



Participant observation

Lecture 7

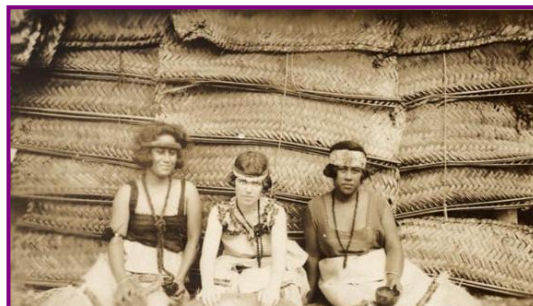


Participant observation



Margaret Mead
1920s Samoan young girls
Coming of age in Samoa, 1930

Bronislaw Malinowski
1916-18 Trobriand Islands
Argonauts of the Western Pacific, 1922



Different definitions of participant observation

"a conscious and systematic sharing, in so far as circumstances permit, in the life-activities and, on occasion, in the interests and affects of a group of persons."

Kluckhohn 1940

"The participant observer is a researcher who participates in social activities with the subjects of study over an extended period of time."

Whyte 1979

"The participant observer actually employs three methods, not one: participant observation (to describe incidents); informant interviewing (to learn institutionalised norms and statuses); and enumeration or sampling (to document frequency data).."

Zelditch 1962 (*anthropological perspective*)

Observations–Kjerstin Dahlblom–Epidemiology Umeå Univ

Observations

1. get acquainted with setting
 2. evaluate behaviour
 3. access to tacit knowledge
 4. capture a phenomena and its specific components
- Many types of observations exists
 - Useful for unknown events, hidden subcultures etc



Observations

- Need to mentally prepare beforehand
- Choice of site important
- Observer-effect, subjectivity?
- Covert – overt
- Ethical considerations

Dimensions of observations

(page 71 in Qualitative Methods for International Public Health
Adapted from Spradley)

- space the physical place or places
- actor the people involved
- activities the set of related acts people do
- object the physical things that are present
- time the sequencing that takes place over time
- goal the things people are trying to accomplish
- feeling the emotions felt and expressed

Range of variation in how observations may be conducted

Full participant observer, insider	Role of the observer	Onlooker, observation as outsider
Overt, everyone knows	Degree to which those observed know they are being observed	Covert, no one knows
Full explanation of real purpose to everyone	Degree to which those observed know why they are being observed	False explanations given to everyone
Single observation, limited duration	Duration of observations	Long-term, multiple observations
Narrow focus, single behaviour observed	Focus of the observations	Broad focus, holistic view sought
Open, descriptive accounts, qualitative data	Type of data produced	Quantitative data, based on pre-determined observation list