

Zethnography: Part One

Introduction & Key Terms

Beyond Borders of Culture and Species

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To the Student

In today's world when we study animals we cannot avoid studying the interaction between animals and humans. There are very few places left on earth where animals and humans do not live together. In addition, for some city-dwellers a zoo, wildlife center or rehab center are the only places they will ever see a "wild" animal.

For this reason it is important for us to be able to observe the behavior of wildlife both in the "wild", in urban situations and in wildlife centers to evaluate how we can cohabitate with them in the most positive and sustainable way. Ethnographies are the study of the culture of humans. Zethnographies are the study of animal culture. In this lesson block we will learn some of the skills needed to make scientific observations about animal culture. After you complete the reading you will take the final quiz. You will then choose a final project to complete after watching the video lecture.

To complete this block you will start by reading the Zethnography lessons. You will then watch the zethnography video. This is a lecture I did for the Animal Behavior Conference in Toronto, Ontario (Canada). So this lecture is not directed towards you, the student, as the lessons are. However, the lecture will give you a "live" flavor for many of the topics I discuss in this lesson block and will also serve as an example of a presentation. Since you will be creating a similar study/presentation watching this video is important. After you finish all the readings and watch the lecture you will start your own project. You will be observing your subjects for at least three months. You will be taking notes, taking photos, creating charts. You will end by making conclusions and writing a paper or creating a power point type presentation about your subject.

Your subject does not need to be fancy or complex. You could do something as simple as studying birds at your bird feeder. Or you could take regular trips to the zoo and do a study of the animals there. If you are fortunate enough to live near wildlife habitat you could even observe animals in the wild.

Introduction

Ethnographies go “beyond borders” of culture, have revolutionized the way culture is studied worldwide and have even been used by the National Park Service.

Zethnography, a term coined by Dr. Kristie Burns, Ph.D is an ethnography of a human-animal culture and utilizes concepts from cultural anthropology, wildlife anthropology and ethology. *Zethnography* allows a deeper insight into actions, causes and consequences and thus advances animal behavior management techniques at facilities, wildlife parks and wild habitat areas, and paves the way to more effective operant conditioning and the creation of a safer, more nurturing and non-threatening environment for both humans and animals.

Zethography goes beyond standard observation records and provides effective mechanisms of data retrieval, methods for uncovering cognitive structures and ethology, devising verbal action plans and decision models, analyzing fieldwork, and utilizing a variety of techniques for data reduction. It also teaches animal care professionals and others how to translate this accumulated data into an ethnographic report and finally into a more effective behavior management plan.

Dr. Kristie Burns, Ph.D., a wildlife behavior anthropologist and certified wildlife educator, holds a degree from Northwestern University and has spent 23 years producing ethnographies and *zethnographies*. She was mentored at Northwestern University by Oswald Werner, author of *Systematic Fieldwork*.

Key Terms

Before we explore this topic I need to define some key terms. Because I am using new methods and defining a new term the definition of terms becomes ultimately important to this lesson as the new term's definition must be distinguished from similar fields of study. It must also be shown that this new field of study deserves a separate category.

The Journal of Animal Behavior, published by the Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour is one of the 17 "Like-Minded" organizations listed on the website for ABMA. Research areas covered in this journal include:

- Behavioral ecology
- Evolution of behavior
- Sociobiology
- Ethology
- Behavioral psychology
- Behavioral physiology
- Population biology
- Sensory behavior
- Navigation and migration

People interested in this field include:

- Ethologists
- Biologists
- Psychologists
- Physiologists
- Veterinarians
- Zoo-Keepers
- Animal Handlers
- Wildlife Rehabilitators
- Ethnographers

Behavioral Physiology: This is a systems approach to understanding physiology. It reveals how the physiology processes information about "itself" and information about its environment. In biological terms these adjustments made on a behavioral physiological basis would be "adaption" and "homeostasis". In terms of behavior one would call these adjustments "learning" which includes emotion, attention, motivation, memory, perception and reinforcement.

Behavioral Psychology or Behaviorism: This is a psychological approach that combines philosophy, methodology and theory. Its roots are in a reaction to "mentalist" psychology that was predominant in the 20th century. John B. Watson and B.F. Skinner were forerunners in this movement through their writings. They put forth that

psychology should concern itself with observable behavior of people and animals and not with unobservable events that take place in their minds.

Behavioral Ecology: This method focuses on the evolutionary basis for animal behavior due to ecological pressures. Behavioral ecology emerged from ethology when Niko Tinbergen outlined four causes of behavior as causation, development, function and phylogeny.

Sociobiology: This method is based on the belief that social behavior has resulted from evolution and examines and explains behavior within that context. This term can fall under biology or sociology so can involve many different kinds of scientists from anthropologists and archeologists to zoologists. This field researches areas such as mating behaviors and patterns, societal structures of animals and relationships in packs of animals.

