Ken Barger
POPULATION-BASED RESEARCH
Appendix 1: Pᴀʀᴛɪᴄɪᴘᴀɴᴛ-Oʙꜱᴇʀᴠᴀᴛɪᴏɴ
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Keeping in mind some ᴘʀɪɴᴄɪᴘʟᴇꜱ of ethnographic research can help us have a more balanced and valid understanding of others, and a more satisfying field experience:

- Working with others is about building human **relationships**. It is *not* them giving us information, but a process of people sharing views and feelings and developing mutually satisfying ties. There will be some we naturally like more than others, and we will develop deeper relations with some in the community more than others... and there will be some that we do not like and who do not like us. In general, if we are interested in them and show respect, most will respond similarly. Even where there may be problems, we will learn about both ourselves and them.
- Our role is being the **learner**. *They* are the ᴇxᴘᴇʀᴛꜱ on what they think, feel, experience, etc. We are asking them to *help us* learn. We are more open to learning and experiencing how different behaviors are integrated into a functioning ꜱʏꜱᴛᴇᴍ.
- Recognition and **control of biases** is the ʙᴀꜱɪᴄ ᴇᴛʜɴᴏɢʀᴀᴘʜɪᴄ ᴍᴇᴛʜᴏᴅ. We seek to learn *what is there*... not what we think is there (or we should simply research ourselves). The major bias we encounter in inter-ethnic contexts is *ethnocentrism*, making false ᴀꜱꜱᴜᴍᴘᴛɪᴏɴꜱ about others' behavior based on our own limited experience (http://www.iupui.edu/~anthkb/ethnocen.htm). "Assumptions" mean that we don't know that we don't know. At best, this leads to *mis*understandings, and at worst this produces prejudices, animosity, and open hostilities. The key to controlling for biases is to recognize that we do *not* understand, and a useful technique is to look for ʀᴇᴀᴄᴛɪᴏɴꜱ (ours and theirs)... which indicate that the "realities" of life are not working. Then we can be more open in seeking more valid and balanced understandings.
- To gain more valid and balanced understandings, we try to learn by **structured experience**. We try to experience the *range* and *depth* of their experiences in order to understand the basis of their behavior. *Culture* is a complex and integrated system of behaviors (http://www.iupui.edu/~anthkb/concepts.htm), and we try to gain insights into the *meanings* and *functions* of this system by experiencing it ourselves. One thing to note is that intensive emersion in another culture usually involves *culture shock*, which is usually very disorienting and painful as we reform our own behavior to better function in another context with its own integrated system of behavior. If we are prepared for this, the process can be a significant growth experience as we personally learn more about who we can be from a wider range of human potentials. In the outcome, learning to *be* someone in another cultural context is the primary methodology in ethnography.
- **Ethics**. Our field work and reports do impact on people's lives, and we have a moral obligation to ensure that these impacts are as possible as possible. The ultimate judge of what are "positive" impacts lies with those with whom we work, *not* ourselves, our colleagues, or our profession.

1. RESEARCH GOALS

   What are the **purposes** of our research?
       What do we want to learn?
       We should have clear the specific goals of what we are investigating and want to learn
       These goals provide a guide for making decisions in the research process
   How will the results of our work be **used**?
       For *us* (personally, professionally)?
       For *them* (their goals in life, specific issues)

2. ASSUME NOTHING

Biases: Making *assumptions* about others' behavior
based on our own [limited] experience

Types of bias include:

Conceptual	The way we organize our mental views, beliefs and perceptions about life and the universe, which influences what we notice, what we seek to learn, and how we interpret phenomena (meanings, categories of life experience, explanations, etc.)
Methodological	The way in which we select, gather, and analyze information, which structures the basic materials we use for developing our understandings (what questions we ask and do *not* ask, *how* and *where* and *when* and *with whom* we collect information and *not* collect information, etc.)
Situational	The way local settings and circumstances influence what information and events are and are *not* accessible to us in understanding life and issues, what experiences and information are included and excluded by specific situations (gender, with whom we are associated, where and when we do things, etc.)
Personal	The individual experiences and personality that form our personal interests, likes and dislikes, characteristics, etc. which influence what and how each of us seeks to learn and understand (childhood experiences that form our attractions and aversions, etc.)
Chance	The random circumstances and events that cannot be anticipated and controlled beforehand, but which provide and deny information for understanding life and the universe (meeting someone unexpectedly that leads to new insights, etc.)

