

Participant Observation

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Abstract

Investigating the meanings of human existence as they are constructed and enacted by people in everyday life situations and settings presents serious challenges for all forms of human studies. Participant observation, whereby the researcher interacts with people in everyday life while collecting information, is a unique method for investigating the enormously rich, complex, conflictual, problematic, and diverse experiences, thoughts, feelings, and activities of human beings and the meanings of their existence. Use of this distinctive method emerged with the professionalization of anthropology and sociology where it gradually was formalized and later spread to a full range of human studies fields. Its practice nevertheless remains artful, requiring creative decision making about problems and questions to be studied, appropriate settings and situations for gathering information, the performance of membership roles, establishing and sustaining trusting relationships, ethics, values, and politics, as well as record making, data analysis and interpretation, and reporting results. This essay provides a brief sketch of the method of participant observation and an overview of a few of the more central issues of its practice, including its location historically within the framework of different views of social scientific methodology.

INTRODUCTION

Participant observation is a unique method for investigating human existence whereby the researcher more or less actively *participates* with people in commonplace situations and everyday life settings while observing and otherwise collecting information. By participating in human life, the researcher acquires direct access to not only the physically observable environment but also its primary reality as humanly meaningful experiences, thoughts, feelings, and activities. Through participation, in other words, it is possible to observe and gather many forms of data that often are inaccessible from the standpoint of a nonparticipating external observer. Participant observation consequently is one of the premier methods for conducting investigations

of the realities of human existence in their totality as they exhibit external, physical characteristics and internal, subjective, and personal features as well as intersubjectively and socially meaningful properties. The form of the researcher's participation and the character of the human settings studied further specify what is distinctive and unique about this method of scholarly investigation.

Participation may range along a continuum from *passive* to *active*; although it often is difficult to discriminate unambiguously between these poles. Passive participation suggests that the researcher is present at some human scene but not otherwise engaged directly with people or their activities. Active participation implies that the researcher is joined with people—their thoughts, feelings, and activities—and, thereby, connected to their lives. The participant observer typically performs some socially available role or roles, even if only nominally, in the study setting. The investigator may be a mostly passive participant in some situations and/or a more or less active participant in others. It is the more *active* aspect of *participation* in the lives of the people studied that differentiates this research method from other forms of observational inquiry.

The settings of participant observational investigations are ones characterized by whatever it is that people ordinarily think, feel, and do in the course of their lives. These situations consequently are not concocted or shaped by the researcher. In other words, they are the *natural settings* of human existence, complete with the reality of daily life as it appears to members of these situations and settings. Furthermore, these situations usually are not controlled by the researcher—or, at least, they are not manipulated beyond whatever forms of human management ordinarily transpire. Participant observation consequently differs noticeably from methods of inquiry, such as experiments or surveys, whereby the researcher artificially creates and controls the study conditions more extensively. It thereby is a more “natural” and much less intrusive, reactive, or unnatural form of inquiry than many other forms of research.

Participant observation is closely related to “qualitative” and “ethnographic” methods of research as well as those involving “field research” or “field work.” These forms of research increasingly have become legitimate and tremendously popular in a broad range of fields. Besides the disciplines of anthropology and sociology where formal methods of participant observation originated, these methods of investigation—commonly involving some participant observation—are being employed widely today in all of the social sciences, communication, education, management and business, criminology and criminal justice, and many other fields, such as social work and human services, medicine, nursing, health, and other areas of scholarly study involving people.

FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH

Travelers and merchants collected information while participating with people from the obscurest beginnings of human record keeping. Explorers, missionaries, and civil servants—especially with worldwide colonialization by Europeans and Americans—also recorded their observations on this basis. Social reformers and political activists later adopted a method of recording facts while participating among disadvantaged or powerless populations. These instances of participating while observing influenced the subsequent development of participant observation as a disciplined, scholarly method of investigation.

The methodology of participant observation emerged gradually in both anthropology and sociology with their professionalization—notwithstanding the imperialistic claims of one or the other to this method exclusively. Both disciplines were founded on grand theoretical scenarios stressing social evolutionary naturalism. The founding figures of anthropology and sociology often depended on the observations of others—particularly missionaries, civil servants, and world travelers—but they rarely collected data themselves. One of the earliest deployments of participant observation for professional purposes probably was Frank Hamilton Cushing's 1880s ethnography of the Zuni Indians of the American southwest.

