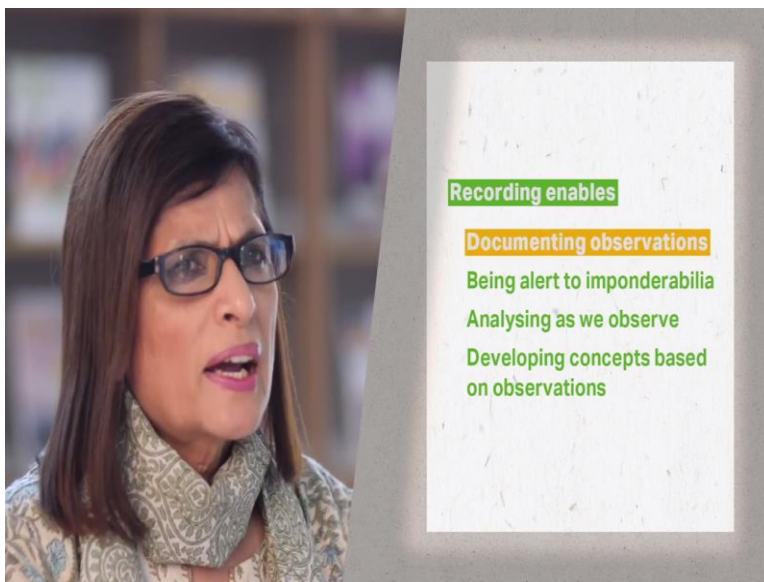
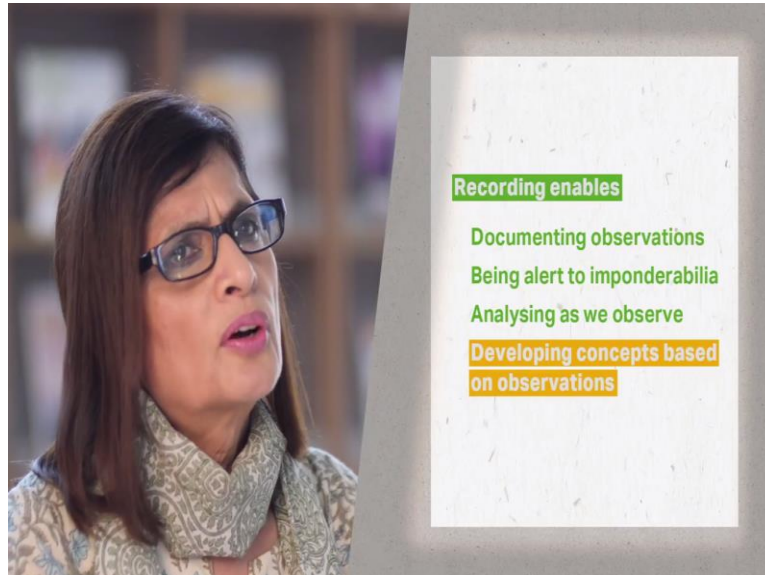
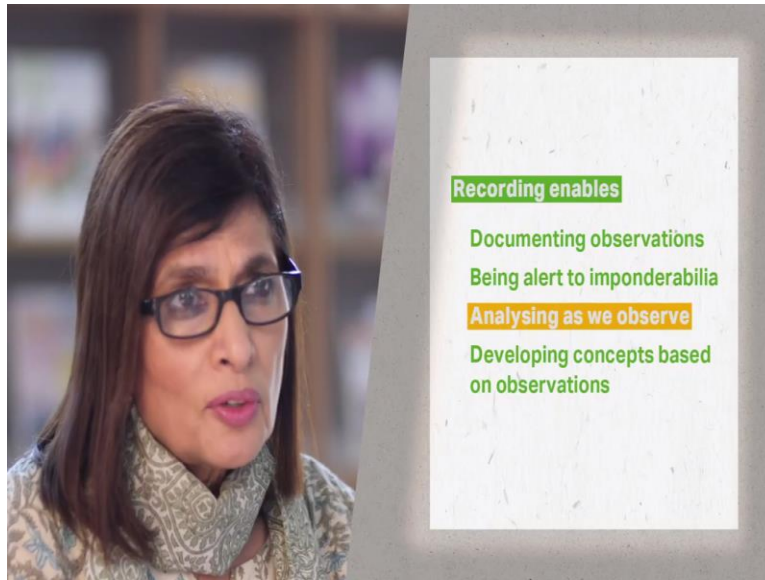