Ethology: Ethologists are typically interested in a behavioral process rather than in a particular animal group, and often study one type of behavior (e.g. aggression) in a number of animals. They may also study what they call 'animal communication, animal emotions, animal culture, learning and sexual conduct' They sometimes use these discoveries in animal "behaviorism and training" where they consider the natural behaviors of certain animals or specific breeds that enables the trainer to select the best breed to perform a task or that enables the trainer to understand what the animal is capable of and what it will respond to.

Ethnography: This is a method for observing the culture of humans. Ethnography is like an onion – the more you peel back with data and analysis the more you will see. Ethnographic enquires seek to elicit the social world from the point of view of those that inhabit it. Although it has behavioral aspects it does not consider the behavior itself as the only level of analysis. Ethnography focuses on the social organization of work activities. It analyzes the obvious – how social organization in a culture is accomplished, understood and achieved by the social actors. However, it also analyzes the hidden. An ethnographer finds patterns in and understands issues faced by a wide sample of people with diverse backgrounds.

Systematic Fieldwork: This is a scientific method of data collection and analysis that produces superior ethnographies and is the culmination of decades of work by ethnographers Oswald Werner and Mark Shoepfle. This method lays out a systematic approach to doing ethnographic fieldwork. This approach shows ethnographers how to design studies, conduct systematic fieldwork using ethnoscience observation and interview techniques. They also provide methods of data analysis including how to uncover cognitive structures, devise verbal action plans and decision models, analyze oral texts and other methods of data reduction.

Zooethnography is considered an “emerging field of animal culture including capacities that are socially learned and transgenerational.” A group in Sweden, headed by Jacob Bull and Eva Hayward have formed a group called HumAnimal at Uppsala University Center for Gender Research. Their aims are to cross over the nature/culture divide in science and human-animal studies. They use interdisciplinary skills such as combining evolutionary biology, sociology and pedagogy, art history and philosophy. They believe that relationships are intersectional and not analogous and use models based in race and gender relations to expand on this. The overall aim is to promote better understanding of human-animal relations in society, science and culture by way of exploration and analysis, to explore the critical potentials of such understanding, and to establish human-animal studies as a field of academic inquiry in Sweden and “A common thread among our different research projects is that human-animal relations are used as a tool, or rather an entrance, to highlight and challenge common notion of, for example, suffering, sex, sexuality, language, the human/animal – nature/culture divide, post-humanism and other sociological and philosophical concepts. Jacob Bull says, “HumAnimal is not presenting zooethnography as a new methodology, but as an invitation to take what Derrida refers to as *The Animal Question* to methodology.”

Native Americans: Zooethnography, as a concept is not completely new. The Native Americans lived under the assumption that animals and humans were part of the same culture and treated animals based on that belief. In the paper, *Probing the Relationship Between Native Americans and Ecology* Nathan Sherrer and Tim Murphy, Ph.D. quote Lynn White Jr. in saying, “The transition from animistic religions (i.e., Native American) to modern religions such as Christianity has had a profound ecological effect. Popular religion in antiquity was animistic. Every stream, every tree, every mountain contained a guardian spirit who had to be carefully propitiated before one put a mill in a stream, or cut the tree, or mined the mountain” (White 1205)”.

Zethnography This field is being presented as a new methodology and provides specific tools and methods for collecting and analyzing data in this common culture. It agrees that the study of the common culture of human and animals is important but in a purely scientific manner and not a philosophical or emotional manner. Zethnography does not address the basic question of human-animal culture but assumes it exists and functions with that assumption. Zethnography does not use the term *intersectional relationship* but sees human-animal relationships as *coadjutant*. All zethnographies assume that each culture is unique and that equality and relationships will differ based on each cultural situation just as in human-culture studies. Thus, inequality is not a focus in zethnography and terminology used must reflect that. Zethnography uses culture as a term to define only those situations in which there is a common culture and does not look at the philosophical or wider implications of humans and animals joining as a

culture on the planet in general. Zethnography uses all of the fields of study above to gain as much insight into animal behavior as possible and enable a greater correlation between data gathered from the human and animal elements of each culture.

Zethnography Comparison Chart

	Zethnography	Ethnography	Zooethnography	Behavior Psychology	Ethology
Animal-Human Culture	Assumes Human-Animal Culture Exists	From Human POV	Explores the Existence of Human-Animal Culture	From Human OR Animal POV	Animal Behavior
Observes	Explores evolution, adaptations, imprinting, observable and unobservable data	Explores evolution, adaptations, imprinting, observable and unobservable data	Varies: Does not promote one method	Explores observable data	Explores Evolution, Cultures & Communication
Is presented as a new methodology with supporting data & analysis techniques	X				
Describes Human-Animal Relationships as..	Coadjuvant	Analogus	Intersectional	Analogus	Analogus
Includes emotional and/or philosophical data analysis			X		
Includes only scientific data analysis	X	X		X	X
Explores inner workings of Cultural Behavior	X	X	X		
Requires ethnographer and animal behavior scientist as an individual or team	X				