Franz Boas' early twentieth century opposition to the dominant social evolutionary paradigm revolutionized early American anthropology by emphasizing the descriptive, ethnographic study of local cultures. He also aimed to rescue anthropology from the many amateurs working in this area and provide it with a sound scientific basis. This image of "science" was grounded in the idiographic (specific or particular) approach of the cultural sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*), however, rather than the nomothetic (generalizing or law-like) approach of the physical or natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*). These differing methodological approaches also are referred to commonly a "humanistic" and "positivistic," respectively. Anthropologists employed participant observation primarily for describing non-Western cultures and particular aspects of them, such as language, family, and kinship or religion. Boas students such as Alfred Kroeber, Clark Wissler, John Swanton, Fay Cole, Robert Lowie, Edward Sapir, Paul Radin, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead (also including novelist Zora Neale Hurston) dominated the field into at least the 1940s. Their work established ethnography conducted by participant observation as the research standard in North American social and cultural anthropology.

Bronislaw Malinowski and students—such as E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Hortense Powdermaker, Raymond Firth, and Edmund Leach—exerted a similar ethnographic influence over British and European anthropology.

Malinowski used participant observation during extended trips into the field, recording his thoughts and feelings in a diary, and he later wrote extensively about these field experiences. He especially exhibited a self-conscious concern for the relationships between participant observational methods of research and the resulting data. This particularizing approach and its concern for the natives' (or insiders') perspective sometimes is characterized as an "emic" one as opposed to the generalizing, "etic" concern of theorizing from an external (or outsiders') viewpoint.

During the early twentieth century in American sociology, W. I. Thomas likewise challenged grand theorizing by engaging in an informal participant observation and gathering documents and records of human life. Stressing the empirical quality of his observations and other research materials along with theory construction, Thomas explicitly advocated a more positivistic methodology (a nomothetic one modeled after the natural sciences). Robert Park, who replaced Thomas as the leading figure of the early Chicago School of sociology during the 1920s, expanded upon this methodological program. In collaboration with Ernest Burgess, Park turned the city of Chicago into a sociological laboratory. They trained several generations of sociologists, many of them producing famous studies of the city and its varied ways of human life using an eclectic array of empirical approaches. Qualitative methods, including an informal participant observation, were employed to describe distinctive ways of life, much of this in response to urbanization. They studied American subcultures, gangs and delinquency, vice, deviance, and crime, ethnic groups, communities, and much more.

From the 1920s onward, American sociologists debated the respective merits of qualitative and quantitative methods, oftentimes expressed as case studies versus statistics and/or subjectivism versus objectivism. The dominant sociological methodology favored quantitative approaches, especially the newly developed techniques of survey interview or questionnaire research. Many nevertheless stood firm on the necessity of descriptive, qualitative data and methods such as participant observation. Both sides more or less accepted a positivistic view of methodology. A notable minority, however, advocated a more thoroughly humanistic approach, one holding that the logic and techniques of research must be uniquely adapted to the human character, especially meanings, of social life. This viewpoint especially is evident in Charles H. Cooley's notion of "sympathetic introspection," Florian Znaniecki's "humanistic coefficient," Robert MacIver's "sympathetic reconstruction," and the celebrated Neo-Kantian concept of "verstehen" (a humanly empathetic form of understanding) drawn especially from Max Weber, the classical German sociologist. Participant observation is especially valuable for intuitively and empathically apprehending human realities,

beyond what is accessible by sensation or reason, and it therefore was often seen as central to humanistic methodologies.

Several generations of Chicago sociologists, such as Herbert Blumer, Everett Hughes, Louis Wirth, E. Franklin Frazer, and Robert Redfield, supported, used, or advocated qualitative methods (forming a more humanistically oriented Second Chicago School). Hughes and his collaborators—including Howard S. Becker, Blanche Greer, and Anselm Strauss, among others such as Erving Goffman, Julius Roth, Gerald Suttles, Elliot Liebow, and William F. Whyte—published studies exemplifying and defending participant observation. From the early 1930s onward, sociological and anthropological approaches to qualitative methods were intermingled in the United States. The publication of textbooks on participant observation and related qualitative, ethnographic field methods mostly came later.

In the positivistic climate of American social science from the 1940s to the 1960s, participant observation sometimes was deemed to be nonscientific. More commonly, however, it was viewed as useful during the preliminary stages of scientific inquiry for exploration and description. Qualitative descriptions generated by participant observation are helpful from this vantage point in formulating concepts for measurement and hypotheses which, with further testing and verification, may be employed to construct explanatory theories. Yet, participant observation was not seen as especially useful for the ultimate scientific goal of explanatory (nomothetic) theorizing.

