

Fieldwork in anthropology is influenced by the researcher's - positionality, methodological choices, and social context. Discuss how biases can arise at different stages of fieldwork. Explain how anthropologists can uphold objectivity and epistemic responsibility in producing reliable knowledge.

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Fieldwork in Anthropological Research

Fieldwork is a core qualitative research method used by ethnographers that involves long-term, immersive engagement within a community. The main technique used by ethnographers in this method is participant observation. The main aim of fieldwork is to acquire insider's (emic) perspective about community's culture. This method has increased susceptibility to subjectivity due to close involvement of researcher within a community. However,

objectivity can be ensured by using positivist empiricism - a scientific approach that prioritizes objective, observable and measurable facts.

1. Examples of Fieldwork in Anthropological Research

a- Bronislaw Malinowski's work on Kula Ring

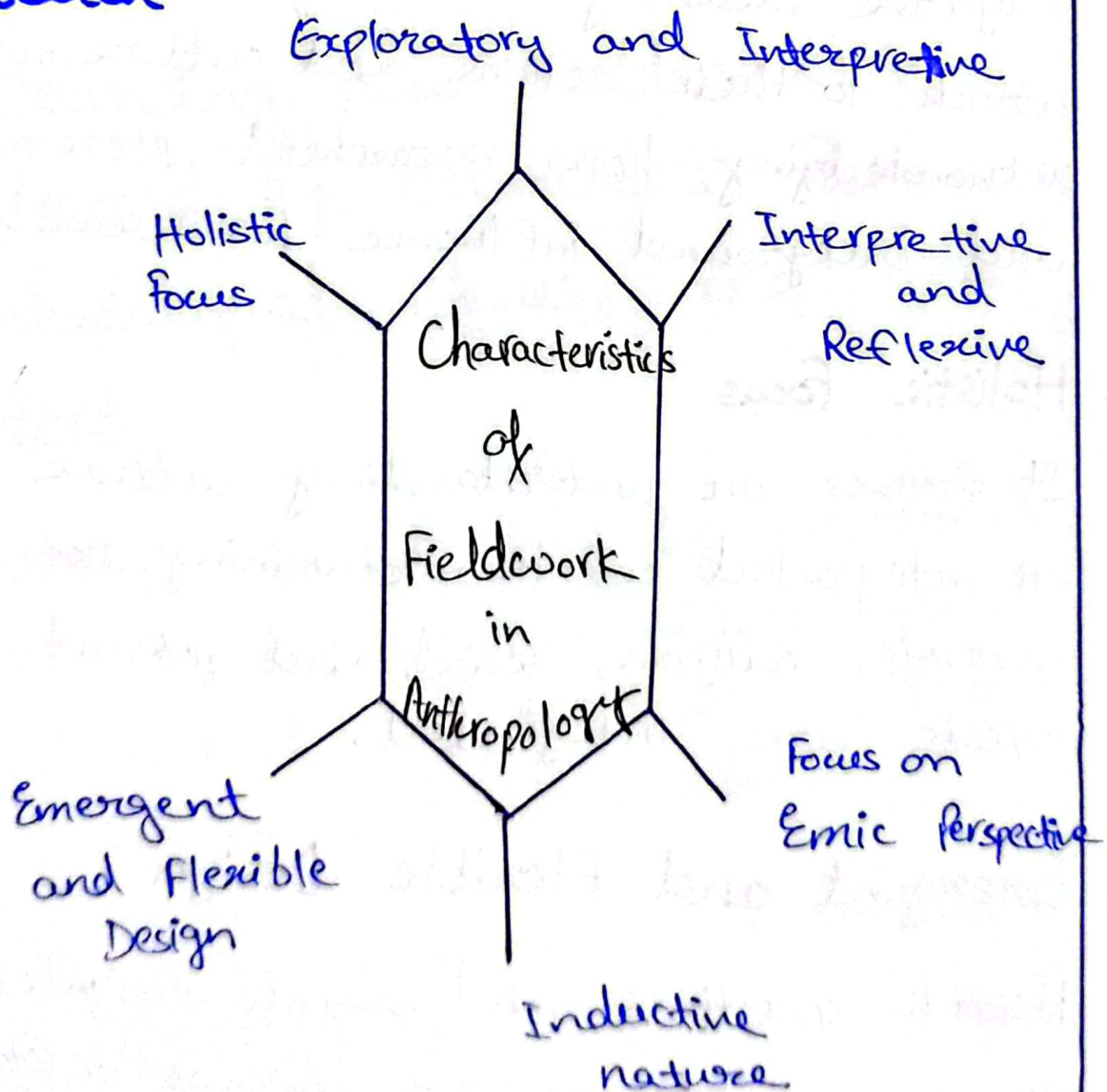
Malinowski conducted fieldwork among Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea and studied that kula ring is not merely an economic ritual, in fact, it is reflection of beliefs, values, and social structure of Trobriand society that is meant to serve biological and psychological needs of Trobriand Islanders (Argonauts of the Western Pacific for kula, 1922).

