

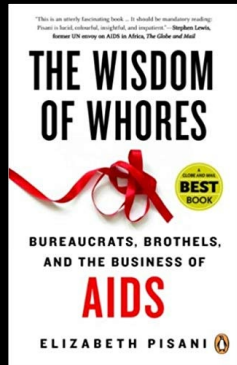
An Introduction to Focused Ethnography

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Learning Objectives

- Provide basic understanding of the differences between traditional and focused ethnography (FE)
- Outline steps of doing FE
 - Provide an introduction to the methodological components of FE
- Start to plan / get an idea of the methodological components involved in your FE
- Chat box

Traditional Ethnography

What is Ethnography?



STEVEN LEVITT
THE FREAKONOMICS OF CRACK DEALING



Traditional Ethnography

Wants to answer: “What is going on here?”

Wolcott, H. F. (1999). *Ethnography: A way of seeing*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.

Relies on developing a full description (and *interpretation*) of a group of people and provides details of their everyday life

Agar, M. (1986). *Speaking of Ethnography*, *Qualitative Research Methods*, Volume 2. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Want to learn about a group of people’s shared ideas, attitudes, knowledge, values, beliefs, social hierarchies, power relations

Understand how a group of people organize their behaviour by learning *from* people within the culture

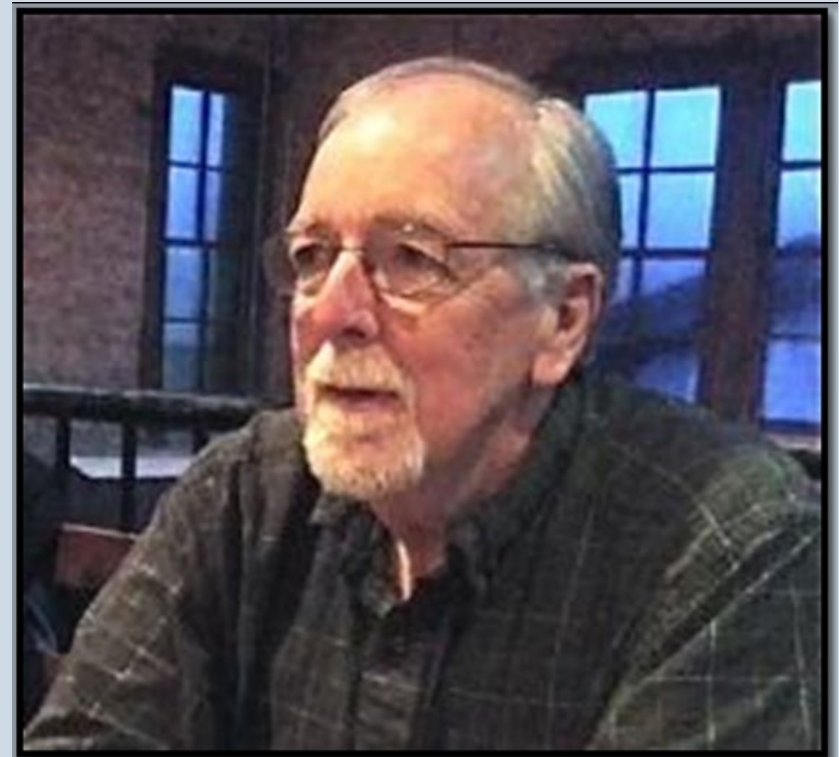
“I want to know what you know, in the way that you know it. ... Will you become my teacher and help me understand”



What Have We Learned from Doing Ethnography?

Generalizing one's "culture" onto everyone is a mistake

- For example: You are a Muslim, so you are like this and so is everyone else. Everyone who is Muslim is like X and Y. Everyone fits into this box of characteristics which does not allow for variation.



Focused Ethnography

Thank you to Maria

SHE WAS/IS MY TEACHER AND MENTOR.

THESE SLIDES ARE THE THINGS SHE TAUGHT ME.



Consider Your Research Question

DOES YOUR QUESTION FIT WITH FOCUSED ETHNOGRAPHY?

Focused Ethnography



Focus on cultures and sub-cultures framed within a discrete community or phenomenon and context, whereby participants have specific knowledge about an identified problem

Why *Focused* Ethnography?

