

# 1 Ethnography: An Analysis of its Advantages and Disadvantages

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3 *Received: 12 September 2021 Accepted: 30 September 2021 Published: 15 October 2021*

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## 5 **Abstract**

6 Introduction to Ethnography-What is Ethnography: Ethnography is research, precisely about  
7 individuals, societies and their culture. It aims to study social and cultural aspects of society  
8 and the researcher focuses to collect information for that. It focuses on the behaviour of  
9 people concerning the social setup they live in. The outcome of a field study mirrors the  
10 learning and the arrangement of implications in the lives of a social gathering. Department of  
11 Anthropology, Princeton University defines Ethnography as "a research method central to  
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15 *Index terms—*

## 16 **1 Introduction to Ethnography**

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22 knowing the world from the standpoint of its social arrangements. It is a qualitative research method predicated  
23 on the diversity of culture at home (wherever that may be) and abroad. Ethnography involves hands-on, on-the-  
24 scene learning -and it is relevant wherever people are relevant."

25 O'Reilly (2012) has referred to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) who have stated that that the term  
26 ethnography is variable and contested, overlapping with qualitative research more broadly, with 'fieldwork', case  
27 study, and even life histories (Heyl 2001). Ethnography as portrayed by O'Reilly (2012) "is iterative-inductive  
28 research drawing on a group of strategies, including immediate and supported contact with human specialists,  
29 inside the setting of their everyday lives, watching what happens, tuning in to what is stated, making inquiries,  
30 and creating a luxuriously composed record that regards the immutability of human experience, that recognizes  
31 the part of the hypothesis, and the analyst's part, and that perspectives people as part question/part subject".  
32 Ethnography employs a participant observation approach for the study.

## 33 **2 II. Advantages of Ethnographic Research Methodology**

34 As with any other research methods, Ethnography has its advantages; however, it is important to mention here  
35 that ethnography is a completely different approach of data collection wherein the collector of data is himself a  
36 participant and not an outsider.

37 The main aim of the participatory observation is to be immersed within the society under study (and studying  
38 complex issues) as its member and then record everything. This experience may open up people under study in  
39 a more comfortable manner to the anthropologist which enables him to see more than an etic perspective of the  
40 way of life. They are not aware that they are being watched (covert method) or observed therefore they are  
41 performing in a very natural way and the observation is highly.

42 Professor of Sociology Mitchell Duneier (1999) in his book Sidewalk has explained the social setting of New  
43 York's Greenwich village three-block span and offers an open and convincing picture of a few black men earning  
44 a livelihood in Greenwich Village offering used merchandise, begging, and searching books and periodicals.  
45 Duneier conducted his study for five years with these people and has shared in Sidewalk a quick afterword by

46 long-lasting book merchant Hakim Hasan, the protagonist. This intriguing investigation uncovers the city life in  
47 all its multifaceted nature: its imperativeness, its contentions about ethnicity, race and its shocking opening of  
48 doors for compassion among outsiders. This study signifies that the participatory approach enabled Duneier to  
49 understand the life and conditions of the inhabitant of the village very closely and precisely. It is highly accurate  
50 and the data collected is first hand and from the horse's mouth.

51 Also while researching participatory mode; you can get unexpected results and observation which were never  
52 perceived by the researcher. Duneier in Sidewalk found that many people sleep on the footpath even if they had  
53 a home. He founds and experienced himself about the arbitrary display of authority by the police many times,  
54 even during Christmas it tells him to stop selling books.

55 Another study by Paul Willis (1977) 'Learning by Labour', is an ethnographic research of twelve regular  
56 workers 'lads' from a school in Birmingham. He spent a sum of year and a half watching the 'lads' in school  
57 and after that a further a half year tailing them into work. The examination planned to reveal the subject of  
58 how and why "common labourers kids land regular workers positions" (1977:1). The ethnographic approach  
59 enabled Willis to submerge himself into the social settings of the 'lads' and gave him the chance to ask the lads  
60 (normally open) inquiries regarding their conduct which included definite records of the fellows battling, getting  
61 into an issue with educators, bunking lessons, setting off flame W quenchers for the sake of entertainment and  
62 vandalizing a mentor on a school trip.

63 This methodology allows the cultures to speak for themselves. It provides them with a voice.

64 We could not have known about the life of inhabitants of Trobriand Islands and their practice of incest,  
65 had Malinowsky (1922) not worked over there. We would not have been able to know about the nuances of  
66 intergenerational relations in Singapore lest the fieldwork was done in this area (Kristina Goransson: 2013).

