we're studying.

Next, critiques of claims to absolute authority and objectivity.

So this is talking about that when you are stepping into another culture, you cannot claim you absolutely understand that culture and that you are a master of this culture. That comes back to over-simplifying it.

And then, a movement to acknowledge the constant shift in changed and culture. So once again, moving away from over-simplifying. Not making it sound like this culture is only this one thing. Showing that culture is changing. Just as it does in Western culture, we are now expanding beyond that perspective in understand and recognizing that there are the same shifts in other cultures and areas of the world.

It's evolved alongside the approaches to history, sociology, philosophy, and other humanity and sciences work to approach research in a less western-centric male-dominated perspective.

At the CHIRP Lab that's extremely important to us. We want an intersectional approach, that is interdisciplinary and does not over-simplify the research work that we're doing.

Lastly, let's look at Social Media as Ethnographic Method. So this is going to be the example I'm presenting to kind of illustrate what this might look like in our current field.

So, upcoming field of ethnographic method to gauge cultural behaviors through social media.

There is a hesitation here to overuse technology due to the multitude of platforms and accuracy of information collected.

So there's a consideration to not over-generalize and simplify. When you're looking on twitter, there is always the possibility of bots. You don't want to look at a hashtag, look at the first three posts, and over-simplify an entire cultural movement. Super dangerous.

Once again, really being away of over-simplifying. And with social media that is something we really have to keep in mind.

But it is a new way to gather mass data and note trends. Something that's more accessible to a wider audience of doing research, and it's just a mass of data that wasn't as possible and accessible to really see before.

For further reading and for the quotes of definition of ethnography, we have writing culture, the poetics and politics of ethnography by James Clifford and George E. Marcus.

I have a brief description here of what this is about if you're interested in exploring it further.

And then Ethnographic Essentials: Designing, Conducting, and Presenting your Research by Julian Murchison. This is another great resource that I have used a lot when looking in how we're going to approach our ethnographic research here at the CHIRP Lab.

I absolutely recommend them, to look at these annotated bibliographies I've written, and see if this is something that's going to be helpful for you and your research.

And then, little plug here at the end: Resources at the CHIRP Lab.

Visit our site, Chirp-Lab.com to learn more about our personal mission, projects, and current researches that we are working alongside with.

Visit Chirp-lab.com/resrouces for further readings on the relationship between religion and power which we study here at the CHIRP lab, worksheets on research method and research development, and to view our other key concepts videos that really explore a lot of the different things that are foundation to the research that we do.