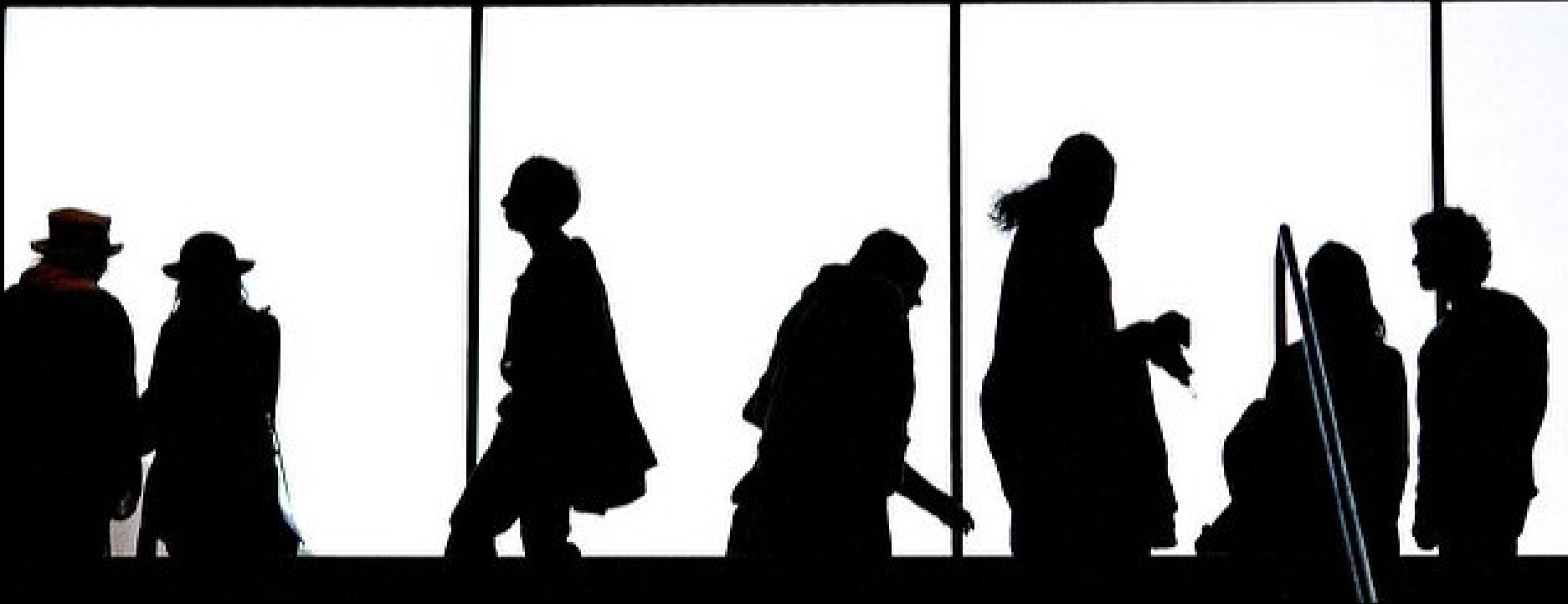
Focused on a distinct problem



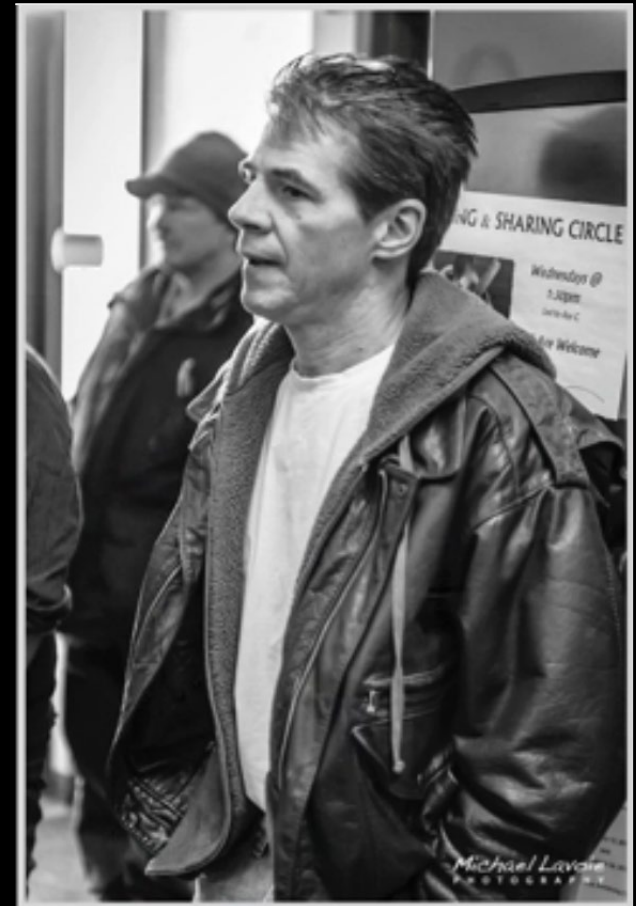
Conducted within a specific (often familiar) context



Among sub-cultures or group of people within society



Participants don't have to know each other but come together because of a shared experience



Short term, purposeful field visits



Complemented with intense data gathering



Findings are applied to address practical problems



Table 1. Comparison of focused ethnographies to traditional anthropologic ethnographies.