There were, however, efforts to establish inductive theorizing, based on participant observation and other qualitative methodologies, as legitimate in their own right, independently of positivist conceptions of theory and theorizing. More inductive, “grounded theory” approaches, such as those pioneered by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, increasingly tended to ignore positivistic imagery. Many proponents of participant observation and other qualitative methods eventually would reject the positivistic goals of explanatory (nomothetic/emic) theorizing entirely in favor of interpretative (idiographic/etic) theorizing as envisioned from a humanistic standpoint.

Following World War II, sociologists and anthropologists increasingly found variations of Marxist thinking, phenomenology, existentialism, linguistics, and analytic philosophy of special interest. Many of them contained sharp critiques of positivism, resulting in theoretical and methodological innovations. This included social constructionism (Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann), the symbolic interactionist emphasis on social meanings (Herbert Blumer), viewing social life as a drama (Erving Goffman’s dramaturgy), and a focus on how members of society accomplish social life (Harold Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology). The synthesis of these perspectives along with features of phenomenology and existentialism by Jack Douglas, John Johnson, David

Altheide, and Peter and Patti Adler, among others, was especially important for emphasizing a methodology of participant observation.

Anthropology, during this period, provided a different intellectual context, a much less positivistic one in which ethnography still was under the powerful influence of Boas and Malinowski. Even so, the work of Clifford Geertz and David Schneider and Europeans such as Mary Douglas, Victor Turner, and even Claude Levi-Strauss show many of these same influences. Some of these innovations also were manifest in the United States with cognitive anthropology, ethnoscience, and the "new ethnography." Since the 1970s, there has been a good deal of cross-fertilization among like-minded sociologists and anthropologists, especially with respect to theories of symbolic meanings, humanistic methodologies, as well as ethnography, participant observation, and related qualitative approaches.

CUTTING-EDGE RESEARCH

By the 1980s, there was a growing social scientific consensus that human realities are socially constructed by way of interactional processes with meaning as a central feature. This perspective dissented significantly from naturalism, realism, and other objectivist viewpoints. Human meanings are "subjective" in the sense that they are internalized by individuals, but they more accurately are "intersubjective" (and thereby collective or social) in that meanings are expressed in language. As meanings are shared with other members of the linguistic community, they consequently are available to others (they are not private or "subjective" in the more ordinary sense), thereby resolving the standard objections to the so-called subjectivist approaches.

Moving even further from earlier theorizing, meanings were envisioned as always problematic and conflictual. Human reality therefore is composed of diverse and pluralistic meanings constituting a multiplicity of realities. Some researchers focused on the more cognitive aspects of meanings, leading to innovations in sociolinguistics, and studies of different forms of knowledge, such as religious or scientific. Others emphasized that cognitions always are colored by emotions, resulting in an emphasis on not entirely "rational" (even irrational) qualities of human meanings and existence. Feminist thinking, moreover, called attention to the monumental significance of gender differences for human constructions of meaning as well as related social roles and interactions.

Altogether, then, human realities came to be seen as emotional in addition to being cognitive, gendered, conflictual and problematic, complex and multiple, intersubjectively meaningful, as well as produced and internalized by human beings through social interaction. These realities, contrary to reflection and correspondence theories of truth (rationalism/empiricism),

always are relative to intersubjective human construction. They do not exist independently of human construction; they have no objectivity independently of human existence; and they never can be apprehended exhaustively or absolutely.

Human studies consequently require special methods and procedures, such as participant observation, suited to the description of these human meanings and realities. The aim of such humanistic methodologies is to describe human meanings and experiences, even though such descriptions always will be incomplete and partial. Likewise, no explanation of human meanings and experiences is possible (in the positivist sense), and all interpretation inevitably will be partial and incomplete. It, nevertheless, is possible to provide interpretations of human meanings and experiences from the standpoint of particular scholarly issues and problems. This viewpoint also reflects the influences of American pragmatism—including such influential figures as William James, Charles Peirce, John Dewey, G. H. Mead, and C. Wright Mills—running through much of this work. Hence, within such a delimited theoretical context, it is possible to make judgments—based on reasons and evidence—about different, even rival, interpretations.

