

Design Ethnography

Irene Rae
Computer Sciences

CS-570 Introduction to Human-computer Interaction



WISCONSIN
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

“What people **say**
what people **do**
and what people **say they do**
are entirely different things.”

— Margaret Mead

Ethnographies

Reveal a **deep understanding of people** and how they **make sense of their world**.

Research method based on **observing people in their natural environment**.

“If you want to understand what motivates a guy to pick up skateboarding, you could bring him into a sterile laboratory and interrogate him...or you could spend a week in a skatepark observing him interacting with his friends, practicing new skills, and having fun. Ethnography is observing people’s behavior in their own environments so you can get a holistic understanding of their world—one that you can intuit on a deeply personal level.”

—LiAnne Yu, Cultural Anthropologist

TED Video

A Systematic Process

Useful ideas can emerge during casual observation, but the most powerful insights come from a rigorous analysis of systematically collected data.

Data

Photos, video, audio, other contextual info.

Focus on the meaning of the **setting**

What do
ethnographies
allow us to do?

Discover Meaning

Ethnography provides **rich insights** into how people make sense of their world.

By examining the artifacts that reflect people's lives we:

Learn **what they value**

Design products and services that evoke meaningful experiences

Understand Norms

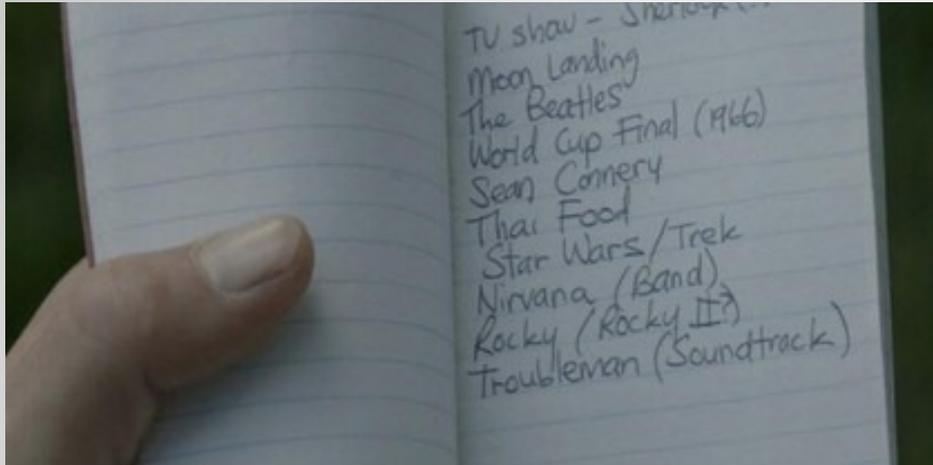
Cultural norms influence design decisions.

By examining how people express themselves through style and ornamentation, we gain insight into **how people define themselves** within a group or a community.

