

# Review of: "Is Fieldwork losing its grace? Encountering Western and Indian Experience"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

I have read with interest this article on fieldwork. Fieldwork has become a very common method of social research not just in anthropology but in sociology, political science, religious studies, business studies, cultural studies, etc., around the world. What started as an almost exclusive undertaking for anthropology has become the preferred research approach for many inside and outside the academy. If fieldwork is what made anthropology unique, then that uniqueness has been eroded by the application of fieldwork in almost all other fields of study.

Maybe the prevalent use of fieldwork by others and the multiple forms it takes is what has convinced the author that something (negative) has happened to fieldwork--that fieldwork has lost its past glory. The author provides some examples in the form of citations to demonstrate some of the areas where fieldwork has lost its past glory. As I kept reading the text I kept wondering if there is only ONE kind of fieldwork that we can assess and measure through time and space to establish its status at any specific moment. If as Wax and Wax (1980:29) say fieldwork is "a process of social research in which the investigator attempts to enter into the universe of meanings and participate in the moral system of this host community" then there will be multiple forms of fieldwork based on the individuals, places, and time periods involved. To assume there is one kind of fieldwork, as the author does in the essay under review, is to miss the complexity of the fieldwork enterprise.

The author has also on numerous occasions provided broad statements about the topics or concepts being addressed where nuance is needed. When the author, for instance, states "Anthropological fieldwork tradition demands total immersion within others' cultures" is there consideration of fieldwork carried out in one's own culture, in a taxi cab as the driver, or in a corporation as an employee? Who is the other when the fieldworker is the subject and object of study? Addressing these matters makes the subject at hand a little more complex than what the author wishes to present.

There is an area where as I read the piece I wondered if the author fully understood what immersion means during fieldwork. The author provides an example of a time during fieldwork where the author could not consume *handia* offered by the community members, which the author interprets as an inability to immerse self in the culture. If immersion in a culture were to be seen as doing everything then few anthropologists would consider themselves participant observers in any study. Immersion, in my view, denotes the ability to be part of the culture, to be present and to understand what is going on, and once in a while to fully participate in the activities of the community without compromising one's values and principles. If one is present in the community long enough one will find ways to negotiate those areas and activities in the community that may not align with their personal choices.

Overall the author offers the reader the opportunity to think critically about the place of fieldwork in anthropology today. To make the argument more convincing the author may do well to read more recent works that address various forms of fieldwork. Here are some examples:

1. Boellstorff, Tom, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce, and T. L. Taylor. 2012. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*. Princeton University Press.
2. Campbell, Elizabeth, and Luke Eric Lassiter. 2014. *Doing Ethnography Today: Theories, Methods, Exercises*. Chichester, West Sussex; Malen, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
3. Collins, Samuel Gerald, and Matthew Slover Durning. *Networked Anthropology: A Primer for Ethnographers*. 1st Edition. London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2014.
4. Crane, Julia G. and Michael V. Angrosino. 1992. *Field Projects in Anthropology: A Student Handbook*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.
5. Horst, Heather A., and Daniel Miller. *Digital Anthropology*. Taylor & Francis, 2013.
6. Hine, Christine. *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.
7. Robben, C.G.M. and Jeffrey A. Sluka. 2012. *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

I recommend that the author makes some further edits and revisions to the article to make a tighter argument.

## References

Wax and Wax, 1980, "Fieldwork and the Research Process," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, Vol. 11(1):29-37