This methodological viewpoint also emphasized the necessity of self-conscious reflection about the relationship between the practices of the researcher and the products of research. In other words, research *reflexivity* became a central methodological obligation for all humanistic studies, especially participant observation. Much attention has focused on the researchers' social location and how research practices influence what is discerned and described by way of participant observation as well as how these human realities are analyzed, interpreted, and reported. This emergent framework for understanding human studies was reinforced greatly by Thomas Kuhn's extraordinarily influential work in the history and philosophy of science. It confirmed for methodological humanists that the workings of the physical and biological sciences were much less positivistic than previously described and subject to many of the same interpretative difficulties as the human sciences.

The earliest uses of participant observation were highly artful. A form of research that is informal and dependent on the intuition and interpersonal abilities of the researcher and therefore not something that is mechanically reproducible based on a formula by just anyone. Students commonly were told to review exemplary studies and then proceed into the field to do likewise. Gradually, during the 1960s and 1970s, a few textbooks endeavored to describe strategies, techniques, and pitfalls more formally. Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, studies based on a method of participant observation

proliferated, and spread to other human studies fields, and this trend has continued to the present. Today, participant observation is employed extensively in most all human studies fields, including medicine, nursing, and health.

Previously heated battles over quantification and positivistic methodologies versus qualitative and humanistic methodologies have waned substantially as methods such as participant observation have gained widespread popularity and respectability. The legitimacy of participant observation is no longer seriously questioned. Textbooks, guides, resource works, and journal articles outlining and describing specific methods, strategies, and techniques of participant observation also have proliferated. This research method consequently has been subject to considerable formalization, even if it still retains powerful vestiges of its former artfulness.

There is considerable consensus that participant observation is most appropriate when certain minimal study conditions are present.

- A central interest of the research is some concern for human meanings, feelings, and interactions viewed from the perspective of the native members of those situations and settings.
- The phenomenon to be investigated is observable in some natural, everyday life situation or setting.
- The researcher is able to acquire reasonable access to people and their activities in an appropriate setting.
- The phenomenon of study is sufficiently limited in scope, size, and location to be examined by way of a case study design.
- The questions or problems to be addressed are appropriate for case study.
- Suitable information can be collected by direct observation, participant observation, interviews, documents and related materials, and other means and sources available in some field setting.

Participant observation frequently is used in an open-ended manner to explore and examine research questions that emerge with investigation rather than preconceived hypotheses; although nothing prohibits its use for hypothesis testing. Working inductively by way of a “logic of discovery” offers advantages in research validity, being dependent on accessing the insiders’ realities. Yet, it also places special demands on the researcher. The definition of study questions, issues, and problems, as well as the formulation of concepts and development of appropriate indicators often must be refined during the course of the investigation while participating and observing in the field.

Participant observation, moreover, requires the researcher to find and select a setting or settings appropriate for study, and identify features or

aspects of situations in the larger setting for investigation. What is observed often is selective, requiring some strategy for sampling. Those strategies usually are based on opportunistic techniques, such as snowball samples, or those involving judgments or rationales other than probability sampling. The study problem and setting often suggest and delimit sensible sampling strategies.

Gaining access to a research setting and situations presents the participant observer with a host of complex decisions. It often times requires some negotiation or reason for being present, and the participant observer must decide how to account for being present, when and where to disclose research interests, and how much information to supply. It is possible to participate and observe in many human settings overtly or covertly; that is with or without disclosing the research intentions. Much debate surrounds the ethics of *covert* participant observation and it sometimes is deemed to be unacceptable under all circumstances. Yet, many human situations, such as those involving illegal activities, are difficult or impossible to investigate when research interests are explicitly revealed in those settings. Covert research sometimes involves lying and deliberately deceiving people about the research interests. It is possible, however, to participate and observe in many situations, particularly highly public ones, without deceiving people even if the researcher does not reveal an interest in conducting research. A great deal of overt human research is done without informing everyone involved that research is underway or disclosing the precise character of the investigation. The complexity of many research problems, moreover, makes it unlikely that subjects fully comprehend the study or their involvement in it, even when they are informed more fully.

Many research settings provide the participant observer with a wide range of possible roles from being a mostly passive outsider to becoming an actively involved insider. It is common for the participant observer to perform multiple roles along this continuum during the course of a prolonged investigation. The researcher may define the participant role as that of mostly an outsider, an investigator, nominally present to observe what people are doing in some setting or situation. Alternatively, the participant role may be defined by insiders based on those ordinarily available in the setting or a particular situation.

