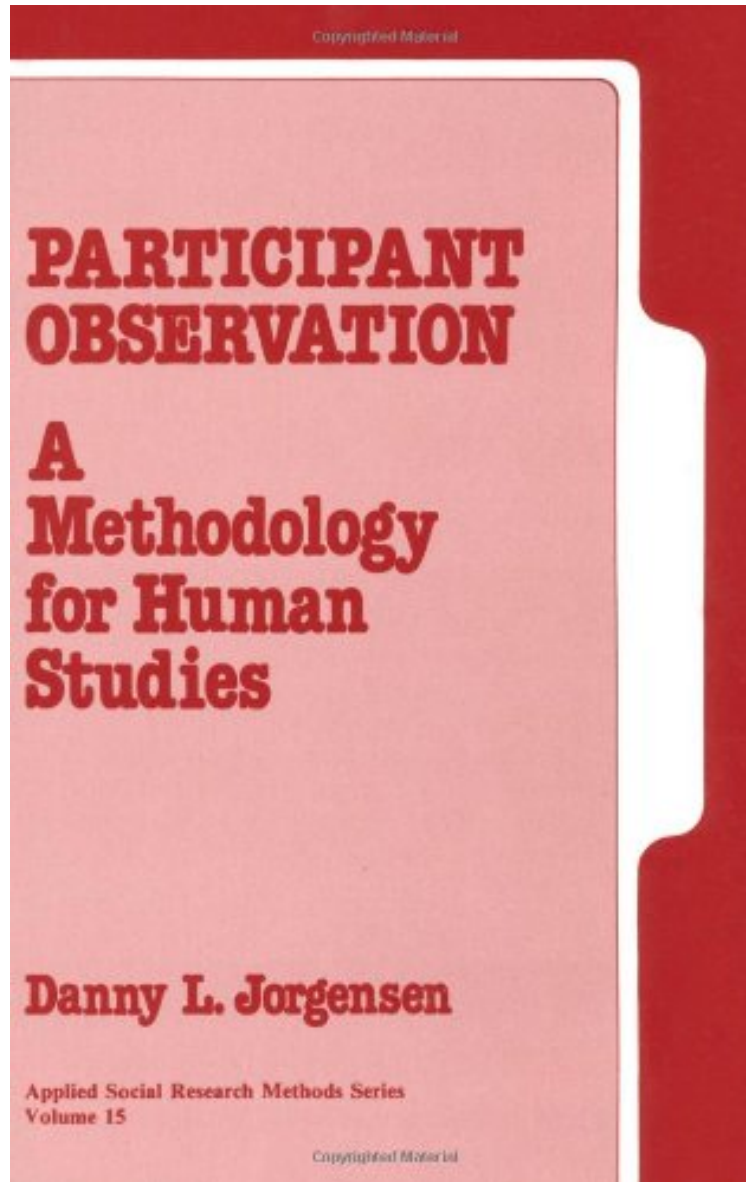


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Participant Observation: A Methodology for Human Studies (Applied Social Research Methods)

