

A STUDY OF THE ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES BASED ON PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL PARAMETERS

Nitin Chhikara

Carole McGranahan, in the article (2018) attempts to define the essence of ethnography. This attempt is mired with multiple ideas, but the focus on ethnographic sensibility is central. It is, she defines as, "the cultivation of a sense of the ethnographic as they lived expectations, complexities, contradictions, possibilities and grounds of any given cultural group." (p 1) Carole distinguishes ethnography from all other methods and proves its uniqueness. Ethnographic sensibility is the sense of living the ethnographical space itself. She believes that what is needed is not just the quantity of ethnographies done but the infusion of this sensibility into its study. The common barrier to the recognition of this sensibility is the blurring of lines between what is 'ethnographic' and what is not ethnographic. It is both ontological and epistemological, and hence this duality becomes unnoticeable at times because the researcher finds himself in the same reality. She writes how ethnography, a method used since the beginning of anthropology, has changed its definition. Now, it is not just a method to know something, but by itself is a "way of knowing" (p 3).

A survey is not just a particular technique of collecting information: questionnaires are widely used but other techniques, such as structured and in-depth interviews, observation, content analysis, and so forth, can also be used in survey research. Survey research is widely regarded as being inherently quantitative and positivistic and is contrasted to qualitative methods that involve participant observation, unstructured interviewing, case studies, focus groups, etc. This distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is frequently unhelpful and misleading. A survey technique is not a dictated method, where the researcher merely writes down what he sees. It is the technique where the place of study and the area of research are also rediscovered. Therefore to describe the social context, relationships, and the secondary areas of research, it is crucial for the researcher to be immersed within the systems of that community/ culture. Borneman and Hammoudi (2009), who notes that the most important anthropological tool in ethnography is of 'being here'. It is also crucial for surveying techniques.

Carole had listed down a few principles to be followed with regard to these sensibilities of researching, and these can be used in the survey techniques as well. She points out that the result of the research is not dependent on the technology he uses, but on the interpersonal skills of the researcher. Thick description, a method deployed by Geertz can add details to the survey technique

which generally hides behind the invisible lenses. Without the internalization of the real ethnographic, all methods lose the value of their real purpose. Investigators need to acknowledge that all of the peoples' lives are a product of the 'uncertain' and the 'predictable'. Both these factors can be studied through a participant observation method which is not restricted by the boundaries of the research question.

Surveys are effective tools and can help us understand the larger changes in society. For instance, in the early 1970s, before the end of the Vietnam War, surveys showed that tertiary students had strong anti-American attitudes. Recent surveys have shown that these feelings are no longer evident among students. Ending the Vietnam War certainly improved the attitudes of students to the United States. The larger social structure, hence, enraptures the survey and thus, the techniques used too shall acknowledge the change. So, the cross-sectional designs and combination of methods can help the investigator in understanding the situation better. Using the cross-sectional approach, researchers collect data from at least two groups of people at one point of time and compare the extent to which the two groups differ on the dependent variable. This has become to be the most used survey design, and it is due to the openness to changes around us.

The interpersonal skills and building a good rapport are integral for a good survey. Therefore Dillman (1978) notes that as a general rule the experience of participating in the survey should be made as pleasant and rewarding as possible. The researcher should pay attention to the other aspects of survey design, and ensure that they minimize respondents' burden. Other rules for a questionnaire include: Go from easy to more difficult questions, Go from concrete to abstract questions, Open-ended questions should be kept to a minimum and, where possible, placed towards the end of the questionnaire. A good questionnaire is one in which there is a logical flow to questions. It is also noted that one of the most common criteria by which a method is judged is the response rate it achieves. Face-to-face interviews have traditionally been seen as the most effective in this respect while telephone and particular mail surveys and internet surveys have developed the reputation for low response rates. But this is misleading. The response rate obtained in a particular study, however, will be due to the combined effect of the topic, the nature of the sample, the length of the questionnaire, the care taken in implementing the particular survey, and other related factors. There will be situations where a well-administered mail or internet survey will yield response rates at least equal to both personal and telephone interviews and at a much lower cost. Therefore, as Carole said, all does not hang on the power of methods and technology itself.

Brewer notes that the disadvantage in sociology is that, it sometimes competes with ordinary common-sense views of the same things. People are usually confident that they know why the family is declining, or why crime or unemployment has risen, or what is wrong with the church, morality, the police, or whatever. Moreover, laypeople often fix upon explanations derived from common-sense knowledge which best suit their personal beliefs and views, and never work at their explanations, or continually try to improve them. He then progresses to outline the crucial

(MIJ) 2017, Vol. No. 3, Jan-Dec

e-ISSN: 2454-924X; p-ISSN: 2454-8103

developments in the history of ethnography. The Chicago school in sociology explored the observational techniques which could be used in the discipline. Robert Park, one of the main contributors to the school, was famous for his emphasis on 'real first-hand observational research'. Sociology is a unique discipline among other social sciences. The uniqueness is also seen in its ways to understand the outside world. The tussle between common-sense knowledge and observation may act as a deterrent for the true generation of knowledge in a survey. The researcher might get lost within these oblivious lenses and might not be aware of it. The only tool which can save a researcher from this is— ethnographic sensibility.

Bibliography

Borneman, John, and Abdellah Hammoudi. 2009. Being There: The Fieldwork Encounter and the Making of Truth. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

John D. Brewer. 2000. Ethnography. Open University Press.

McGranahan, Carole. 2018. Ethnography beyond method: the Importance of an ethnographic Sensibility. Sites: new series. vol 15 no 1.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. The Interpretation of Cultures. New York: Basic Books.