Diagram 1

Zethnography differs from *behavioral psychology* in that it elicits data to explore relationships and inner workings of the culture rather than using only observable data. Although Zethnography does also use behavioral observation methods to gather some of the data it uses. It differs from *ethology* in that it does not base its work in evolution but rather in adaptations and imprinting. Ethology is one tool that zethnographers use. *Sociobiology* is another tool that zethnographers use to help them understand the animals they are observing within the culture they are researching. Zethnography differs from *Ethnography* in that it views animals and humans with a coadjutant relationship rather than an analogous relationship (whole-part, species, kind) like is the standard in ethnographies today. It also differs from Ethnography in that it studies only human-animal cultures and has developed a method for translating standard ethnographic data collecting methods into methods also usable on animals. It has expanded and continues to expand on ideas for data collecting and analysis based on the unique challenges in these studies. The final goal of the zethnographer is to provide data to zoos, animal

training facilities and wildlife centers that allows the animal trainer, handler, zookeeper, vet, wildlife rehabilitator or biologist or to do their job more effectively. How they use this data is up to each individual person. Operant conditioning is one method that can be used once data is collected. However, data can be used with any number of training methods. Zethnographers do not provide methodology suggestions to trainers – they provide data that trainers can use. Zethnography believes that only scientific - not emotionally driven - methods and data collection and analysis can result in usable information for the animal handler, zookeeper, trainer, biologists or rehabilitator. Zethnography also believes that unique data collecting methods done by a participant observer can result in valuable information for anyone working with animals on a daily basis.

Literature Review

In developing the concepts, data collection methods and data analysis methods for this lesson/concept I am grateful to the following people, organizations, conferences and books:

Data Collection and Analysis

Werner and Shoepfle. *Systematic Fieldwork Volumes 1 & 2*. Sage Publications. 1989.
Association for the Study of Animal Behavior: *The Journal of Animal Behavior*
Esbjèorn-Hargens, Sean. *Integral Ecology: Uniting Multiple Perspective on the Natural World*.
Simmons, Laurence and Armstrong, Philip. *Knowing Animals*.
McFarland, Sarah E. and Hediger, Ryan. *Animals and Agency*.
Boddice, Rob, editor. *Anthropocentrism: Humans, Animals, Environments*.
Grandin, Temple. *Animals in Translation*.
Mech, David and Boitani, Luigi. *Wolf: Behavior, Ecology and Conservation*.
Hornocker, Maurice, Negri, Sharon and Rabinowitz, Alan. *Cougar: Ecology and Conservation*.
Rocky Mountain Research Station. *Lynx Ecology in the Intermountain West*.

Expansion of Ethnography

Wray, Jacilee. *Ethnography in the National Park Service: Past Lessons, Present Challenges, Future Prospects*. The George Wright Forum. Volume 26. No.3
Hardin, Rebecca and Clarke, Kamari Maxine, editors. *Transforming Ethnographic Knowledge*.
Kuriyan, R. *Linking Local Perceptions of Elephants and Conservation*.
Mullin, Molly and Cassidy, Rebecca, editors. *Where the Wild Things Are Now*.
Goodson, Leigh and Vassar, Matt. *An Overview of Ethnography in Health and Medical Education Research*.
Journal of the Education Evaluation Professional. 2011.

Human-Animal Cultures

Taylor, Nik. *Theorizing Animals: Rethinking Humanimal Relations*.
Thomas, Elizabeth Marshall. *The Tribe of Tiger*.
Milani, Myrna. *The Body Language and Emotion of Cats*.
Uppsala University, "The HumAnimal Group" <http://www.genna.gender.uu.se/themes/animals/>

Behind the Scenes Facility Visits

Cincinnati Zoo in Ohio
Minnesota Zoo in Minnesota
Happy Hollow Zoo in California
Joel Slaven's Professional Animals in Florida

Bearizona in Arizona
Lynn Culver's Private Feline Center
Big Cat Rescue in Alabama
Lowry Park Zoo in Florida
Bobcat and Lynx Genetic Bank Facility, Minnesota

Training in Behavior Management & Enrichment Skills

Academy of Wildlife Education. Five Years as Team Wildlife Anthropologist
Wisconsin DNR Wolf Trackers Ecology Course: Wolf Ecology & Tracking
Wisconsin DNR Wolf Trackers Tracking Course: Wildlife Tracking
2011 FCF Convention: Orlando, Florida June 9-11, 2011. Feline Husbandry, Medical Management, Etc...
8th Annual Avian Ambassadors Raptor Handling Class with Sid Price, New Mexico
Mountain Lion Incident Management Immobilization Course with Jay Tischendorf, July 18, 2011.
APWE Conference in San Jose, California. March 7, 2012.
Wildlife Educator's Course at Cincinnati Zoo. October 13, 2011.

Conversations and Interviews with Biologists & Educators

Cathryn Hilker, founder of the Cincinnati Zoo's Cat Ambassador Program
Lynn Rodgers of the North American Bear Center
Jay Tischendorf, DVM, Wildlife Biologists and President of the Eastern Cougar Foundation
John W. Laundre, Biologists and Author of Phantoms of the Prairie
Richard P. Theil, Biologist/Author of Keepers of the Wolves: Early Years of Wolf Recovery in Wisconsin.