Anthropological Research Methods

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Anthropological Research Methods: Caveats and Promises

• Wide range of methods depending on theoretical orientation and problem

• Methods vary depending on subfield of anthropology (socio-cultural anthropology)

• Methods have multidimensional flexibility depending on epistemological and ontological positioning

• Methods provide a fundamental platform from which to engage in trans-disciplinary and synthesis research
PART I. PERSPECTIVES

1 Epistemology: The Nature and Validation of Knowledge
   Michael Schnegg

2 In Search of Meaningful Methods
   James W. Fernandez and Michael Herzfeld

3 Research Design and Research Strategies
   Jeffrey C. Johnson and Daniel J. Hruschka

4 Ethics
   Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban

5 Feminist Methods
   Christine Ward Gailey

6 Participatory Methods and Community-Based Collaborations
   Stephen L. Schensul, Jean J. Schensul, Merrill Singer, Margaret Weeks, and Marie Brault

PART II. ACQUIRING INFORMATION

7 Sampling and Selecting Participants in Field Research
   Greg Guest

8 Participant Observation
   Kathleen Musante (DeWalt)

9 Behavioral Observation
   Raymond Hames and Michael Paolisso

10 Person-Centered Interviewing and Observation
    Robert I. Levy and Douglas W. Hollan

11 Structured Interviewing and Questionnaire Construction
    Susan C. Weller

12 Discourse-Centered Methods
    Brenda Farnell and Laura R. Graham

13 Visual Anthropology
    Fadwa El Guindi

14 Ethnography of Online Cultures
    Jeffrey G. Snodgrass

15 Social Survey Methods
    William W. Dressler and Kathryn S. Otlis

PART III. INTERPRETING INFORMATION

16 Reasoning with Numbers
    W. Penn Handwerker and Stephen P. Borgatti

17 Text Analysis
    Amber Wutich, Gery Ryan, and H. Russell Bernard

18 Cross-Cultural Research
    Carol R. Ember, Melvin Ember, and Peter N. Peregrine

19 Geospatial Analysis
    Eduardo S. Brondizio and Tracy Van Holt

20 Social Network Analysis
    Christopher McCarty and José Luis Molina
# Research Methods: Principles and Practices

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Holism

- Meaning, understanding and behavior are generated by interconnections of a whole
- The specific cannot be understood without reference to that whole, or some subset of that whole
- Reductionism and parsimony are suspect unless holistically contextualized
Cultural Relativism

- Resistance to universal assumptions about socio-cultural processes
- Focus on cross-cultural or group patterns and also exceptions and alternatives to those patterns
- Provide a voice and articulate value to socio-cultural phenomena in marginalized, underserved and under-represented populations
- Focus on inter-cultural or group patterns of agreement and disagreement
Fieldwork: Then and Now

- The real-world places for engaging people;
- Still fundamental to our discipline both real and imagined;
- Opportunity for grounding and validating our theories, methods, and goals;
- Professionally and personally challenging (rite of passage)

Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, New Guinea 1938

Susan Crate, Pacific Islands (2012)

Bronislaw Malinowski, Trobriand Islands (1918)

Joshua Bell, Papua New Guinea (2005)
Ethnography

- Empirical grounding of our research during fieldwork
- Engaged, inductive and reflective
- Focused but flexible
- Triangulation of practices and tools
- Participatory and Collaborative
Multi-Sited

- Ethnographic fieldwork across more than one geographic, community or institution site
- Examination of linkages among sites at different spatial and temporal scales
- Focuses on inter-site flows of knowledge, values, power, materials and their human and environmental consequences (justice, decisions, polices)
Methodological Toolkit

- Participant Observation
- Interviews and Surveys
- Qualitative-Quantitative Analysis
- Modeling
Participant Observation

• A defining method for anthropology
• Participate in and observe people and groups
• The anthropologist as instrument or interlocutor
• Data or information subject to post modern, scientific and humanistic analysis
• Stand alone or complementary to other methods
Interviews and Surveys

• Use informal interviews to identify relevant issues and topics and to complement participant observation
  – Key informants and collaborators
  – Very open ended

• Use semi-structured interviews to simulate natural discourse
  – Large group of experts that represent diverse views (n=10-40)
  – Set open-ended questions asked to all with probing
  – Non quantitative but amenable to qualitative analysis/modeling

• Surveys
  – Developed from interview data for statistical and model analysis
  – Used to transition from subset of interviewees to larger populations
  – Results validated and interpreted using qualitative interview and p/o data
Anthropological Modeling

Examples

- Text Models (Atlas.ti)
- Cultural Modeling
- Cultural Consensus
- Social Network Analysis
- Complex Adaptive Systems
- Agent Based Modeling
- Participatory GIS

Text Model: Harmful Algae Bloom

Common Motivators Among Stakeholders
Outcomes of Methodological Goals, Principles, and Practices

- Ethnography or case study
- Comparative research
- Inter- and trans-disciplinary research
- Participatory and collaborative research
- Valuation and agency of knowledge, values and practices within and between groups
- Attention to structures and processes across time and space
Methods tell much about Anthropology

- We produce ethnographies and people-centered accounts
- Our methods organize our goal to talk and understand people and their contexts
- Produce data that are valid ethnographically
- Essential to evaluating our theoretical assumptions
Thanks