

Nonparticipation

Let's begin at the bottom of the scale with the observer who has no involvement with the people or activities studied. It is entirely possible to collect data by observation alone. Sometimes this kind of research may be undertaken by an extremely shy individual who would like to conduct ethnographic fieldwork but wants to avoid involvement. Sometimes a particular social situation does not allow for any participation, but still holds possibilities for research.

Consider the ethnographic study of television programs. Bean (1976) set out to study the cultural themes in contemporary soap operas. She viewed various programs and read *The Soap Opera Newsletter*. She was able to identify a number of cultural themes and concluded that "soap operas contain a coherent expression of the principles on which the American family is based" (1976:97). Watching television offers many other opportunities for the nonparticipant to make observations. For example, a slightly less "staged" type of program that offers ethnographic possibilities is the football game. By watching numerous televised games, an ethnographer could discover not only the explicit rules for the game but also the tacit rules for wearing uniforms, staging half-time performances, communicating non-verbally, demonstrating affection for other team members, and even how to behave as a sports newscaster. Children's cartoons, commercial advertisements, newscasts, and the entire range of programs offer other opportunities for ethnographic study without involvement.