## Understanding Ethnography Ethnographic Records Lecture No 6

A point we have made repeatedly is that ethnographic observation is observing in order to understand and make sense. This means that in practice, observation is inseparable from recording and analysis. Let's reflect on the value of recording and analysing as we observe. Thinking back on our discussion on observation, let us bring forth the importance of recording.

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The most practical reason for recording is so that we do not forget what we have observed. We are observing so much and all the time. And our fieldwork is likely to range between a few weeks to a few months or two years. So, recording our observations and thoughts systematically is crucial to ensure that all our observations make it to the final analysis and representation.

But besides the practical necessities of fieldwork, recording plays a crucial role in defining our observations and our analysis. By recording our observations, we are persuaded to focus on the imponderabilia, the small and big details that we observe. For this reason, the question 'what to

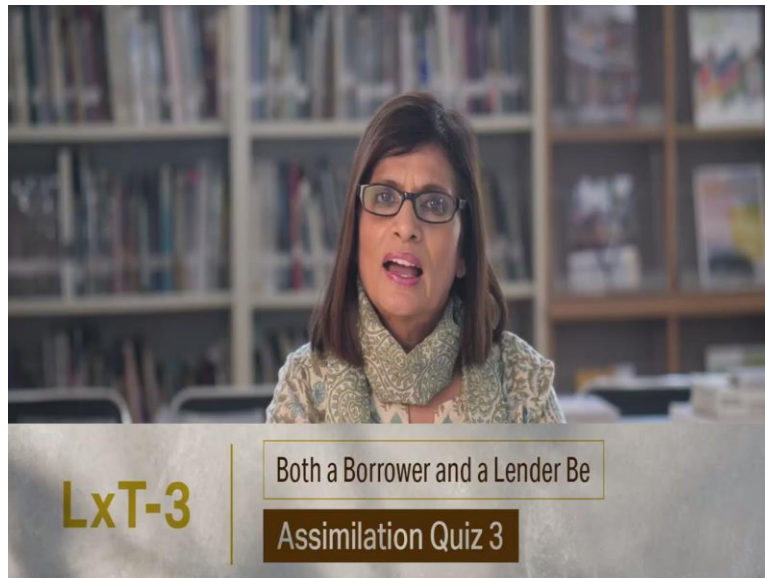
observe' is the same as 'what to record'. When we record something, it is the focus of our observation.

Recording is also important, a first step to analysing. As we record our observations, we are interpreting them, deriving some meaning from them. As we progress with our fieldwork, recording becomes an important tool, directing the focus of subsequent observations. In reviewing our records, we are often able to see in them something that we may not have noticed while observing and making the record.

By enabling us to revisit our observations, records enable us to bring multiple interpretations to our on-field experiences. Many ethnographers find that in reviewing the records or refining them, new concepts and themes emerge. These can provide directions for subsequent research engagements. For those of you, who might be interested in learning more about how that happens, refer to this reading.