Focused ethnography	Anthropologic ethnographies
Specific aspect of field studied with purpose.	Entire social field studied.
Closed field of investigation as per research question.	Open field of investigation as determined through time.
Background knowledge usually informs research question.	Researcher gains insider knowledge from participatory engagement in field.
Informants serve as key participants with their knowledge and experience.	Participants are often those with whom the researcher has developed a close relationship.
Intermittent and purposeful field visits using particular timeframes or events, or may eliminate observation.	Immersion during long-term, experiential-intense fieldwork.
Data analysis intensity often with numerous recording devices including video cameras, tape recorders and photo-cameras.	Narrative intensity.
Data sessions with a gathering of researchers knowledgeable of the research goals may be extensively useful for providing heightened perspective to the data analysis particularly of recorded data.	Individual data analysis.



control

Reconsider Your Research Question

DOES YOUR QUESTION STILL FIT WITH FOCUSED ETHNOGRAPHY?



Regroup: Brief Chat

Doing Focused Ethnography

Again....Consider Your Research Question

Doing Focused Ethnography

Consider why you're doing your research (reflexivity / motives)

Create FE research questions

Find a setting

Get into the field

In the field: Relationships

Sampling

Data gathering strategies and analysis technique

Leaving the field

Reflexivity (Motives)

- Recognizing, being honest, and clear about your identity (e.g., ethnicity, class, gender, education, etc.) and how these parts affect your data, data gathering, data analyses, interpretations, and (re)presentation



Hamilton Bruiser Lefebvre, 2015

Reflexivity: Patti Lather

Lather (1993) suggests reflexivity is about framing which is:

“not a matter of looking harder or more closely, but of ‘seeing what frames our seeing’, to ‘determine the filters through which we are working’ (Lather, 1986b)’ and how this consistently changes.” (p. 675)



Role of Reflexivity

“Researchers should subject themselves to the equivalent degree of scrutiny as they direct towards their participants”

What Difference Does Difference Make? Position and Privilege in the Field

Jill A. McCorkel¹ and Kristen Myers

Feminist standpoint theorists contend that the researcher's positionality affects all aspects of the research process—from the articulation of a research question to the analysis and presentation of the data. They argue that this influence becomes problematic when researchers occupying privileged positions in society elect to study those who are marginalized on the basis of race, class, and gender. In this article, we examine and compare the backstages of two distinct, cross-racial, ethnographic projects in order to understand how and to what extent the researcher's positionality shapes the structure and substance of the research study. We discover that the influence of racial privilege (and other components of researcher identity) on the research process is subtle and complex. It is apparent in the assumptions and narratives the researcher uses to make sense of her experiences in the field as well as in the relationship between the researcher and her respondents. We consider the implications of this in terms of the integrity of the ethnographies we produced, as well as for feminist research more generally.

KEY WORDS: feminist standpoint theory; reflexivity; identity politics; ethnography; master narrative.

Knowing is always a relation between the knower and the known.

Dorothy Smith, 1990

INTRODUCTION

The politics of identity and difference pose considerable challenges for the practice of sociological research. While feminist standpoint theorists have generated tremendous insights regarding the dynamics of identity and knowledge

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<https://twitter.com/jillmccorkel>; <https://niu.edu/cswgs/about/faculty-staff/kristen-myers.shtml>

McCorkel, J.A. & Myers, K. (2003). What difference does difference make: Position and privilege in the field. *Qualitative Sociology*, 26(2): 199-231.

Your Focused Ethnography

Why did you choose to study what you are studying?

Why this community?

What are your assumptions / expectations about your participants / setting?

What do you want to learn?

Research Questions

Understand a particular experience among a specific group of people

Research Questions

Often take the “what” form:

- “What are the common beliefs, values, and practice patterns (among a specific group of people) in a specific context (or who have a specific condition)?”
- “What are the characteristics....?”
- “What is the relationship between...”
- “What is it like to...”