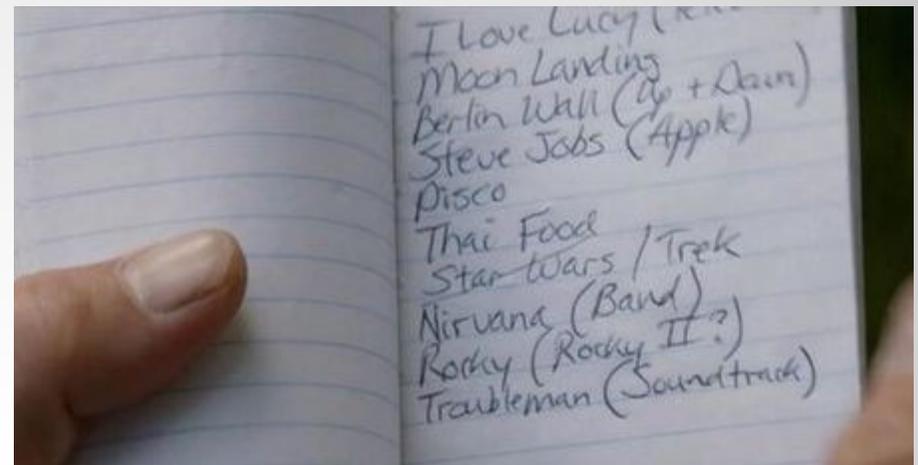
Example

Roles and use of color can vary

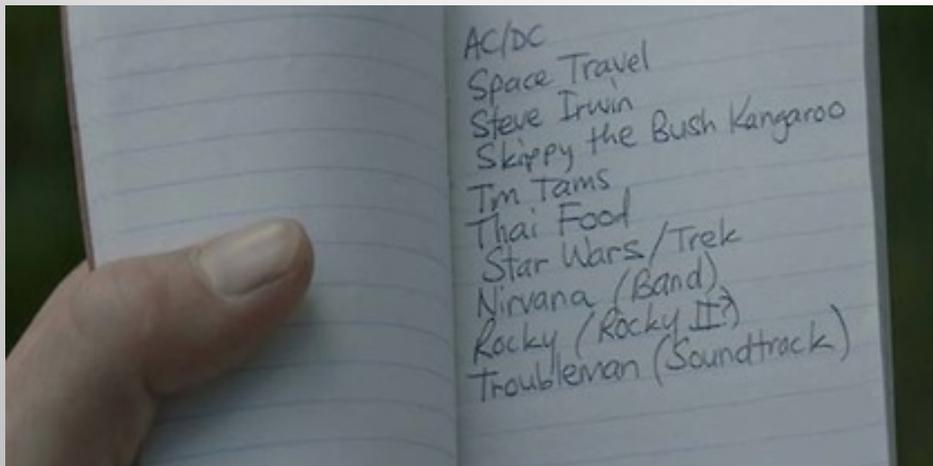
Example of Varying Norms



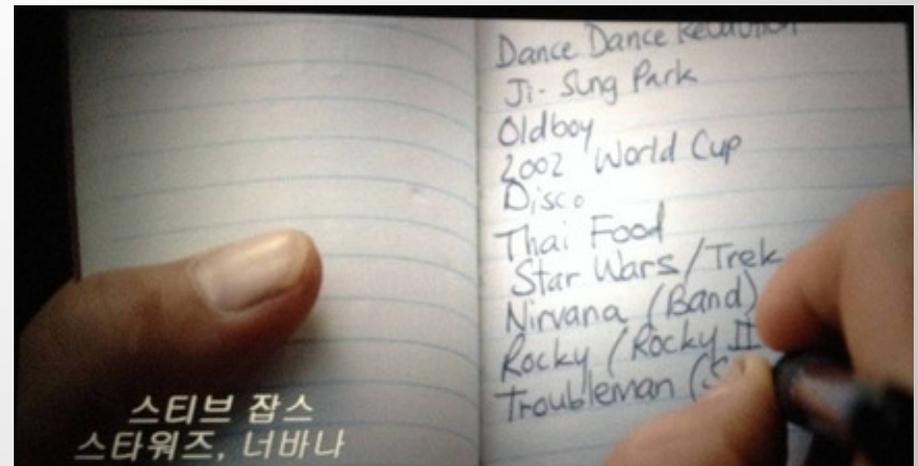
United Kingdom



United States



Australia



Korea

Communication

Helps us understand **how to communicate more effectively** with target audiences in a language and way they really understand.

By observing how people process info, we learn what evokes desired reactions.

Identify Barriers

Behaviors provide clues to where problem exist.

Ethnography vividly identifies people's **pain points** and guides the way towards solutions.

Example:

Morning commute solution: cup holder

Ethnographic solution, beyond the obvious:

Cup holder on the left rather than center

Really real!

Intel Video Part I

Reality is Key

Ethnographies highlight differences between what people perceive they do and what they actually do.

Using ethnographies, we can create environments or messages that connect with people's real emotions and intentions.

Natural Settings

A **setting** is a specific social, cultural, organizational, or physical space or activity of study.