Early participant observers were warned not to cross the rather arbitrary line between passive participation as a nominal member and active membership, something known as “going native” or “becoming the phenomenon.” Actually, participant observers—notably Frank Cushing, Zora Neale Hurston, and others such as Howard S. Becker—had been crossing this line to considerable advantage in acquiring insight into the natives’ world of meaning all along. By the mid-1970s, participant observers, such

as Bennetta Jules-Rosette, were challenging this traditional taboo and demonstrating that the strategic, reflexive performance of membership roles often times provides unique and invaluable access to insider realities. Such participant observational studies demonstrated moreover that the performance of insider roles could be enacted without any loss of objectivity, impartiality or other aspects of disciplined, scholarly rigor. Participant observers, such as people in daily life, are able to switch back and forth between various social roles, fully participating at times while engaging in reflection, analysis, and interpretation at other times, rather deftly. Some researchers also increasingly began employing team strategies of participant observation in order to gather data from the standpoint of multiple roles and perspectives in various settings.

Collecting truthful information requires considerable skill in cultivating rapport, making friends, and sustaining trusting relationships with people in the field. Simply put, people who do not know you or trust you are not likely to be cooperative in providing much data, especially truthful information about the deepest meanings and inner workings of their daily lives. In most settings, it is possible to collect different forms of data by way of a wide variety of means. Observations, for instance, may range from largely unfocused efforts to overview the action to more focused attempts to gather detailed information about specific feelings, meanings, and activities. Participant observers usually ask a lot of questions, many of them causal and informal, in the course of an investigation. Some studies also profitably make use of more formal interviewing techniques and even structured questionnaires. In-depth interviews and life histories also may be collected. Many settings and situations provide access to a vast array of other human communications, documents, and relevant artifacts. Notes and journals recording personal experiences usually provide still another valuable source of data.

Making notes, keeping records, and creating files of information gathering in the field are extremely important and all of these activities present the participant observer with challenges. It is tempting but mistaken to put off record keeping, hoping to recall significant details and events at some later time. Record keeping strategies range from the dependence on handwriting and computer (typewriting) processing to photography and audio or audio-video recording. Analysis and interpretation of participant observational materials is like that of other forms of qualitative data. It commonly involves coding and filing, sorting, sifting, constructing, and reconstructing the data while looking for types, features, characteristics, classes, and patterns. Interpretation of the data necessarily depends on what scholarly issue and problem have been identified for investigation.

Participant observation may be used in a limited manner to acquire snapshots of social life or describe particular slices or aspects of human existence.

It more often is used to provide fairly comprehensive descriptions of cultures, particular forms of human life, subcultures, and ways of human existence. Participant observation, even when used in a limited way to acquire a slice of life, tends to be a relatively time-consuming method of investigation. It is possible to collect information by way of participant observation over brief periods of time; however, most studies require a year and sometimes two or more for satisfactory completion; moreover, some participant observers devote entire careers to the investigation of the rich and tremendous complexity of human existence.

KEY ISSUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In spite of the greater formalization of participant observation over the past 30 some years, its practice remains artful, rather than mechanical or formulaistic, and open to individual creativity. Particular studies regularly have explored and innovated with most of the basic steps, strategies, techniques, and procedures of participant observational investigation. Reporting, participant roles, values, ethics, and closely related matters all have drawn considerable attention.

Many of these discussions have been in response to challenges and debates over “postmodernism.”

The meanings of postmodernism are ambiguous and elusive. Nevertheless, this notion as it applies to participant observational methods generally concerns claims to knowledge and truth. Postmodern ethnography—as advocated, for example, by Stephen Tyler, George Marcus, Michael Fisher, Paul Rabinow, James Clifford, Norman Denzin, Laurel Richardson, and others—refuses to accord special privilege (or authority) to any knowledge claim (religious, scientific, political, or whatever) beyond the subjective experience of the individual in its more radical manifestations. All claims to knowledge in other words are supposed to derive from subjective interests, values, and experiences, with no knowledge claim having any privilege or authority of any other claim. All claims to knowledge therefore are equal to all others and every resulting expression of reality is equally “real.”

Distinguishing and separating facts and values is a persistent problem for participant observation and human studies. Some think that as it ultimately is impossible for the researcher to avoid the influence of values, making explicit value commitment is required, usually to liberal or radical political values. Others hold that it is possible to be reflexive about the influence of values on the participant observer, while maintaining some reasonable separation of facts and values and without making particular value commitments. It seems likely that participant observers will continue to exercise sensitivity and reflexivity about the influence of values and politics on their research.

