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Cartier, Elizabeth A. and Lowry, Linda L., "Producing Higher Quality Ethnographies: The Blending of Two Methods of Analysis to Better Understand Ski Culture" (2015). *Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally*. 10.
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Producing Higher Quality Ethnographies:

The Blending of Two Methods of Analysis to Better Understand Ski Culture

Ethnographic research, which originated in the field of anthropology, has been utilized extensively in tourism scholarship. The majority of this type of research follows a similar methodological path. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest that studies based on cultures do not necessarily follow the same exact framework, however they each contain the following focus: “cultural texts, lived experiences, and the articulated relationship between texts and everyday life” (p. 103). Ethnographic fieldwork can include observation (mostly participant observation), interviews, and archival research (Wolcott, 2008). Supporting this viewpoint, Charmaz (2006) states that ethnography “means more than participant observation alone because an ethnographic study covers the round of life occurring within the given milieu (x) and often includes supplementary data from documents, diagrams, maps, photographs, and occasionally, formal interviews and questionnaires” (p. 21). Although ethnographic researchers generally use multiple fieldwork *methods* to support the overarching goal of the ethnography, there is little research that supports the use of multiple types of *analysis* to strengthen the understanding of cultures in this type of research.

In this paper, we suggest that higher quality ethnographies can be produced by utilizing differing types of analysis to explain specific types of cultures from both the micro and macro levels. Specifically, this paper suggests that ethnographic studies can be strengthened through the use of grounded theory analysis to describe the micro level of the culture (through participant observation, lived experiences, and interviews) in conjunction with discourse analysis to describe the macro level of the culture in society (through related texts). We suggest that these two distinct types of ethnographic analysis, when used together, allow for a richer, more nuanced view of the culture. This idea supports the view that each analysis has the ability to inform the other.

Utilizing qualitative data that looks at the intricacies of ski culture, specifically the power and social imbalance associated with this culture, we, as critical constructivist researchers, use grounded theory analysis of field work (participant observation and interviews) in this setting, along with critical discourse analysis of related written discourses to explain ski culture and to answer the following research questions:

(Q1) How are the tensions inherent in ski culture maintaining the preservation of this culture?
(Micro level)

(Q2) How does written discourse influence the co-creation of inequality and power struggles in ski culture? (Macro level)

(Q3) How are the above two questions, when taken together, able to give a more detailed description of the culture?

Method:

First, we utilize grounded theory analysis formulated by Strauss and Corbin (1994). They say that “theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 273). In addition, Strauss and

Corbin (1994) suggest that this type of qualitative, interpretive research is “a way of thinking about and conceptualizing data” (p. 275) and how we, as researchers, are able to interpret theories as we adopt them (p. 279). Abductive reasoning that is inherent in grounded theory analysis enables us to become involved and closely enmeshed in the analytic process and explore more fully the unexpected and/or surprising findings that emerge during inductive data collection (Charmaz, 2011, p. 361). We use grounded theory analysis when looking at research question 1 through our analysis of field notes that are derived from participant observation and interviews.

Next, we follow Halliday’s (2002) systemic functional linguistic (SFL) model of language in order to support Fairclough’s (1992, 2003) critical discourse analysis (CDA) to interpret written discourse. CDA “focuses on linguistic analysis to expose misrepresentation, discrimination, or particular positions of power in all kinds of public discourse” (Young & Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 8). Fairclough’s (1992, 2003) view of critiquing discourse was chosen as it guides the analysis of a text’s detail focusing on the relationship between social practices and discourse. We use CDA to look at research question 2 through our analysis of written magazine articles in popular ski magazines over the past two years regarding the interpretation of the locals and tourists in ski culture.

Lastly, in order to address research question 3, we compare and contrast the analyses used to support this ethnography in order to describe how and why each analysis is important, and how and why each analysis contributes to and compliments the other. Here we describe how and why viewing the culture from a micro level, through grounded theory analysis of fieldwork in this setting, in conjunction with viewing the culture from a macro level, through discourse analysis of global written word, gives a more thorough view of ski culture.

Contribution:

This paper contributes to the broader view of ski culture by using two different types of analysis that capture both the micro and macro aspects of the culture. We suggest that this approach offers a useful way to combine analytical techniques to produce a higher quality and more rigorous form of ethnographic enquiry. The hope is that this paper joins and contributes to the conversation that focuses on and suggests new and unique approaches to qualitative research.

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