Danny Jorgensen

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Danny Jorgensen : Participant Observation: A Methodology for Human Studies (Applied Social Research Methods) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Participant Observation: A Methodology for Human Studies (Applied Social Research Methods):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Not ReadBy CustomerThis book was purchased for a class then was never used. I do not remember what I did with it but I know I never read it.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Very Helpful BookBy BrianLike most Sage books this book has a great table of contents which i appreciate. This is a very practical book that could serve as a field manual for participant observation. I like it better than Spradley, primarily because of its focus, clarity and organization.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. How to do Ethnography and Participant ObservationBy Robert A. WilliamsInspired by the writings on participant observation by Jack D. Douglas, Danny Jorgensen wrote this timeless handbook on how to do participant observation back in 1989 and it remains the best basic guide on doing ethnography, overt participant observation, or covert participant observation. 'Participant observation' is a term that means different things to different people, much as 'capitalism' means different things to different people. For some, it is simply a method of data collection which is then tested to construct explanatory theories. For Jorgensen and others, it is a humanistic methodology - "an abiding preoccupation - if not a way of life" (p8) akin to ethnography. Jorgensen explains that "Direct involvement in the here and now of people's daily lives provides both a point of reference for the logic and process of participant observational inquiry and a strategy for gaining access to phenomena that commonly are obscured from the standpoint of a nonparticipant" (p9).After chapters one and two discuss the philosophy of participant observation, chapter 3 discusses the politically sensitive topic of gaining access to do research. Many researchers, especially when researching government organizations such as the military or prisons, do so with the preapproval of authorities. Otherwise, there is a good chance that their requests for gaining access in the future to do research will be denied. According to Roy David King in his 'Doing Research in Prisons' in "Doing Research on Crime and Justice" (2000: Oxford UP) edited by King and Wincup [available at .co.uk], "In most cases . . . it would be necessary to submit a formal application for access fully outlining the aims and objectives, the methodology, and the kinds of research facilities required" (p291). Most researchers learn quickly how to become friends of the State and not to publish anything too critical. King explains "When the Home Office is paying the piper it not unreasonably expects to call the tune" (p292). Some researchers believe that doing research as a statist patsy is how NOT to do research (See John McVicar's 'Violence in Prison' in "Aggression and Violence"(1982), edited by Marsh and Campbell, but the reality is that most research is not only state-funded but too often CIA-funded (the problem of CIA produced texts came to the fore during Congressman Frank Church's investigation of U.S. intelligence operations inside America).Jorgensen says "'covert' (without the knowledge of insiders)" participant observation works best at gaining access and for getting informants to share their true opinions and feelings concerning their roles as participants in the phenomena under study (p21). He says "Human beings likewise behave differently when they know they are being studied" (p15). The simple logic of participant observational inquiry is that gatekeepers are in place to keep outsiders from knowing what is really going on, so the participant observer should try to gain access without gatekeepers knowing. That way the true social interactions of human beings in the situation being studied can be observed, rather than a staged performance of " 'frontstage' as opposed to 'backstage' regions of human settings (pp43-44). In my own post-graduate cross-cultural research of the privatization of prison schooling, I found Jorgensen's advice on gaining access to be sound - I was a participant observer behind bars in England and Ohio without ever asking authorities for permission. In England, it meant that I never signed the Official Secrets Act and therefore was not legally barred from sharing my findings with the public.Chapter 4 gives advice on how to participate in the setting without affecting the phenomena being studied. Chapter 5 explains how to sustain and develop field relations with participants and informants. Chapter 6 tells how to observe and gather information. Chapter 7 discusses the making of notes, records, and files as well as their maintenance. Chapter 8 explains how to analyze the findings. Chapter 9 talks about leaving the field and then writing up the findings. Here Jorgensen relies heavily on Becker's "Writing for Social Scientists (1986).The References are excellent. Great ethnographies are listed such as P.A. Adler's "Wheeling and Dealing" (1985), D.H. Hayano's "Poker Faces" (1982), Jack Spradley's "You Owe Yourself a Drunk" (1970) and the granddaddy of ethnographies - William Foote White's "Street Corner Society" (1955). I would only add British sociologist John Sugden's ethnography "Boxing and Society", which won first prize by the American Sociology Association and is available here at .Jorgensen doesn't mention Clifford Geertz or his maxim "make the familiar strange". When entering the field, immerse yourself until the setting you left begins to feel 'strange' and you begin to question 'why' things are done the way they are in the setting you left behind. You should begin to perceive the social construction of human interaction in your own milieu after that. Test your preconceived theoretical lens or lenses, but try on another pair for further insight. Question your premises. As Jorgensen says - it's a way of life.

While providing an introduction to basic principles and strategies, this volume also explores the philosophy and methodology underlying the actual practice of participant observation. Taking a thoroughly practical approach to the methods of participant observation, Jorgensen illustrates these methods with both classic and current research studies. By using the materials in this book, readers can begin conducting participant observation research on their own.