At the same time, it also seems unlikely that they will abandon traditional commitments to the ideals of value neutrality and efforts to provide more or less impartial descriptions and interpretations of social life.

The ethics of participant observation are governed by various professional associations and especially the dictates of federally mandated Institutional Review Boards (IRBs). These IRBs generally have imposed models of biomedical ethics on most human studies fields. Objections commonly have been voiced about the inappropriateness of such models for participant observation and related forms of human studies. Following cursory review, participant observational studies often are subjected to modest subsequent review or exempted from further review. Alternative models, such as feminist, relational, and contextual ethics, have been suggested as more appropriate for participant observation and other human studies field. IRBs sometimes are aware of the inappropriateness of biomedical ethics for much of human studies, but there have been few serious efforts to make significant changes. Until that happens, the basic strategy seems to be to comply minimally with IRB requirements, secure the necessary approvals, and proceed on the basis of more humanistic ethics.

Participant observers have continued to exhibit tremendous creativity in the performance of membership roles, including cultivating and exploiting personal experiences to research advantage. Taking advantage of roles and experiences as a societal member for research purposes has resulted in innovations including "autoethnography." This strategy takes the researcher's self, identity, roles, activities, and personal experiences, as the central focus of investigation or as an important part of the inquiry. It remains unclear as to whether or not autoethnography is a distinctive method of research, as some claim, or a special form and extension of the cultivation of the insider membership roles that some participant observers explicitly embraced some 40 years ago. Positivistic preoccupations with objectivism precluded many early participant observers from explicitly cultivating personal experience as source of data. Yet, many earlier participant observers—from Frank Cushing and Bronislaw Malinowski to John Johnson, Bennetta Jules-Rosette, and Paul Rabinow, among others—depended on personal experiences and made critical use of them in describing and interpreting human realities.

Greater appreciation for the complexities of human realities—cognitive, emotional, gendered, conflictual, problematic, and multiple characteristics—presents serious challenges for reporting the findings of participant observation. No description of human realities, even in restricted settings and situations, will be literally exhaustive, and multiple interpretations from the standpoint of various theories always are possible. Some scholars consequently abandoned efforts to construct ordinary reports of what people in everyday life think, feel, or do. Instead, they have experimented

with different forms and styles of presentation, sometimes writing fiction as the most appropriate means for presenting the results of participant observation, as insightfully discussed recently by Dominika Ferens. Many of Zora Neale Hurston's now famous works of fictions benefitted from her participant observation as a student of Boas in the 1920s, although these pioneering efforts in ethnography remain unacknowledged and unexplored for the most part. There now are many significant discussions of reflexivity, such as Shulamit Reinharz's recent study of the kibbutz in Israel. In spite of the challenges, participant observation is a highly respected scholarly method of inquiry in most human studies fields today.

The artful character of participant observation makes it difficult to predict future developments. Recent examples of participant observation are exceptionally diverse, and they exhibit continued innovation. Such studies, to mention just a few, include Brown's discussion of Black female legislators, Burgess's work on shamanism in Scotland, Clark's studies of children, Flores' research on the recovery of Hispanic gang members, Howe's ethnography of Kuna culture in South America, Luhrmann's participant observation with American evangelicals, Sanders' and Hardy's research on the erotic entertainment industry in Britain, Thiel's examination of the American construction industry, and Alexander's theorizing about politics based on the Obama presidential campaigns.

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Danny L. Jorgensen is Professor (and former Chair) of Religious Studies at the University of South Florida, Tampa, where he has been employed since 1978 (initially in sociology until 1991). His academic background and degrees are in sociology: BS, Northern Arizona University, 1972; MA, Western Kentucky University, 1974; and PhD, The Ohio State University, 1979. Jorgensen's teaching and research is in the areas of participant observation, ethnography, and qualitative research; the sociology of religion; and new religions in America, including Mormonism, Neopaganism and Witchcraft, Scientology, and Old Order Anabaptists (Amish, Mennonites, Hutterites, and Brethren). He is the author of several books, edited books, and an extensive array of book chapters and journal articles—many of them based on participant observation and other qualitative, ethnographic methods—in these areas. He and spouse, June, reside part of the year in Tampa and part of the year near Lebanon, in southern Missouri, on a hundred-acre horse farm.

Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danny_Jorgensen

USF Religious Studies: http://religious-studies.usf.edu/faculty/data/djorgensen_cv.pdf

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