TURNING ETHNOGRAPHIC INSIGHTS OF HOMELESSNESS INTO SURVEY RESEARCH STRATEGIES: LESSONS FROM THE CENSUS

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Goals of Presentation

- Review the insights of two ethnographic studies of Homeless population
  - Conducted during the 1990 and 2010 U.S. censuses
  - Examined the challenges of reaching homeless populations in the U.S. census
  - Provided an insider point of view on homeless populations
- Discuss how the fluidity and mobility of homeless population impacts the Census as well as survey research methods that seek to include homeless populations.

What is an Ethnography?

- Ethnography is the written description of a culture after a period of intensive observation and participant observation (a hallmark of anthropology) by the anthropologist who has lived within the culture of study.

- In taking extensive field notes and analyzing them one is attempting to understand not just the behaviors one can see but also the *world view* of the culture that makes those behaviors possible.

- A wonderful description of the more subtle aspects of ethnography is provided by Charles Frake who says that describing a culture:

  > *is not to recount the events of a society but to specify what one must know to make those events maximally probable. The problem is not to state what someone did but to specify the conditions under which it is culturally appropriate to anticipate that he, or persons occupying his role, will render an equivalent performance* (Frake 1964:111-112).
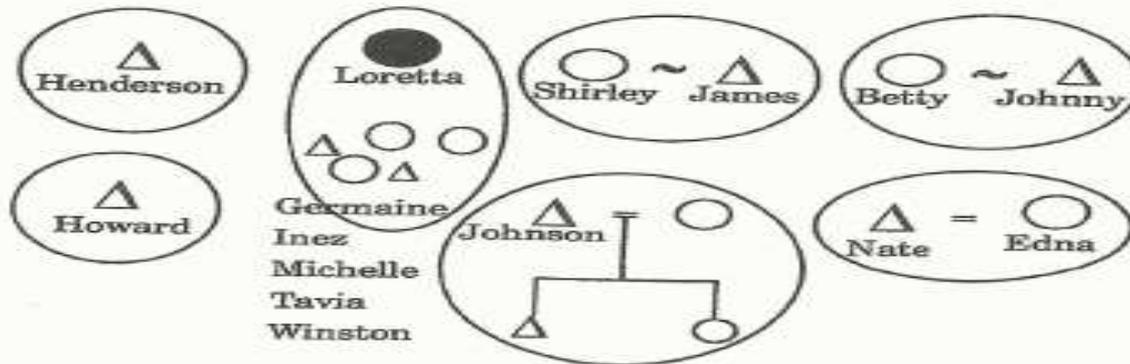
The *Anthropology News* (51:5 May 2010) was devoted to the Census. The articles focused on ethnographic insights. The cover presents the iconic household of the 1950s.
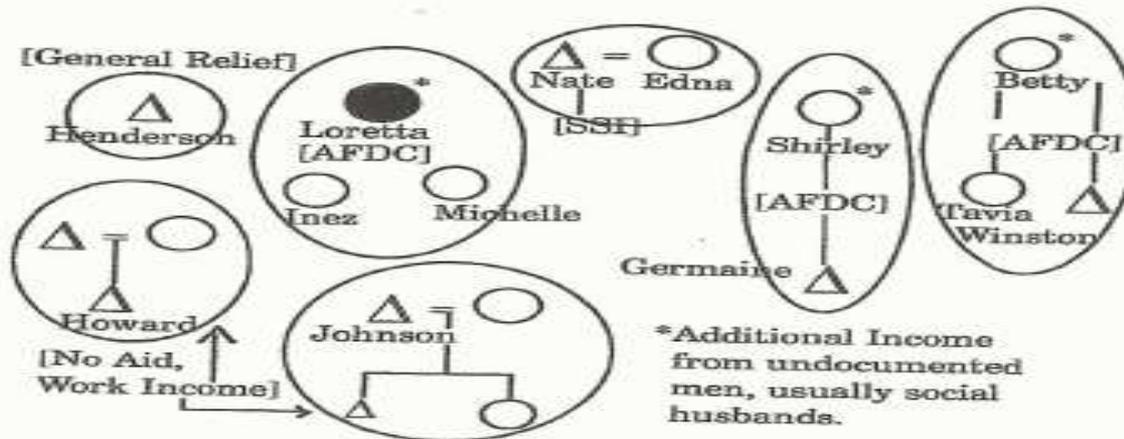
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1950 Census of the United States

Same People-Different Definitions Chart (Peter Hainer): Example of early ethnographic work for the US Census in the 1970s

C. Where People Sleep/Where Children are Kept. (Circles here indicate separate addresses. N.B.: All these people "live" within a few blocks of each other, often in the same building, and move together as a unit.)

