

**June 7, 2000**

**Observation of Behavior**

- Participant observation
- Direct and indirect observation

**Purposes of Today's Class**

- Distinguish strategies for observing behavior
- Define participant observation and identify its strengths and weaknesses
- Discuss and demonstrate skills of participant observation
- Introduce methods of direct and indirect observation

**What Is Participant Observation?**

- Major strategic method in social science
  
- Participation
  - Immersion in everyday life
  - Degrees of participation
  
- Observation
  - Explicit awareness
  - Systematic record-keeping
  
- Thought and behavior in natural settings

**Fieldwork and Participant Observation**

- Participant observation is fieldwork, but fieldwork may not be participant observation
  
- Fieldwork roles
  - Complete participant
  - Participant observer
  - Complete observer
  
- How long does it take?

### **Why Participant Observation?**

- Collect different kinds of data
- Reduce threat of reactivity
- Formulate sensible questions
- Develop intuitive understanding of meaning and process
- Study topics not amenable to other methods

➤ Validity

### **Doing Participant Observation**

- Learning the language
- Building explicit awareness
- Building memory
- Maintaining naïveté
- Building writing skills
- Hanging out
- Building objectivity

## Recording Data: Fieldnotes

- Observations are not data – *write it down!*
  - Don't trust your memory
  - It's good to be obsessive
  
- Data and analysis
  - Iterative process
  - Identify new questions
  
- Fieldnotes as dataset of participant observation

## How to Write Fieldnotes

- Four types of notes
  - Jottings
  
  - Fieldnotes
  
  - Log
  
  - Diary
  
- Balancing participation and observation
  
  
- Using computers

## **Ethics of Participant Observation**

- Limits to participation
  
- Tolerance of deception
  - Inevitably manipulative
  
  - Balancing participation and observation
  
- Protection of informants
  - Anonymity
  - Confidentiality

## **Direct Observation**

- Role of complete observer
  
- Threat of reactivity
  - Deference
  - Social desirability
  
- Types of direct observation
  - Continuous monitoring
  
  - Time allocation studies
  
  - Experience sampling
  
  - Covert observation

## Indirect Observation

- Behavior trace studies
  - Examples
    - Sense of time
    - Bathroom graffiti
    - Garbage project
- Avoid threat of reactivity
- Large body of data
- Ethical concerns?