These types of biases overlap and are somewhat arbitrary, but are a handy devise for asking ourselves what we know and do *not* know.

There is **no** such thing as "bias-free" understandings. Our personal and ethnic guidelines are highly internalized and subconscious. We do not even recognize that we do *not* understand most of what we see around us. Biases enter into *all* of our understandings, from our perspectives on what we are seeking to learn and what we do *not* seek to learn, the questions we ask and do *not* ask, the information with which we have to work, the interpretations we make, and the decisions we make throughout the learning process.

Sound scientific understandings are based **not** on the *absence* of biases but rather on the **control** of biases. Biases present a paradox - we do not know that we do not know. It is impossible to *not* to be biased. How can we then control for assumptions?

CONTROL of biases involves several steps in developing valid and balanced ethnographic understandings:

- **Recognizing** biases in our understandings. How can we recognize that we do *not* understand something? The most useful sign we can look for is **reactions** (cognitive and emotional). We react when our *assumptions* about something are not validated by what actually happens... our "reality" is not working. There are two sides to this:
  - *Our* reactions to others' behavior (confusion, shock, anger, excited, pleased, loaded adjectives like "lazy" and "weird", etc.). Our reactions tell us about *us*... our views, values, etc.
  - *Their* reactions to our behavior... which also indicate that our assumptions in behaving the way we do are not being validated.

  When we can recognize our biases, then we can understand that we do not understand... and can open our minds to new perspectives and understandings.
- Asking **good questions** in developing the research design and gathering of information.
  - (1) What are the *meanings* to them of their behavior?
  - (2) What are the *functions* of their behavior in helping them meet life challenges?
  - (3) How is their behavior *integrated* into a FUNCTIONING SYSTEM?
- In the analysis and reporting of findings, specifically acknowledge the **biases** in our work. (I recommend a specific section in reports that discuss biases in the research.) Keeping what we *do* know in the context of what we do *not* know provides a basis for more valid and balanced understandings, and gives more credibility to our work.

Recognizing and controlling for biases also opens us to new alternatives for experiencing life for *ourselves*. For example, recognizing the *functions* of Inuit relativism in relationships can help us in addressing the problems generated by our polarized views of life (right *vs*. wrong, us *vs.* them, etc.), and realizing the *functions* of Mexican child-rearing can help us deal with "family values" (by praising a kid for being a "good Dominguez" rather than being an individual).

Recognition and **control** of ethnocentric biases is the BASIC ETHNOGRAPHIC METHOD. When we see reactions we can then open our minds to new insights and understandings about their behavioral system.

3. EVERYTHING IS DATA

We should be open to *all* information.

Our personal, ethnic, and professional assumptions filters our perceptions (biases). We also recognize *differences* more easily than *similarities*... when in reality there are always many overlaps in behavior. When we see only some phenomena and not others, we miss the *integration* of behavior. For example, people may agree about a problem but not recognize that they see the cause differently, and this can cause problems in trying to resolve the problem.

Everything is data. What, when, where, how they do things... even their assumptions and reactions about us. Being aware of the whole range of behavior provides us with greater understandings about how all phenomena are integrated in their life experience.

On a practical level, it is impossible to be aware of everything, of course. But by asking ourselves about biases and recognizing what we do not know, we can continually challenge ourselves to be more valid and balanced in our understandings. To make sure we are covering the breadth and depth of exposure, we should try to be completely open in noting *everything* possible.

To provide some balance, we can try to be **systematic** in our exposure:
- Identify the **range** of behavior, activities, events, etc. that occur, including the variations of "normal" and "special" phenomena.
- Select a representative **sample** of different *kinds* of phenomena and their *variations*.
  Who   Subgroups (sex, age, regions, etc.)
  What   Activities (individual/group, routine/unique, low-key/intense, etc.)
  When   Time (season, day, time of day, frequency, etc.)
  Where   Settings (home, church, work, etc.)

When we **standardize** our observations, we can be more sure that the variations should be *theirs*, not ours.

Participate with different people in as many activities at different times and settings as possible. Many phenomena may not be open to us for a variety of reasons, and we should note that these are part of the biases of what we do *not* understand.

4. OBSERVE

In those situations where we can participate partially or fully, **observe** *every*thing:
- **Look** at everything and everyone, **listen** to what is said and context noises
- **Everything** is data
  Who? When? What? Where? How? Why?
  What we see, hear, smell, taste, feel/touch, etc.

Also look/listen across *time* and *settings*. Each bit of data is a piece of the puzzle of an integrated system of behavior.