67 Ethnographies can also help the policymakers to think in an alternate way about having the social perspective  
68 of various actions. In the wake of perusing 'Sidewalk', for instance, it is attractive that individuals should begin  
69 taking a gander at any rate at the road sellers and beggars with different eyes, not communicating instant  
70 suppositions about them. Alice Goffman (2014) in 'On the run: Fugitive Life in an American city', has stated  
71 that the manner of policing is shaping the young blacks differently. Such kind of study acts as a useful input for  
72 the policymakers to shape/modify the existing policies. In Sidewalk, Duneier described that policymakers must  
73 understand the social aspect of the lives of the people in that area and start thinking from their perspective. In  
74 'Learning to Labour', Paul Willis (1977) found out that the lads were never interested in school. Because they  
75 vision their future in factory jobs only, therefore, they perceived school only as an intervening period which they  
76 to just pass. This finding can very well help the school as well as council authorities in trying to find out the  
77 ways and methods to change their perception and perhaps their future employment levels and opportunities.

### 78 3 III.

## 79 4 Disadvantages of Ethnographic Research Methodology

80 The endeavour to be both participant and researcher may lead the analysts to be subjective. Duneier (1999)  
81 sometimes had spoken of the problems being faced by the street vendors in the same way as perceived by them  
82 which looks as if Duneier was speaking their language. To defeat this issue, Woods (1986) recommends the  
83 researcher to join an individual association and a measure of objectivity. By the absence of objectivity, the  
84 researcher will recognize firmly the individuals being studied and will start looking from their lenses as opposed  
85 to contemplating them. A movie Chakravyuh made by Prakash Jha (2012) has shown a protagonist going  
86 amongst the tribal insurgents to gauge their nerve and the reason for their revolt and the problems they are  
87 facing. However, he joined their movement and started anti-establishment activities.

88 Another important drawback is the length of time required to conduct the ethnographic studies. In Sidewalk  
89 Mitchell Duneier (1999) had spent five years with the people under study. The researcher has to be highly  
90 patient with his data collection and should not look for quick data as the participatory method aims towards  
91 things to happen on its own rather than making it. In Learning to Labour, Paul Willis (1977) took after  
92 12 lads for observational study for a one and a half year in school and next six months at the work. Thus,  
93 directing ethnographic research is a lengthy and taxing job, where the researcher is assumed to have enough  
94 vitality remembering the ultimate objective to be recognized into a particular social system and a short time  
95 later observe as an insider, constantly interpret the social relations which make in that specific situation (O'Reilly,  
96 2005), "and so to understand other people's world view" ??Taylor, 2002: 3) Taking part in participatory research  
97 provide myriad results for the researcher. Receiving an unforeseen part in contrast with while using quantitative  
98 research procedures, the researcher plays an important role amid the duration of collecting the data to be  
99 analysed (Padgett, 1998; Marshall and Rossman, 2006). In this way, fieldwork demands more effort, commitment  
100 and sincerity from the analyst, as May contends: "participant observation is the most personally demanding  
101 and analytically difficult method of social research to undertake" (2001: 153). The researcher collects the data,  
102 analyse it and then classify it as per the information provided by the interviewee (Padgett, 1998). Duneier  
103 (1999) realised that while conducting 'Sidewalk', and putting in two years examining Hakim, the protagonist,  
104 who gave him useful inputs by looking at the original copy of the study, that he had ignored a few critical social  
105 perspectives on the Sidewalk.

106 Another impact on the fieldworker examined here is identified with his or her security. Duneier (1999) has

107 given hints that initially, Hakim was worried about his physical safety, Duneier being an upper-class white Jew  
108 can be a target than just being an observer. In the event, while managing unsafe or contentious matters, and  
109 primarily experiencing covert research, i.e. 'inquire about that something without consent and awareness, and full  
110 information is not available to the members' (O'Reilly, 2005: 60), the wellbeing of the researcher could be risked.  
111 Additionally, the ethnographer could participate in hazardous exercises, for instance doing drugs or pirating, or  
112 something which would regularly be unethical. Duneier (2001) could have thought of doing drugs to getting  
113 closer to the subject under study thinking that this may allow him to immerse better in the character.

