2.10: Two Views of Culture: ETIC and EMIC

In the article, “Workaday World, Crack Economy”, anthropologist Philippe Bourgois uses participant observation to get involved with the people living in East Harlem. He actually lived there trying to uncover this system, and getting to know the people that he was observing. His approach displays both emic detail, the stories and explanations given by Primo and Cesar, as well as etic analysis attributing workplace discrimination to the FIRE (Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate) economy. Both points of view are rather crucial.

ETIC

An etic view of a culture is the perspective of an outsider looking in. For example, if an American anthropologist went to Africa to study a nomadic tribe, his/her resulting case study would be from an etic standpoint if he/she did not integrate themselves into the culture they were observing. Some anthropologists may take this approach to avoid altering the culture that they are studying by direct interaction. The etic perspective is data gathering by outsiders that yield questions posed by outsiders. One problem that anthropologists may run into is that people tend to act differently when they are being observed. It is especially hard for an outsider to gain access to certain private rituals, which may be
important for understanding a culture.

The **World Health Organization** (WHO) is an example of an "etic" view. The WHO created a group that specializes in Health and Human Rights. Although the idea that all cultures should have their rights protected in terms of health seems logical, it can also be dangerous as it is an "etic" view on culture. The WHO posits that “violations or lack of attention to human rights (e.g. harmful traditional practices, slavery, torture and inhuman and degrading treatment, violence against women) can have serious health consequences.”[4] Although some cultures may see this as a big step in health care, others could see it as an attack on their way of life. This problem of right and wrong in terms of crossing cultural lines is a big one. It can be hard for some cultures to watch other cultures do things that are seen as damaging when to the culture itself it has a purpose and a meaning.

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**EMIC**

An **emic view** of culture is ultimately a perspective focus on the intrinsic cultural distinctions that are meaningful to the members of a given society, often considered to be an ‘insider’s’ perspective. While this perspective stems from the concept of immersion in a specific culture, the emic participant isn’t always a member of that culture or society. Studies done from an emic perspective often include more detailed and culturally rich information than studies done from an etic point of view. Because the observer places themselves within the culture of intended study, they are able to go further in-depth on the details of practices and beliefs of a society that may otherwise have been ignored. However, the emic perspective has its downfalls. Studies done from an emic perspective can create bias on the part of the participant, especially if said individual is a member of the culture they are studying, thereby failing to keep in mind how their practices are perceived by others and possibly causing valuable information to be left out. The emic perspective serves the purpose of providing descriptive in-depth reports about how *insiders* of a culture understand their rituals.

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**References**

1. Jump up↑ “African People & Culture – Ashanti”.
2. Jump up↑ “Japanese Hip Hop and the Globalization of Popular Culture” Ian Condry
3. Jump up↑ *Southern California Quarterly* “Cinco de Mayo’s First Seventy-Five Years in Alta California: From Spontaneous Behavior to Sedimented Memory, 1862 to 1937” Spring 2007 (see American observation of Cinco de Mayo started in Alta California) accessed Oct 30, 2007
5. Jump up↑ “Discussion Group 10 Week 2- Marisa Mikelsons”
7. Jump up↑ Democracy in Dakar, Nomadic Wax, 2008
8. Jump up↑ [http://courses.wwu.edu/webapps/portal…82_1&frame=top](http://courses.wwu.edu/webapps/portal…82_1&frame=top)


16. ^ Louisa Lim, Painful Memories for China’s Footbinding Survivors http://www.npr.org/templates/story/s...toryId=8966942


18. ^ http://www.allaboutphilosophy.org/cu...relativism.htm


20. ^ Introduction to The Journey of Friar John of Pian de Carpine to the Court of Kuyuk Khan, 1245-1247, as translated by William Woodville Rockhill, 1900, http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/carpini.html


This page also draws upon the following wikipedia resources:

• anthropology
• cultural anthropology
• sociology
• social science
• cultural relativism
• female genital cutting

EXTERNAL LINKS

• What is Anthropology? – Information from the American Anthropological Association
• SLA– Society for Linguistic Anthropology
