

Book Review

Atkinson, P. (2017). *Thinking Ethnographically*. SAGE Publications. 216 pp., \$130.00 (Hardcover), ISBN 9780857025890.

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The current tumultuous climate between various cultures begs for ethnographic analysis that accounts for the multiple shifts within society, ranging from the use of masks to mandatory vaccinations. In *Thinking Ethnographically*, Paul Atkinson, a leading authority in this research area, provides the reader with a road map to unlocking the nuances associated with these topics. The road map he gives is not abstract. This hard-hitting manuscript and direct presentational style demand that the reader move beyond the jejune to the hotly debated topic of ethnographic thinking. Ethnographic thinking requires the researcher to pause cognitively and make the choice of the most appropriate frame of analysis for their research design. Thus, the author cautions the researcher not to enter the superficial arena of research analysis but instead a platform that ensures a quality outcome based on productive thinking that informs ethnographic work.

The book includes eight chapters and a postscript. Chapter one (“Introduction: Granular ethnography”) introduces the term granular ethnography. Granular ethnography is a complex term (e.g., social encounters, occasions) that takes into account the complexities of social life. The chapter also outlines the active engagement between data collection and analysis that must be done to disseminate fruitful and meaningful information. Chapter two (“Defining social reality”) reflects on the ethnographer’s embodied engagement.

Atkinson emphasizes the challenge of understanding the construction of social reality by actors and the physical and symbolic boundaries that create social spheres. He also articulates that this is a process that requires “detailed studies that reflect and respect their complexity” (Atkinson, 2017, p. 20). Chapter three (“Encounters”) explores the intricacies associated with social encounters (e.g., spoken activity) that should elicit multiple nuanced portraits of the subjects. Chapter four (“Language and performance”) further articulates the importance of spoken training, concentrating on the use of dialect and offering concrete insights to achieve practical ethnographic analysis. Chapter five (“Identities”) highlights the distinctions associated with social identities and how they are both framed and constrained within society. Chapter six (“Knowledge and reason”), carefully timed and situated in the book, shifts to focus on senses and material things. This shift gives homage to the increase of knowledge within this area. Still, it points out the dearth of information concerning the execution of everyday life in relationship to material and sensory means.

Chapter seven (“Senses, place and thing”) stresses the wealth of knowledge embodied within each social actor, and chapter eight (“Time and memory”) conveys the importance of placing the ethnographic analysis within both the past and present to understand how actors create recollections and mark time. Lastly, Atkinson ends by encouraging the reader to venture from

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narrow modes of analysis and the present status quo to thoughtful discovery, which still rings true today even though the book was written over three years ago. The implementation of even a small amount of directions provided by this author should place the researcher in a position to increase the likelihood of a publication. Unfortunately, Atkinson does not offer a quick fix, but he does provide a tangible research outcome that can be achieved over time, especially with purposeful steps to achieve a level beyond the superficial and simplistic.

In fact, the book has many strengths, but the strongest aspect is that it traces the “grains” (i.e., details) of everyday life by showcasing contemporary ethnographic inquiry that can be used in the analysis of topics appropriate to this framework. The only downfall that may deter a novice reader is that the book is direct. The urgent demand for movement by scholars away from the superficial is quite clearly articulated by the author, starting with chapter one and continuing until the last page. Due to the structure of the book, I would recommend it for a graduate student or a rising and/or seasoned researcher. The frankness of the book may discourage some readers, thus explaining my hesitation for the use of the book in any class on the undergraduate level.

Regardless of the population, facilitators should warn students of this writing style to ensure that the book is viewed within the context of the passion of the author. To counterbalance the directness of the book, the facilitator may consider supplementing the book with other written works (e.g., *The New Normal*, *Rescuing Autoethnography*) by the author. Taking this step to review his past work will ensure that the student grasps the academic landscape that shaped past and current ethnographic analysis. Finally, the book outlines distinctive analytical processes and establishes reasons for each step. This “how-to” guided journey should provide insurance to a researcher using this outline that they are offering a distinctive new aspect (research product) to the conversation. Unlike other “how-to” books, this author leaves nothing to chance or speculation, which should ultimately create a sense of security for the researcher on the route to submission for publication. Ultimately, the book is applicable and important as a tool for research and should be implemented across numerous disciplines within the social sciences.

Notes on Contributor

Shauntey James is a PhD and JD scholar at Penn State Harrisburg, United States. She routinely publishes and presents on women, race, gender identity, and sexual assault. Her most recent publication is a co-authored book entitled *The History, Evolution, and Current State of the Female Offender: Recommendations for Advancing the Field*.

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