Can also include:

- “How/why did (particular group) engage with (particular group)?”
- “What facilitates, constraints, or sustains?”

Find a Setting

Convenient settings

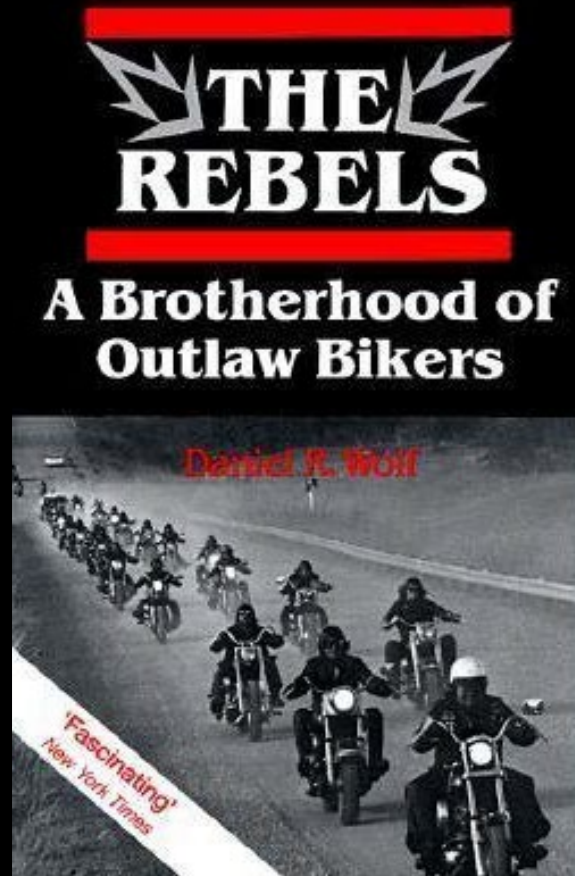
Pre-established relationships within a community

Be careful about being a helicopter researcher

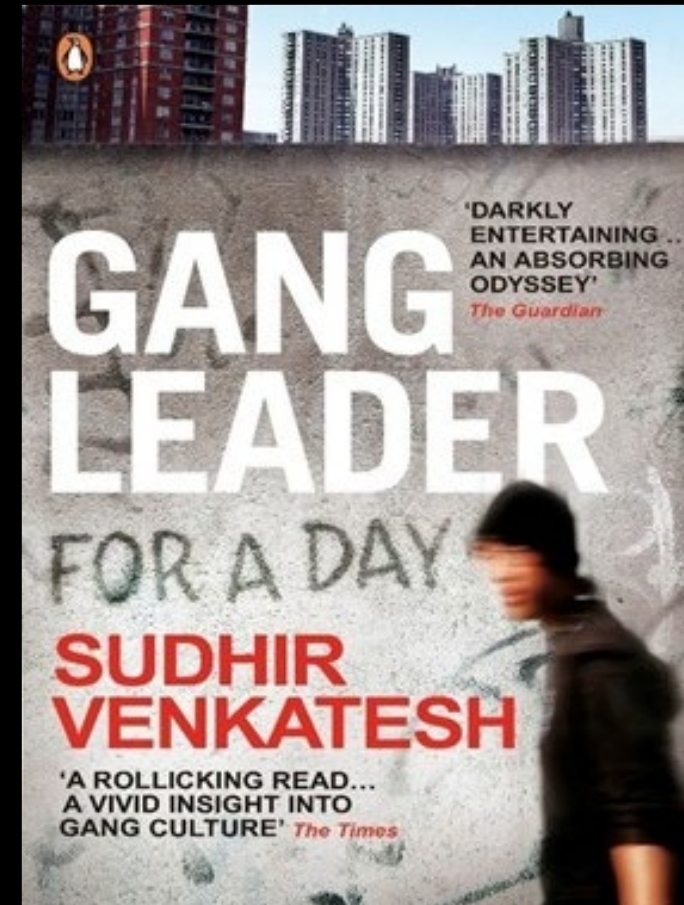
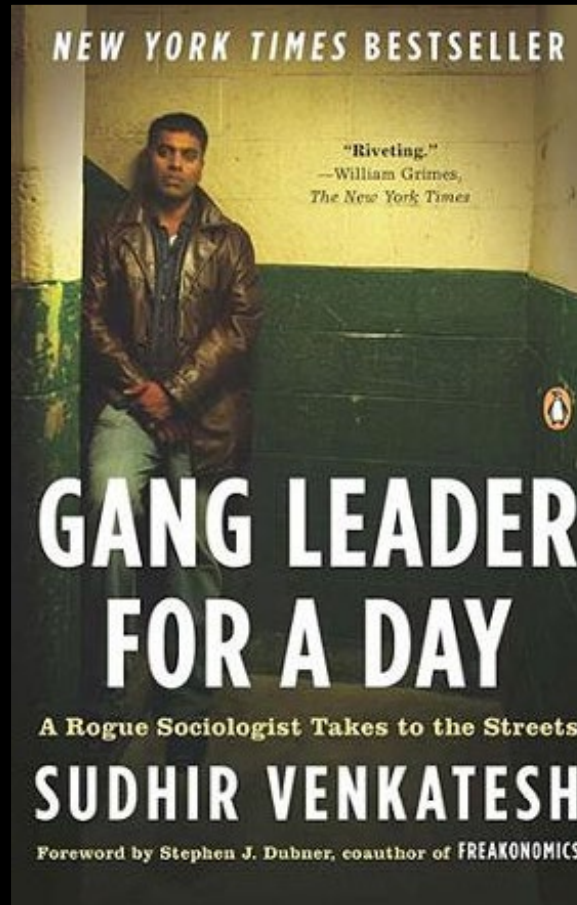
- [CANHelp Research Agreement](#)