5. INQUIRE

We cannot understand everything we see and hear, so we need to follow up with further inquiry. This requires *interaction* (and introducing possible biases which need to be noted).

There are different **techniques** to inquire:
- Be **open-ended**
  We want to understand *their* views and feelings
  Ask for *their* explanation of what's going on
    - *eg*: "I wonder what people think about how people did in the race."
  Do not lead
    - *eg*: "Do people like to win races?"
    - Leading imposes our predisposed views (such as there being a winner and a loser)
      - Do not ask for an answer to a specific interpretation
        - *eg*: "Did John lose the race?"
      - Do not give examples, etc.
      - Do not ask a Yes/No question
    - Leading calls for a biased response
      - We imposes *our* own mindsets
      - It also elicits misinformation (acquiescence, coverup of private matters, etc.)
- Express a NEED to understand
  Knowing **how** to ask can make a difference in responses
    - *eg*: "Why?" Inuit respond "Ačok"... their views of behavior are not very introspective
    - *eg*: Direct questions are "rude" and "nosey" to Inuit
  Ask for *help* in understanding
    - *eg*: "I've noticed that people often do ____, and would like to make sure I understand better what they think about that."
  (This is something I learned form the Inuit, that has worked with many groups in many settings)
- **Probing** (eliciting *their* views more)
  Echo - using their statement as a basis for deeper inquiry
    - *eg*: "You said people are afraid? I wonder why."
  Ask for further information
    - *eg*: "What else?", "Is there another one like that?", etc.
    - Asking "What?" calls for more information
      - Compared to asking "Is there anything else?"... which can elicit a simple "No"
  We can also direct the *direction* of the conversation
    - But still follows *their* conceptual categories and experience
    - eg: "You said people like doing ___. I'd like to understand this better."
  Encouragements - responding positively to them fosters more dialogue
    - *eg*: postures (nodding, leaning towards them with eyes open), noises ("Hmm!"), etc.
  Sympathize
    - *eg*: "I don't like it when people do this also."
- Ask for **examples** of an idea, reason, feeling, etc.
  It is often not easy for people to explain deeper thinking and emotions.
  Ask for them to give several examples often illustrates core perspectives and themes

Dealing with uncomfortable situations: Often views are difficult or uneasy to express verbally, private, and otherwise not explicit. We should always respect the right of people *not* to share with us (and note this as a bias in our understandings, though we can also note that a particularly topic is private). In some cases we can help make the views and feelings more comfortable to discuss:
- Take individuals out of focus
  eg: "What do *people* think about that?"
- Generalize
  eg: "Someone said that..."
- Build personal sharing (cite our own experience, etc.)
  eg: "My mother once told me that..."

6. RECORD DATA

A permanent and accurate record of data findings is necessary. Memory is both selective and unreliable, particularly in intensive qualitative research. If possible, it is desirable to record events as they happen, while observations are fresh and clear... as with informal interviews in a private setting. But in participant-observation this is usually not possible or practical, so a few techniques are helpful in making sure we systematically retain the breadth and depth of experiences:

Outline Notes We can usually record a brief summary of events in temporary notes to be used as a basis for making more detailed notes later. Whenever we get a chance, we can jot down an outline of key words which can jog our memories in recording in our field journal.

Memory Technique It is highly useful to develop our abilities to remember events between recording outline notes. One technique to remember main points until they can be entered into outline notes is:
- Focus on discrete points in sequential order of occurrence.
  For example, Joe talks about family: "Last night I was talking with my wife [Sue] about having another baby. She said Jane was jealous because she couldn't have babies, and she [Sue] was afraid Jane would put a curse on us if we have another baby. She [Sue] said about a month ago Jane complained about Mrs. Smith's new baby, and later she [Sue] had seen Jane on Mist Hill at night humming. You know witches do this, don't you? [Sue said] about two weeks later Mrs. Smith's baby got severe diarrhea, and Sue is sure it was Jane's fault."
- As Joe talks, we keep a mental note of key words in the process of the event:
  1 Baby
  2 Curse
  3 Smith
  4 Witch
  etc.
- With each mental note, we repeat the whole sequence of key words.
- At first opportunity, write down key words with as much detail as we can:
  Baby - Joe/Sue, Jane jealous
  Curse - Sue afraid, Jane
  Smith - Jane, Mist Hill, hum
  Witches - hum/hill/night?
  etc.
- Then we wipe the key word list from our short-term memory, and start over again.
This technique helps to make a temporary record which we can use to build more detailed notes later on, and therefore enhance more accurate and comprehensive record of information for later analysis.