Setting in ethnography \approx context in CI

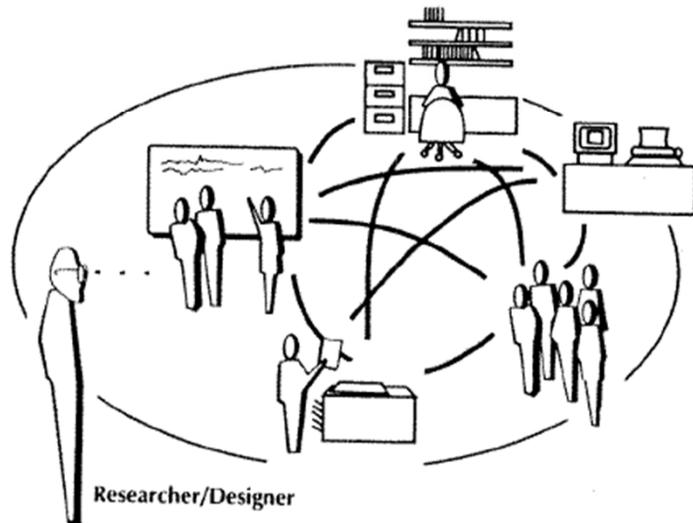
Focus on **naturally occurring, everyday talk and action**

Holism

HOLISTIC

Particular behaviors understood in relation to how they are embedded in the social and historical fabric of everyday life.

Focus on relationship between the parts



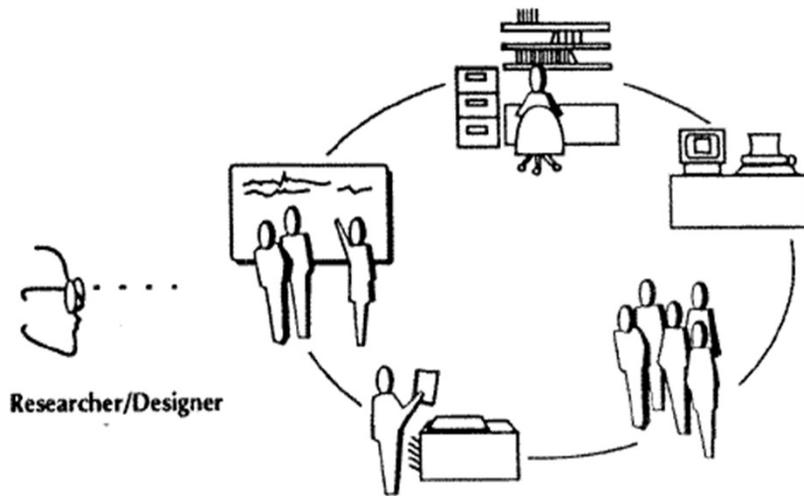
holism: whole entities have an existence other than the mere sum of their parts