D. "Official" Relationships: – Welfare, Schools, Courts, Census: Source of Income.

Previous Homeless Ethnographic Work Indicates:

- Some homeless people hide and do not want to be identified.

- Homeless people often cycle through various living arrangements and often are on the move.

- Some pretend to be housed.

- Homeless people who doubled-up with another household are often excluded in the Census form of the head of household.

- Concept of 'usual residence' may not be relevant to homeless populations

An International Comparison

- India has had a protocol for including the homeless in the national census since 1961 (Gandotra 1977)

- In 1991 the Indian census takers were instructed to take a count of all of the "houseless" (their term for homeless) who were living on the pavement on the blocks that were assigned to the census taker in a three week period of time (Glasser 1994)

- By the night of the census the workers were already acquainted with the population to be included.

Year-long ethnography of homeless in small New England City, 1989-1990

ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

REPORT #17

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF HOMELESS

IN WINDHAM, CONNECTICUT

Final Report for Joint Statistical Agreement 88-22

September 1991

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Matt Salo, Technical Representative

Meeting People Where They Are: 1990 Study

- The research team attended the large soup kitchen for two to four days a week during the entire year. I would usually make an .announcement inviting people who were homeless to come up to talk to me or a research assistant. The announcement would be made as lunch was about to be served at 12:30. Our reciprocity was to share housing information with anyone who asked. Note the use of "does not have housing" instead of "homeless." The announcement was:

- *I am interested in talking to anyone who does not have housing. I am doing a study for the Bureau of the Census, and I have some housing information I would be glad to share with you.*

- *Estoy interesada en hablar a todo el mundo que no tiene viviendas. Yo hago un estudio por la "census" y yo tengo informacion sobre viviendas que yo puedo compatir contigo .*

The Challenge of Finding the Out of Doors Homeless Individuals

- The soup kitchen was the place of first contact with 50 households of the 156 households in the study. An example of someone we met was Brian, a man who spoke with us at various times over a nine month period of time.

- Brian was in and out the state mental hospital during the course of the year.

- Over the course of one year, Brian lived in the woods, in the state mental hospital, in an SRO hotel, and then back to the woods.

- Like most of the 19 out-of-doors homeless we met in this study, Brian was very reticent about where precisely he stayed and did not want any visitors to his campsite.

- We recommended at the end of the study that instead of visiting the out of doors homeless where they sleep (the strategy in the 1990 census) that they be counted in service sites such as soup kitchens.

The Doubled Up Homeless

- Of the 156 households interviewed, often multiple times in the 1990 study, fully 60 were individuals and families living with another family.

- Maria was a 51 year old Puerto Rican mother of 14 who was living with her youngest 3 children.

- When we met Maria at the soup kitchen, she was needing to leave her daughter's apartment who feared that she would be evicted for letting someone stay with her who was not on the lease.

- Maria and her children moved to the family shelter until they could find their own apartment. With no credit references, this was challenging.

- When we met with Maria in her new apartment, she introduced us to another family who was now staying with her.

- Maria and her children had become the host family.

The 2010 Homeless Ethnographic Study

Ethnographic Study of the Group Quarters Population in the 2010 Census: Homeless Populations

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2010 Homeless Enumeration

- The Service-Based Enumeration (SBE) for homeless populations was conducted on March 29, 30, and 31, 2010

- The SBE utilized the seven-question Individual Census Report (ICR) designed for Group Quarter Enumeration (GQE), which collected around three percent of U.S. population in 2010.

- GQE that sought to enumerate individuals living in group quarters such as college residence halls, prisons, nursing homes, and homeless shelters.

- Below is the ICR form

OMB No. 0607-0919-C: Approval Expires 12/31/2011

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

United States·
Census 2010

Individual Census Report

Use a blue or black pen.