114 Another important aspect of adverse repercussion is the breach of privacy. It ought to be noticed that in  
115 ethnographic research, there is a possibility of privacy issues in the study of the subject as various aspects are  
116 very private to the subject ??Homann, 1991: 65). Duneier (1999) was very careful in this regards and whatever  
117 he used to gather the information he always shared with his subjects and showed him pictures, photographs and  
118 records which he has taken. Also as per Bardia Monshi & Verena Ziegelmayer (2010, 305-312), as per ethnographic  
119 research on patienthealer connections in Sri Lanka; specialists were amazed to find that members' perspectives  
120 of wellbeing and privacy varied incredibly from plain Western perspectives and that the privacy protection they  
121 had set up caused inconvenience among members. Humphreys' (1970) investigation of the conduct of men  
122 participating in gay acts out in the open restrooms is regularly taken for instance of research in which the  
123 privacy of sources was abused. Such infringement happened not just because of the genuine perception of the  
124 gay demonstration by Humphreys in the secret social part of 'Watch queen' yet additionally when he secured the  
125 addresses of the men required by following utilizing the tag quantities of their cars, and after that utilized this  
126 data to track them down and question them. O'Reilly (2012) attests: ethical aspects of the research always take  
127 a back seat when the research is conducted in a covert manner ??2005: 60).

128 Undertaking open research, as conducted by Duneier in Sidewalk, is a straightforward approach and being  
129 honest with the members, yet it affects the social relations in some ways; in this specific circumstance, Duneier  
130 underscores the way that individuals from various ethnicities and races won't be comfortable in revealing  
131 everything in front of the outsider ??1999, ??38). This could influence the analyst's objective which is to  
132 depict the true picture of such a culture without condemning given his social setting' (Marshall and Rossman,  
133 2006: 82). Therefore participatory research in an overt way is having its limitations in finding relevant and  
134 unbiased data which honestly reflects the people and the culture under study. Winlow et al's (2001) Study of  
135 Doormen has occurred with a covert way of research as the inhabitants were very shy and would not have opened  
136 if they had known the original identity of the researcher.

137 One more criticism of the ethnographic approach is related to the quality of the research conducted and  
138 the effectiveness of the methodology, concerning the uncoordinated method for directing research and gathering  
139 information (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007; Padgett, 1998). The faultfinders would proceed by expressing that  
140 this approach is utilizing little scope and small samples to deliver impressionistic discoveries defenceless against  
141 any inclination one could envision' ??Padgett, 1998: 12). Taylor writes that an ethnographic investigation  
142 provides narrow results instead of broad and universal details of social life" (2002: 3) and, as indicated by Gray,  
143 "a few commentators contend that the discoveries are 'insufficient in representativeness and generalisability, two  
144 key criteria of legitimacy in sociological research' ??2003: 15). Also, since the researcher in an ethnographic  
145 approach is individualistic so the veracity of data collected is not checked. However, having a thought of results  
146 to be cross-checked may not make the researcher comfortably conduct his study. Regarding Learning to Labour  
147 by Willis (1977), many critics have raised doubts about the validity of his conclusion as his sample size was only  
148 12. Reliability seems to be less as it is difficult to repeat this research and he might have been played by lads  
149 also.

150 IV.

## 151 5 Conclusion

152 To understand the complex matters it is important to be part of the setup under study. It could not have been  
153 easy for either Duneier or Willis to conclude about the reason for the problems being faced by their subject under  
154 study without being part of the setup. Ethnography, therefore, precedes various exploratory techniques due to  
155 these advantages. However, every study technique has its limitations (I would not call them disadvantages) and  
156 those limitations are to be kept in mind while planning for the exploratory approach. By getting the accounts of  
157 various ethnographic studies, it can be said that this approach is highly immersive and provides one with a highly  
158 transparent and original account of information. This methodology allows the culture to speak for itself which is  
159 highly important. However, it poses various risks and pitfalls which are important to be addressed. Anthropology  
160 relies heavily on this method and it has been found to provide a highly realistic outcome of the research. As  
161 implied, we could not have explored so much about various societies which are living isolated, without the help  
162 of this technique.

163 Word Count: 2461 (excluding references and cover sheet) <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>© 2021 Global Journals

## **5 CONCLUSION**

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## 164 .1 Global Journal of Management and Business Research

165 Volume XXI Issue V Version I Year 2021 ( ) A

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