Advantages vs. disadvantages to participant-observation:

**Advantages:**

Enhances quality of data

--you can establish good relationships with people, which leads to ...

more honesty

more info

more willingness to share taboo, secret, or private information

--You can observe firsthand the differences between what people say they do and what they actually do (ideal vs. real culture)

--Learn about subtle things that people do not talk about: explicit versus tacit

--you can tell when people are lying or hiding things

--You learn how to formulate sensible questions

--You can see how life changes throughout the seasons

--you have the opportunity to witness unique, unpredictable events, and peoples’ reactions to these events are immediate rather than dimmed or otherwise altered by time

--conversational exploration of ideas (see Raybeck:96)gives true emic view; you can go deeper and ask more questions

--Learning a language lets you learn key aspects of that culture which are structured into the language (each language conveys a certain world view); learning the language shows respect for the people, and learning a language means you have immediate contact with people and don’t have to rely on an interpreter

--Anthropologists tend to work alone, which gives them much greater control over their research agendas and fieldsites.

--a great deal of flexibility

--You get to interact with all sorts of people, from different social classes, genders, generations, etc.

Enhances quality of THE interpretation of data

--You can get a better sense of how your research topic fits into their lives as a whole (holistic)

--constant cross-checking or triangulation

Encourages the formulation of new research questions and hypotheses grounded in on-the-scene observation

--You can learn things that you may have never thought to ask about

--is more collaborative: in the production of knowledge, gives some control to the people you study

May be only viable mode of research (as with deviant sub-culturesdrug dealers, bank robbers, gangsters, gangs, poachers) [I do work on smugglers]

**Disadvantages:** --The sample size is going to be small because it is time-consuming

**-**-The anthropologist’s rapport with people might lead to bias in his/her findings (over-romanticizing)

Because p-o is so time-consuming, rarely does another anthropologist study the same questions with the same people, so there is seldom any verification of the reliability/reproducibility of the findings.

control of research less in hands of researcher

--It is difficult to record information while you are participating in certain events

--Your presence might affect peoples behavior

-- You might lose time from your research if people try to take advantage of you or if you feel some moral responsibility to get involved in peoples’ lives

anecdotal not “scientific” or factual enough

synchronicunless you probe this through interviews and questions, you might get a static view of how things are at the point when you are there.

forced to confront the paradox of cultural relativism

personally taxing [see readings]

\* culture shock and cross-cultural misunderstandings

\* Infantilizing

\* Lack of privacy

\* Physical discomforts, dangers

\* Different cultural norms about gift-giving

--Data overload: you collect accounts from too many people and lose focus of a coherent research question

--Is too micro-lvel, and often fails to take a macro perspective on social events (observations are too immediate, needs more distance)

--Your outside status might mean that you are not accepted, or that you don’t feel comfortable posing certain questions

--You might become so enculturated thatn you con no longer be the objective observer and adequately document things (everything seems commonplace that you lose your anthropological/critical approach to observing social life)

--You might not know how to pose good or proper questions

--You might change the culture that you are studying by introducing new material items, drugs, or other things.

--You can’t truly overcome a huge cultural barrier that separates the anthropologist from the people he/she studies, so full knowledge can never be gained

--Your ability to collect good data is a crap-shoot (very hard to predict or control)