Start here

1. What is your name? *Print name below.*
Last Name

First Name · MI

2. What is your sex? *Mark* ☒ *ONE box.*
☐ Male   ☐ Female

3. What is your age and what is your date of birth?
Please report babies as age 0 when the child is less than 1 year old.
Print numbers in boxes.
Age on April 1, 2010 · Month · Day · Year of birth

➜ **NOTE: Please answer BOTH Question 4 about Hispanic origin and Question 5 about race. For this census, Hispanic origins are not races.**

4. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?
☐ **No,** not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
☐ Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano
☐ Yes, Puerto Rican
☐ Yes, Cuban
☐ Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin — *Print origin, for example, Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, and so on.* ↙

5. What is your race? *Mark* ☒ *one or more boxes.*
☐ White
☐ Black, African Am., or Negro
☐ American Indian or Alaska Native — *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.* ↙

☐ Asian Indian   ☐ Japanese   ☐ Native Hawaiian
☐ Chinese   ☐ Korean   ☐ Guamanian or Chamorro
☐ Filipino   ☐ Vietnamese   ☐ Samoan
☐ Other Asian — *Print race, for example, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on.* ↙
☐ Other Pacific Islander — *Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on.* ↙

☐ Some other race — *Print race.* ↙

6. Do you live or stay in this facility MOST OF THE TIME?
☐ Yes → *This completes the form.*
☐ No ↙

7. *(If No)* **What is the full address of the place where you live or stay MOST OF THE TIME?**
Please complete all that apply.

Street address number

Street name

Apartment number

Rural route address

City

County

State or foreign country

ZIP Code

Form **D-61(ICR)** (4-2-2009)

USCENSUSBUREAU

2010 Homeless Enumeration, Continued

- First night the census takers enumerated individuals and families in emergency shelters, transitional shelters, in hotels and motels used to house the homeless.

- Second day the enumerators visited individuals at regularly scheduled mobile food vans and soup kitchens.

- Third day the enumerators counted people at pre-identified targeted unsheltered outdoor locations (TNSOL) such as at bus stops, encampments, or cemeteries.

2010 Homeless Enumeration, Continued

- If an individual believed that he/she had been missed in the Census he/she could have filled out the five question Be Counted form.

- The Be Counted forms were to be made available at many community sites as well as at the Questionnaire Assistance Centers.

The Doubled Up Homeless

□ Individuals and families living with another household (the doubled up homeless) were to be included in the U.S. Census form that all residences received before April 1, 2010

□ The first question asked the individual filling out the form how many people were living or staying in the house, apartment, or mobile home on April 1, 2010.

□ The second question asked if there were "additional people" staying there on April 1, 2010. This second question could include homeless individuals and families staying with the householder.

Methodology: Meeting Homeless People

❑ Direct observations
  - ❑ American Community Survey at Group Quarter
  - ❑ Census Day at two soup kitchens

❑ Post Census focus groups
  - ❑ Shelter and soup kitchen

  ❑ Unobtrusive observations
    - ❑ multiple visits in three cities
      - ❑ Shelters
      - ❑ Soup kitchens
      - ❑ Day respites
      - ❑ Single Room Occupancy lodging
      - ❑ Group Home

Finding and enumerating homeless populations within shelters will only capture a portion of the homeless population on a given night

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❑ The shelter for singles is characterized by people who stay for short periods of time as they cycle through

  ❑ living out of doors

  ❑ with other people or families (doubled up)

  ❑ in their own room

  ❑ temporary motel living

❑ Shelters for singles characterized by:

  ❑ people may be barred or leave abruptly

  ❑ few services

  ❑ multiple bed dorms

❑ Family shelters in contrast house families until they find their own apartment, have services, and are often full

Not all homeless population in shelters: being barred or asked to leave

A person can be barred for fighting, as we witnessed:

> *A man became very upset because another man sat in "his seat" on the couch in the lounge. They first argued verbally then took their fight to the dorm room behind the lounge and began to hit each other. The shelter worker asked the man who "took the seat" to leave.*

There is also evidence that in addition to barring people, the shelter workers at times control who enters the shelter. The following excerpt illustrates this:

- *As I (IG) was entering the shelter at 6 pm, a woman outside told me that it was full (thinking I was in need of a bed). I said, "full already!" I mentioned this to the shelter worker on duty who told me that in fact they weren't full.*

- Being barred means that the person needs to find alternative (and more difficult to enumerate) places to stay, such as out of doors or doubled up.

Occasional Result of Being Barred

A backdrop to this study was the death of a homeless man who went to sleep on the steps outside the shelter after being asked to leave the shelter.

Three men in a soup kitchen were visibly upset as they discussed the recent death. One man said he had stayed in the shelter that night and witnessed the man who died cutting up vegetables for dinner when shelter staff told him to leave; shelter staff did not call the police. The man and his girlfriend went outside to sleep in doorway next to the shelter; and several hours later, the man was dead.