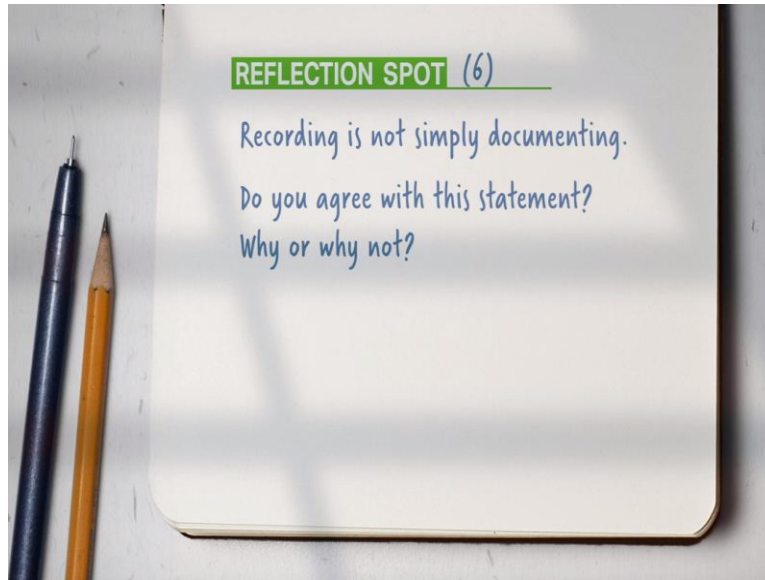
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The image displays a composite of three elements on a grey background. On the left is a color portrait photograph of Fern Ingersoll, a woman with short dark hair wearing a light-colored collared shirt. Below the photo is a yellow-bordered caption box containing the text "Fern and Jasper Ingersoll". To the right of the photo is a page from a book. The page title is "Both A Borrower and A Lender Be: Ethnography, Oral History, and Grounded Theory" by Fern Ingersoll and Jasper Ingersoll. The page includes an "Introduction" section with the text: "Whether we move backward in time or forward over group boundaries, we can find striking cultural differences. All over the world..." and a small page number "81" at the bottom. Below the book page is another yellow-bordered caption box containing the text "Both a Borrower and a Lender Be: Ethnography, Oral History and Grounded Theory".



This is an essay by Fern and Jasper Ingersoll, which outlines their process of analysis that went hand in hand with on field engagement, and recording. And as always, there is a quiz to help you reflect on the material. For all the reasons we discussed, most ethnographers recommend making field notes as a daily activity. The same applies for visual and ensorial records. Sorting to records to decipher and interpret them should be a part of the daily activity of a fieldwork. As you may have understood by now, recording is not simply documenting. Let us pause here for a moment and reflect on the statement I just made.

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Recording is not simply documenting. Do you agree with this? Can you think about why you do or do not?

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Some of you may have noted that recording is to diligently write down what you see. And so it is to document with all sincerity, whatever we observe. Some of you may have reasoned that if we are doing more than documenting, we might note down things that we think. And these may not be completely in tandem with what we observe. Others may have said that documenting is not sufficient for making ethnographic records. But then we need to think about what else does recording entail?

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There are certain characteristics of recording which make it ethnographic in nature. And this is true of all ethnographic records, no matter their form, medium or content. The most important characteristic is that it incorporates analysis. In writing down our field notes, while observing and participating, or later, we try to record what we saw, heard, and experienced. But importantly, we also record what we understood from our experiences. Like when we observed that the Kavadias dress differently on days when they have to perform the storytelling.

We also interpreted this difference in dress as a difference in mindset. Every act of recording is interpretive in nature. However, in doing ethnography, we need to bring an awareness and consciousness to our interpretations. In other words, we must learn to distinguish between our observations, our assumptions and our interpretations. We must view our records from multiple perspectives, generating different possible interpretations. One way in which we may do this is by making different forms of field notes, some on the field, some of it.

Each enables us to review and interpret our observations differently. We will discuss the different forms of field notes in just a bit. Ethnographic recording takes place simultaneously from the position of the outsider and the insider. Our records are based on our experiences of participation, as well as our observations. They are composed of our perspective and those of our

participants, and often informed by the works of writers and researchers we may have referred to in approaching our own study.

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Ethnographic recording is also self-reflexive in nature. It enables us to reflect upon what we observe, its minutest details and its meaning. Through the process of recording, we hope to critically engage with our on-field experiences. This kind of reflexivity is an outcome of the time, effort and attention that we devote to the task. In sitting down, putting pen to paper, trying to remember details, and writing them all down, we revisit our observations and find further meaning in them. In this respect, it is similar to writing a daily diary.

The same process takes place when working with audio and visual records when we review and sort through our images and videos. Being self-reflexive also means that we recognise the subjectivity of our observations. And so an important characteristic of ethnographic writing, is that it acknowledges the presence of the researcher. This contributes further to the ethics of our work, making it clear that our observations and therefore our research is subjective. In other words, recording our observations is a very particular kind of process and much more than simply documenting.