Daniel Wolf: Three Years Just to “Get In” (Somewhat Covert)



Sudhir Venkatesh: One Night, as a Hostage (Overt)



Getting into the Field

Your access to your setting will be enhanced if you are credible and can justify your research



“If you have some connections to the people in the setting, and are you ultimately perceived by those in the setting as a decent human being”



You're in the Field: Now What?

Presenting yourself in the field: "Professional" and "personal" identity

TEN LIES OF ETHNOGRAPHY

Moral Dilemmas of Field Research

GARY ALAN FINE

The only safe way to avoid violating principles of professional ethics is to refrain from doing social research altogether.

—Urie Bronfenbrenner (1952, 453)

Covert vs. overt research

In the Field

Develop relationships / gaining “trust” / credibility

Form “meaningful” relationships

Finding ‘key informants’

In the Field with Maria Mayan and Michael Agar

Once an ethnographer, always an ethnographer

(M. J. Mayan. 2014, Personal communication)



Most organizations have a few current crises that everyone talks about. What are they? Where do they happen in living colour? Go and talk to both sides of the encounter a few times.

(M. J. Mayan. 2014, Personal communication)





Regroup: Brief Chat

Sampling: Purposeful Sampling

You choose your participants [and / or images / documents]
because of their particular characteristics

Purposeful Sampling

Ask:

- “Who can give me the most and best information about my topic?”
- “In which contexts will I be able to gather the most and best information about my topic?”

Mayan, M. J. (2009). *Essentials of Qualitative Inquiry*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, p. 62.

Participants must be ‘information rich’

- Want participants to talk about their experiences, be articulate, and have the time to talk

Your Focused Ethnography

What is your setting?

How will you “get it”?

Who are your participants?

Data Gathering: Intensive!

Interview: Formal or informal, recorded and transcribed

Field notes

Documents:

- Images, tweets, photographs, Facebook pages, magazines, books
- Policies, procedural documents, speeches, emails
- Epidemiological and census data, maps
- Songs, paintings

Reflexive journals

Can Use Participant Observation



Participant Observation and Interview

Expect contradictions between observational and interview data

- LJ vs Panther

How are events performed in the field vs how events are described? Why are they different?

Your Focused Ethnography

Data gathering strategies?

Data Analysis

Often use content analysis

Process of:

- **Identifying**
- **Coding**
- **Categorizing**

the primary patterns in the data,

Then abstract generalisations and explanations of patterns

Content Analysis

Iterative process: Done at the same time as data gathering



Rich Points

“Something happened I didn’t understand”

- Problems in understanding are called ‘rich points’
- “When a rich point occurs, an ethnographer learns that his or her assumptions about how the world works, usually implicit and out of awareness, are inadequate to understand something that had happened” (Agar, p. 31)



Rich Point/Coherence: Cowboys Herding Cats



Focused Ethnography Using Content Analysis

Article

Diabetes in Pregnancy Among First Nations Women

Qualitative Health Research
2014, Vol. 24(11) 1469–1480
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DOI: 10.1177/1049732314545089
qhr.sagepub.com



