

Review:

*Laurie Mullen*

**Sarah Pink (2001). Doing Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research.** London: Sage, 196 pages, ISBN 0-7619-6154 (Paperback) £ 17.99, ISBN 0-7619-6053-8 (Cloth) £ 55

**Key words:** visual ethnography, ethnographic research, visual methods, qualitative research

**Abstract:** In *Doing Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*, Sarah PINK outlines the possibilities and practicalities of visual methods in ethnographic research. PINK draws on research and paradigms from anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, photographic studies and media studies to describe visual methods in the qualitative paradigm. In addition, the book problematizes issues such as representation, interpretation, and knowledge in the social sciences.

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## 1. Introduction

"Images are 'everywhere'. They permeate our academic work, everyday lives, conversations and dreams" (p.17). So begins *Doing Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*. Drawing on research and paradigms from anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, photographic studies and media studies, Sarah PINK describes how the visual may be incorporated into ethnographic work. PINK intends to situate this book outside of the history of the extant literature on visual research methods. She suggests that this book is not a recipe for visual methods but, in a more inductive manner, offers visual methods in the context of current research. Readers are encouraged to analyze the use of visual methods "creatively developed within individual projects" (p.4). The book is intended for ethnographers wanting to incorporate the visual into their work as well as for photographers and video makers seeking an understanding of ethnography. It is this duality of purpose that is the book's strength and its weakness, which I discuss in the final comment section of the review. [1]

## 2. Overview of the Book

*Doing Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research* consists of three parts. *Thinking about visual research* is the conceptual framework for part one. Chapter one gives a broad stroke of coverage to paradigmatic issues surrounding qualitative research methodologies generally, and ethnography more

specifically. PINK attempts to blur the distinctions between ethnographer and photographer by offering the commonality of individuals with their own intentions working in specific and cultural contexts. One of the most important aspects of this chapter is PINK's brief treatment of the topic of reflexivity and subjectivity in the research process. It is this topic that hints at necessary analysis for future work in this area. The reflexive approach to research is the acknowledgment that the researcher's subjectivity is a central component to the conceptualization and production of the research process. Scholars have written on the relationship between researcher and research subjects in primarily textual representation. The reader's or viewer's perspective is unknowingly shaped by the images shown and those not shown. I wanted to hear explicit consideration of this reflexivity in the role of the social scientists' gaze with visual research methods. In her essay review of gendered and cultured construction of female teachers, BIKLEN (1995, p.7) writes:

"Taken from film criticism, the term gaze here is concerned with how the technology of the camera, as well as the content of film, works to influence the viewer to see the film from the point of the male characters (Mulvey, 1975). Mulvey identified 'the system of the look' to describe not only how the female characters become the object of the camera's (male) gaze, but also how it constructs the gaze of the audience to be a male gaze as well." [2]

As more and more qualitative researchers incorporate visual components, I propose that our visual "gaze" be the object of direct discussion and scholarly work. [3]

Chapter two addresses the appropriateness of visual methods in research as well as issues related to ethics. Pulling primarily from her own research in other cultures, PINK reminds the reader that visual technologies may be interpreted very differently by those involved in the research. Context is the primary determinate for the appropriateness and role of visual technologies. This chapter contains many important caveats for ethnographers incorporating visual methods such as ethical considerations, gender issues, and project design. Specific use of photography and video may have to emerge in the field based on the relationships secured and not predetermined before. [4]

*Producing Knowledge* frames part two of the book and contains three chapters. The third and the fourth chapter discuss the roles of photography and of video in ethnographic research. Again emphasizing reflexivity in research PINK reminds the reader that "the key to successful [research] is an understanding of the social relations and subjective agendas through which they are produced and the discourses through which they are made meaningful" (p.76). I found both chapters interesting and worthwhile. PINK emphasizes two aspects of photographic research. The first is the importance of local vs. academic cultures where researchers work and the second how researchers can use photographs in knowledge production. In chapter four, PINK again emphasizes the reflexivity between the researcher and the subject of ethnographic video. The absence however of the role of theory in photographic representation is worth mentioning.

BECKER (1974) recommends that the photographer or researcher become aware of the theory that guides the project. This may help to ensure that the photographs or images are "intellectually denser". [5]

Chapter five ends part two with a discussion of the often messy and ambiguous process of data analysis. PINK outlines what she calls a different approach to analysis that "begins with the premise that the purpose of analysis is not to translate 'visual evidence' into verbal knowledge, but to explore the relationship between visual and other knowledge" (p.96). This section is very worthwhile reading for even the most seasoned qualitative researcher due to the treatment of the concept of data *construction and representation* through a variety of media. [6]

Chapters six through eight represent the final part of the text titled *Visual Images and Technologies in Ethnographic Representation*. This section challenges the hierarchy of the written word over the visual image. PINK suggests that ethnographic representation is one of situating images in relation to the written word, other images, spoken words and other sounds. What follows is a conceptually rich discussion of the relationships between different media and the construction and interpretation of ethnographic text. PINK focuses on the agency of the reader as "interpreters of text" and meaning. Part of the ethnographer's goal then is to encourage self-reflection on readers' interpretations. Chapter eight addresses the timely topic of digital media in the research process. Scholars and researchers across the world continue to study how humans interact with computer technologies in a variety of domains—cognitive, affective, and social. The field is experiencing both the processes of combining digital hypermedia into projects and research and studying the effects of these actions. My hope is that the implementation of digital media in education and research does not come at the expense of studying how and why we do so. [7]

### 3. Final Comments

I soundly recommend this book. Sarah PINK has made a solid contribution to qualitative research in an era of increasing interest and ubiquity of images both traditional and digital. Graduate students will find this textbook helpful in the general philosophies of the qualitative tradition and specifically in the nascent understandings and implementation of visual methods. Practicing researchers will also find guidance in how to incorporate the visual into an existing qualitative repertoire. While I appreciate her intent on writing for an audience of "ethnographers wanting to incorporate the visual into their work as well as for photographers and video makers seeking an understanding of ethnography" (p.1), I am not sure of the feasibility of this attempt. By writing for both audiences, I wonder if qualitative researchers will become mired down in the conceptual explanations of paradigmatic issues surrounding this type of social science research as they seek the specifics of visual methods. [8]

## References

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