Behavior can only be understood in its larger social context

Descriptive

DESCRIPTIVE

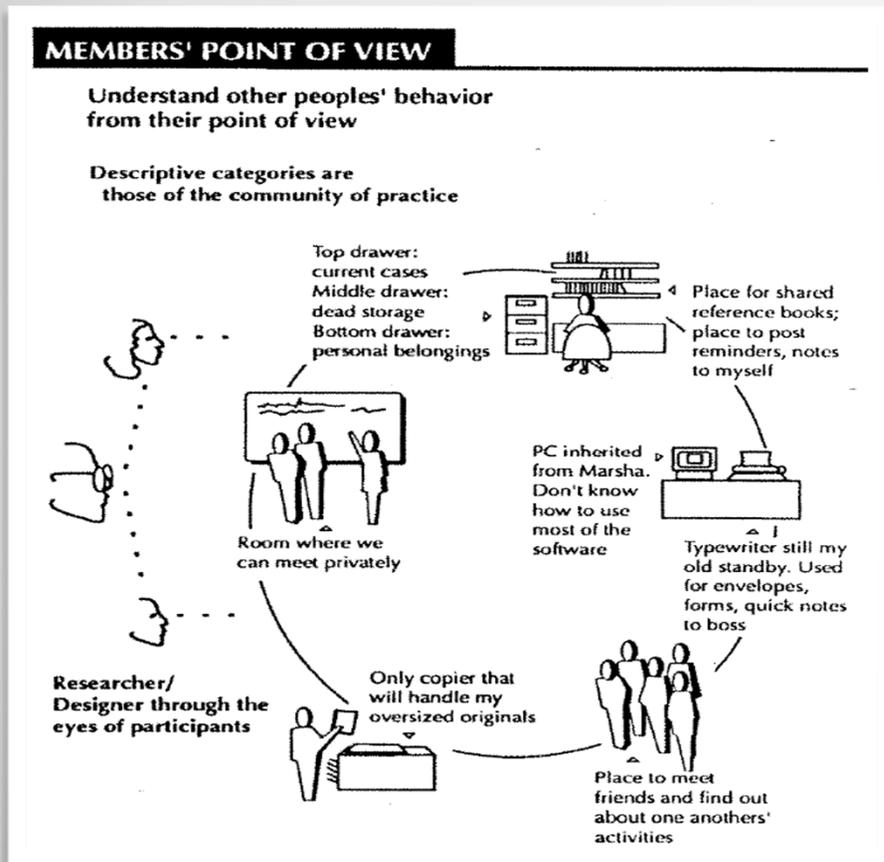
Judgements of the efficacy of behaviors observed are withheld



Study how people actually behave, not how they ought to behave.

Defer judgment!

Members' Point-of-View



See through participants' eyes to grasp how they interpret and act in their world.

Steps in ethnographic research

I. Define the Problem

Specific questions or general topic

Gives structure and identifies objectives

Ethnographer

Helps stakeholders understand questions and role of research

Designer

Articulates a clear and actionable brief

Helps define info and deliverables to communicate with client

2. Find the People

Who can answer the questions?

By environment, culture, product use, actions, location, social connections, etc.

Ethnographer

Defines & finds best people to study

Designer

Confirms that people meet criteria of the brief

3. Plan an Approach

Set game plan & pick questions to ask consistently
Allow opportunities for people to show you what they own, value, and how they do things

Ethnographer

Designs method for collecting data and tools for fieldwork

Designer

Prepares stimuli for ethnographer and sets framework for understanding data

4. Collect Data

Process involves slowing down, taking everything in, using all senses, being curious

Take photos, video, audio, notes, sketches

Ethnographer

Use trained eye to probe, question, observe

Designer

Participate and make observations

5. Analyze Data

Most challenging part!

Get beyond obvious insights

Link findings to a concrete direction

Ethnographer

Lead analysis by grounding fieldwork in research training and outside experience

Designer

Collaborates with ethnographer to transform observations & data into coherent, compelling story

6. Share Insights

Storytelling and information design can be used to communicate the value of the work and the possibilities

Ethnographer

Tells story to help people embrace recommendations and create shared vision

Designer

Creates visual narrative to accelerate knowledge transfer & buy-in

Don't Just Ask Questions

Delve deeply, not superficially!

Make connections, take the leap from research to strategy to innovation

Good ethnographers combine solid social science with business smarts

Intel video

Questions?

Data Collection Methods

Fly on the Wall

Goals

Gaining familiarity with physical and social context
Observe without influencing

Outcome

Fieldnotes (written, pictures, audio, video)
Make sure you get permission!

Participant Observation

Goals

Gaining intimate familiarity with/in-depth understanding of how people work, relate to each other, share info, etc.

Gain insider perspective on how organization and how members interact

Outcome

Fieldnotes (written, audio, video)

Interviews

Goals

Gain understanding from individual perspectives

Validate findings from observations

Use interviewing with follow up

Study language and codes

Outcome

Transcripts (transcoded from audio)

Jeans video

Recording Data

Notes and records of

Ideally, everything you see

Ideally, everything you hear

Your own interpretations (ID separately)

What you don't see or don't understand

Questions?