Richard T. Oster¹, Maria J. Mayan¹, and Ellen L. Toth¹

Abstract

We conducted a focused ethnography with 12 First Nations women who had had diabetes in pregnancy to understand their real-life experiences and find ways to improve care for those with diabetes in pregnancy. We carried out unstructured interviews that were recorded, transcribed, and subject to qualitative content analysis. The experience of diabetes in pregnancy is one wrought with difficulties but balanced to some degree by positive lifestyle changes. Having a strong support system (family, health care, cultural/community, and internal support) and the necessary resources (primarily awareness/education) allows women to take some control of their health. Efforts to improve pregnancy care for First Nations women should take a more patient-centered care approach and strive to enhance the support systems of these women, increase their sense of autonomy, and raise awareness of diabetes in pregnancy and its accompanying challenges.

Data Analysis

All of the data were subject to qualitative content analysis using Atlas.ti qualitative computer software (Atlas.ti Scientific Software Development, 2010) for data management and organization. Data analysis took place concurrently with data collection. To code, interview transcripts were read and reread, to highlight and identify persistent concepts. Highlighted sections were excised and grouped in categories in separate files. The individual files were reread and subcategories were created. After homogeneity was ensured for each, the categories and subcategories were described in depth. Data collection and analysis ceased on data saturation, when no new information or

insight emerged, and when the categories were well refined and defined. Finally, the categories were considered together, determining if/how they were related and to identify common threads/themes in all of the data. As a last step of analysis, we invited the participants to a group meeting to hear the results and share their views.



Dr. Richard Oster, University of Alberta

Leaving the Field

How long is too long in the field?

- Physically disconnect
- Emotionally disconnect

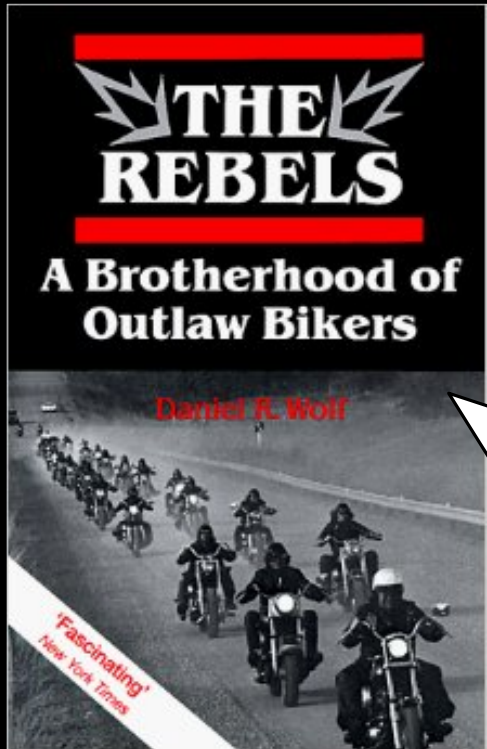
Do we ever leave the field?

- What if you work in your own community?
 - “...You cross the line between the field and home often and rapidly”
Agar, M. (1996). *Professional stranger: An informal introduction to ethnography*, second edition. Academic Press, P. 102
 - R and rape story; RM and grocery store

Commitment to the community

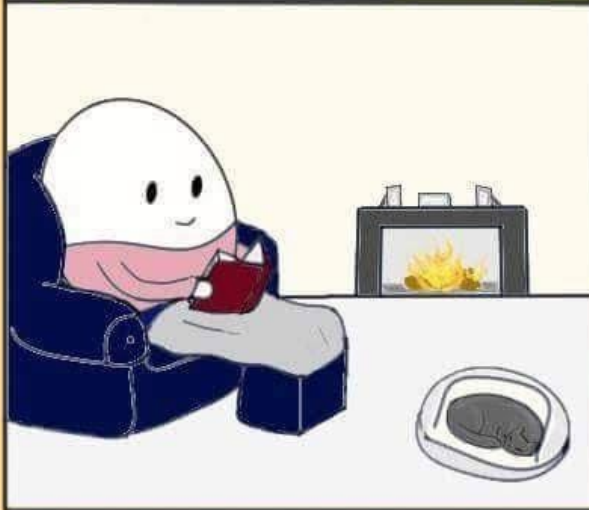
Your Focused Ethnography

What responsibility / commitment do you have to your participants and the communities you do research with?



A field-worker will be a different person when he or she emerges from the field. P. 216

Humpty Dumpty had a great fall



Special thank you to Mark Johnston for this hilarious graphic!

Thank you! Please contact me anytime

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