Living out of doors presents special challenges to enumeration

In soup kitchens people told us about living in places not intended for habitation, hidden from view, for example:

- 59 y/o man living in unheated garage for over 3 years
- 40 y/o man has been living in his car for 6 months
- 50 y/o man living with friends and in his van
- 61 y/o man sleeping in his car for several years
- Two men, sleeping on park benches and cemetery for years

One day I witnessed one of the men being carried out of soup kitchen; he had fallen asleep and was unresponsive. The next week he told me that he stays out of doors, in shelters, and sometimes, in the emergency room.

Not all homeless shelters may be recognized as shelters

❑ We discovered a mariner's lodge consisting of ten rooms that provided temporary refuge for people working on the sea, but is in fact used by homeless individuals. People without the $135/wk can barter for their rent by performing chores.

❑ *In February I talked with a 20 y/o who had been at this lodge for three months after being released from prison. He does chores for the shelter for his rent. He uses his mother's address for his mail because she is in "housing" so cannot legally have him stay with her.*

Low cost motel rooms between shelter stays

- *At the mariner's lodge I talked with a 67 year old man who is a disabled veteran and receives social security. Before his one month stay at the SRO, he was sleeping in his car; before that at a **local motel**; before that in an apartment.*

- Some homeless in motels told us that they would probably not open the door for the Census taker and would be unlikely to receive mail at the motel.

The "doubled up" homeless are pervasive

- ❑ Doubling up is the first and most usual step for people with no housing
- ❑ Sharing resources and costs; reciprocity
- ❑ Short stay
- ❑ Not counted in Census
  - ❑ May jeopardize the host's rental or subsidized housing (referred to as living "in housing")
  - ❑ Temporary – not 'living there'

Recommendation: Further Research on Inclusion of the Doubled Up Population

- Staying with doubled up with family and friends is a frequent precursor to living on the streets or a homeless shelter (Bolland and McCallum 2002).

- If the host is a renter with a lease that prohibits guests from staying longer than a specified period of time the renter may think that hosting a doubled up person could jeopardize the host's family's housing.

- The National Alliance to End Homelessness estimates that nationally there were over 6 million doubled up individuals in 2010 (NAEH 2012).

Recommendation: Make Extensive Use of the Be Counted Form

❑ Ongoing distribution and ***explanation*** of the Be Counted forms in the soup kitchens and all of the major places that homeless people congregate.

❑ Publicize a toll free number within the homeless community, for people to call if they realize that they were not counted.

❑ Based on Census Day soup kitchen observations, need development of consistent and effective strategies at soup kitchens for enumeration of non sheltered homeless; this may include multiple visits at same soup kitchens.

Recommendation: Further Collaboration between Census and HUD

- Based on our experience with the Point-In-Time Count of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), we recommend the Census Bureau and HUD work together on the development of homeless enumeration methodology; both agencies have considerable knowledge and research regarding homeless enumeration.

- We recommend further research regarding effective strategies to count the homeless individuals *after* the three day service-based enumeration

Develop consistent and effective strategies at soup kitchens

- ☐ Soup kitchens heavily utilized by shelter, out-of-doors, doubled up, and housed but poor populations
- ☐ Make multiple visits to the same soup kitchen to insure that everyone is counted.
- ☐ Make pre-census visits to soup kitchens in order to discover culture and demographics of the soup kitchen
- ☐ Do not confront people as they enter the soup kitchen; they may leave
- ☐ Leave the census forms at each place setting
- ☐ Make an announcement about the importance of the Census.

Develop a close collaboration with homeless networks

- Some of the problems we encountered appeared to be due to a lack of knowledge by the Census of all of the homeless serving sites and networks

- As emphasized by homeless individuals throughout our study, people within homeless networks can be mobilized to spread information to each other

- Research from France, conducted by the Institut National D'Etudes Demographiques (INED) found that working closely with all homeless networks increased their success of reaching homeless populations (Marpsat 2008a).

Overall Recommendations for Survey Research

◻ Work closely with homeless networks of both homeless individuals as well as service providers. Examples of networks include:

  ◻ Street newspaper teams

  ◻ Advocacy groups

  ◻ Client advisory groups of homeless-serving organizations

  ◻ Soup kitchen workers, some of whom are formerly homeless individuals

Overall Recommendations (continued)

- Devote adequate time in preparation for learning the homeless milieu.

- Utilize focus groups conducted at shelters and soup kitchen to learn from homeless populations

- When possible, find formal roles for homeless and formerly homeless individuals on the research team

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