Field Journal A permanent comprehensive record is needed for future analysis. At first opportunity write a detailed record from the field notes, while information is still fresh. It normally requires as much time to record a field journal as it does to observe and participate in events. A comprehensive field journal should include the following information for each entry:

(1) DESCRIPTION

Each entry should be logged in chronological order to include:

Setting: Note the date, time, location, people present, weather, personal feelings and mood, etc.
This provides a record of the *context* of the record.

Narrative: Write a detailed and comprehensive description of events (like a movie).
Break each discrete event into a separate paragraph and skip a line between events.
(This gives a visual cue when reviewing the journal later on.)
Be sure to keep the focus on the FACTS (and not your INTERPRETATIONS of those facts).
For example, *not* "Jane bewitched Mrs. Smith", but
"Joe said Sue said Jane was humming on hill at night"
"Joe said this is something witches do"
etc.

The field journal must be an accurate record, and if only interpretations are recorded then important facts that might lead to critical insights are lost. Facts can be compared across the field journal to build deeper understandings. For example, later on eight other people say witches act in caves, never in view of others, and Mrs. Smith says her baby got sick from something she ate after weaning. You also learn later on that Joe courted both Sue and Jane before he married Sue.

(2) QUESTIONS

After comprehensively entering the facts, now is the time to make tentative *interpretations*. We may have gained important insights that we don't want to lose... but we also may be shallow or wrong, so we don't want to commit to unverified interpretations. For example:

Qs: "Is Joe worried about his wife's allegations about Jane?"
"Is witchcraft based on envy?"
"What other motives are attributed to witchcraft?"

Putting interpretations as *questions* forces us to re-examine ideas and test how far can interpretations be supported by other facts. In drawing broader conclusions, we may document a *pattern* that witch accusations usually arise after open conflicts.

(3) NOTES

We also want to alert ourselves for further information, so we should make noes on points to follow up on. For example:

Notes: "Find out what others think identifies a witch."
"Check Mrs. Smith's views about Jane."

In this case, we may find that most other people also think Jane is a witch. Putting research tasks as NOTES forces us to gather more empirical evidence to validate and refine ideas.

7. VALIDATE

The more empirically grounded our information is, the more reliable and valid our conclusions can be.

Each interpretation and conclusion must be TESTED against the empirical data (in our field journals and in other sources). This testing is based on:
- **Consistency**
  For example, the record shows that almost all babies over a ten-month period get diarrhea when they are being weaned.
- **Proportional Support**
  For example, many different people over 10 months say babies get diarrhea when they are being weaned, whereas only Sue attributed this to Jane being a witch. Also, only 3% of the people in the community say Jane is a witch.
- **Covariant Factors**
  For example, accusations of being a witch usually focus on women who have had a prior relationship with the accuser's husband **and** on women who have not had a baby themselves. Other context factors may provide the greater explanation for the behavior.

For **analysis** and **conclusions** of data, see Barger **POPULATION-BASED RESEARCH**.

SUMMARY

Points of **distortion** in process of qualitative field research include:
- **Biases** influence the whole research process, from our research goals, activities, analysis, and conclusions. This includes what we look for and what we actually observe and do *not* observe. our memory, and our data. Grounded scientific research is based on *control* of biases, rather than their absence.
- The **assets** of the participant-observation method include:
  - *Depth* of understanding about the meanings of behavior, as facts and interpretations are based on long-term and intensive information.
  - *Quality* and *validity* of data, as ideals are compared with actual behavior.
- **Limitations** of the participant-observation method include:
  - *Representativeness* is sometimes hard to establish, as selection of people and events may not be systematic... though this is not an issue when almost everyone in a small community is included.
  - *Distributions* of behavior may need to be determined, as some subgroups and events may not be equally represented.

Other **qualitative field techniques** include:
- Ethnolinguistics (Appendix 3)
- Key informant
- Life histories
- Focus groups
- Other records - photographs, public documents, artifacts, etc.

The assets and limitations of particular research techniques must be evaluated to establish the advantages and biases involved.

Training in participant-observation include:
- Using standardized settings for comparing learning experiences.
- Joint observations and comparing findings.
- Outside critique of notes and observations.

In the long run, **experience** and **critical thinking** are the best teachers. (
http://www.iupui.edu/~anthkb/learning.htm)

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