b- Margaret Mead's work in Samoa

Margaret Mead ^{conducted field-} work in Samoa and observed that adolescence is not a universally stressful period, in fact,

it is shaped by cultural factors. Emotional distress of adolescence in American culture is not biological inevitability but a product of enculturation, particularly societal constraints concerned with sexuality (Coming Age in Samoa, 1939).

2. Characteristics of Fieldwork in Anthropological Research



i- Exploratory and Interpretive

Thick Description is magnificent example in this regard. Clifford Geertz ~~observed~~ ^{interpreted} how Balinese cockfight is a reflection of beliefs and social values.

ii- Interpretive and Reflexive

fieldwork focuses on understanding subjective meanings and symbols people attach to their actions and culture, while acknowledging how researcher's presence and background influence his research.

iii- Holistic Focus

It focuses on understanding culture as an integrated whole, examining how economic, religious, social, and political aspects are integrated.

iv- Emergent and Flexible Design

Research questions and research design evolve as new insights emerge during fieldwork.

Focus on Emic Perspective

Fieldwork focuses on gaining insider's emic perspective about community's culture.

vi. Inductive Nature

It focuses on developing theories and concepts using data obtained through fieldwork rather than testing pre-defined hypothesis.

3. Expounding how Fieldwork is influenced by Researcher's Positionality, Methodological Choices, and Social Context

Fieldwork is influenced by researcher's positionality, methodological choices, and social context due to close involvement of researcher within community.

(i) Participant Observation: Core Technique used in Fieldwork

R In this technique, researcher actively

participates in activities of group under observation. Due to this, fieldwork is influenced by researcher's positionality, methodological choices, and social context.

(ii) Weaknesses of Fieldwork in Anthropological Research

a- Increased Susceptibility to Subjectivity

In fieldwork, research is likely to be influenced by researcher's personal interpretations, background and due to his close involvement with community the fieldwork has increased susceptibility to subjectivity.

b- limited Generalizability

Fieldwork has limited generalizability as data is typically gathered from a small sample specific to a community.

c- Ethical Constraints

Close involvement of ethnographer with community ^{may} leads to ethical dilemmas

related to informed consent, confidentiality, (and), power relations, and potential harm to participants.

5. Positivist Empiricism: A Form of Empiricism that Upholds Objectivity

Positivism is a form of empiricism and a scientific approach which argues that knowledge about human societies comes from objective, observable, and measurable facts. It seeks to identify general laws or universal patterns of human behavior.

Examples of Positivist Empiricism

i. Cross-Cultural Approach

It focuses on comparative study of data obtained from large samples of societies such as Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) to test hypothesis and identify universal

patterns or correlations across diverse societies.

ii- Demographic Approach

It involves statistical study of past and present human populations that involves numerical data on fertility, mortality, and migration to understand how social, biological, and cultural factors shape population change and social structure over time.

6. Strengths of Positivist Empiricism

i- Objectivity

This approach aims to minimize researchers' biases by using structured tools and statistical analysis so that findings remain independent of personal interpretations.

ii- Replicability and Reliability

The standardized methods and clear procedures allow study to be repeated

in different settings to verify findings, enhancing reliability and validity.

iii- Highly Structured

Research design, data collection, and analysis are not flexible and adaptive.

Data is collected using structured tools like close-ended questionnaires.

iv- Large Sample Size and Generalizability

Data is typically gathered from large samples so that results are representative of broader population.

v- Comparative and Longitudinal Focus

This approach uses numerical data to statistically compare different cultures or track social, biological and cultural changes within a community over long period of time.

Concluding Thoughts

Fieldwork in anthropology involves long-term, immersive engagement within a community. Fieldwork is inductive in nature, exploratory, interpretive, reflexive; it has increased susceptibility to subjectivity, limited generalizability, and ethical constraints. ^{Due to} This in fieldwork is influenced by biases. However, positivist empiricism can uphold objectivity.