

# Using Ethnography in Psychological Research: Challenges and Opportunities

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# 1 *Using Ethnography in Psychological Research: Challenges and Opportunities*

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1  
**Abstract.** Ethnography has gained more popularity in psychological research in recent years. As one of the qualitative traditions, ethnography is best to describe the behaviour of group and group member deeply rooted in its culture and cultural values. This paper presents a literature review on the role, challenges and opportunities in adopting ethnography in psychological research. Study examples are presented within which, types of ethnographical design to explore new psychological phenomena are discussed. Continuous self-reflection for both researchers and participants, and researcher's flexibility of using data collection methods informed by researcher's positionality and engagement are suggested to further advance rigour in the study findings.

**Keywords:** ethnography; challenges; culture; psychology researches

## Introduction

Ethnography is one of the most commonly used qualitative research approaches in psychological research (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012; Frost, 2011; Holt et al., 2013; Suzuki et al., 2005; Tanggaard, 2014), due to the expanding role of psychological research to understand the phenomena of human behavior in holistic and culturally-rich perspective (Packer, 2011).

Ethnography is originated from the Anthropology discipline and cross-cultural research that contribute significantly to the understanding everyday life of a certain group of people (Banister et al., 2006). Later development also see the use of ethnography in the Western world's psychological research with a consideration that human behavior is indispensable from its surrounding cultural aspects (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012). Psychology researchers expect that ethnography provide research users a better understanding the world and how these people live their daily lives (Packer, 2011). In ethnography, a researcher blend into the site and regularities of research participants. Such involvement is vital to gain a more holistic understanding of the particular group being studied (Suzuki et al., 2005).

Ethnography has been in use in several studies on psychology in the Western context. For example, the study on the Inuit Tribe in Canadian Arctic by Kral et al. (2011), family therapy in Oslo University by (Steier, 1991 as cited in (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012)) and a study by Holt et al.

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(2013) on physical exercise program in Edmonton, Canada (Holt et al., 2013). In this Western context studies, ethnography is used at organizational level to understand the organizational behaviors (Eberle & Maeder, 2016). Ethnography has not yet been widely used in psychological research in Indonesia. is Teluma and Kartini (2019) study on Lamaholot society in Flores Island who joined the Facebook group "Suara Flotim". This study explored the virtual self presentation of the group members in cyber community of one area in Flores island. Another example is a research conducted by Ninin et al. (2020) on the less fortunate urban society in Jakarta, village community in Garut district and broadband village community in Tasikmalaya. Ethnography method can be a powerful asesment tool for the researchers to explain the situation in that village community (Ninin et al., 2020).

The scarcity of published psychological literature adopting ethnography shows the vital discussion on its challenges and opportunities, whereas as previously discussed there is a great benefit of ethnography in doing psychological studies within which understanding the society contexts and the underlying cultural aspects are explored (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012). This paper presents a review of published literature on ethnographical research with aims to describe the position, challenge, and application of the ethnography towards the studies of psychology.

## Discussion

### *Defining Ethnography*

The understanding of ethnography is dated back to its history, which was influenced by two academic disciplines, social anthropology in England and Sociology in the school of Chicago in North America (Brewer, 2000; Packer, 2011). The British approach is related to the British Colonialism, for which ethnographic approach was adopted to understand the culture of the colonial territories. An example of this is a research by Malinowski, who lived and interacted with local people, to understand the culture of the society living in Trobriand Island, New Guinea (Case et al., 2014; Gobo & Marciniak, 2016; Packer, 2011). On the other hand, influence from Sociology developed in America from year of 1920 – 1930, ethnography was used to observe marginal and deviant groups on the urban industry areas, such as the group of prostitutes, immigrant, drugs uses, and gangs (Brewer, 2000; Case et al., 2014; Gobo & Marciniak, 2016).

Wilhem Wundt, as one of the founders of Psychology, stated that culture is an important factor influencing psychological phenomena (Gobo & Marciniak, 2016; Tanggaard, 2014). The concept of Volkerpsychologie elaborated by Wundt was related to the ethnography study on human culture with introspection method. The basic differences between ethnography method and Wundt's approach is that Wundt's approach used experimental method with a laboratory control, making the studied phenomena not happening in a natural setting (Frost, 2011). Another point of contrast is the concept of Volkerpsychologie related to the immediate experience which had a different meaning for each individuals in understanding the reality of the surrounding world, which were mainly influenced by the culture. Despite these two differences, there is a commonality in the initial study of Psychology to those characteristic of ethnographic approach, that is the importance of understanding concept about

the culture of human psychological phenomena (Frost, 2011; Gobo & Marciniak, 2016; Tanggaard, 2014).

In the context of a qualitative psychological study ethnography is defined as a research on a certain group of people in a natural situation to find the social meaning resulting from in their daily routines by directly involving the researchers on that particular situation (Brewer, 2000; Packer, 2011). Holt et al. (2013) mentioned that the understanding towards the culture of a group from the perspective of group participants help in providing understanding about behaviors, values, emotion, and mental state of members of the studied group. This makes it essential for the researcher to get involved directly and build a rapport with members of the ethnic group (Bosse et al., 2006; Gobo & Marciniak, 2016; Holt et al., 2013; Packer, 2011). There are several keywords to ethnography: concept about a group of people, natural situation, social and cultural interpretation of a community.

(Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994 as cited in (Suzuki et al., 2005)) added that an ethnography design is pertaining to the exploration of social experiences, as such the disclosure and the use of data that may not entirely structured with a relatively small number of research participants, and an interpretation towards human behaviors. Recent development from Gobo and Marciniak (2016) found that the ethnography is frequently associated with a number of terms such as, participant observation, fieldwork and case study. Brewer (2000) argued that these association is misplaced and originated from the early development of ethnography in 1920 – 1930, of which anthropology that refers to this research design as ethnography and Sociology that refers to this design as participant observation and field research, but the two are essentially different. Participant observation is the active involvement of a researcher to become the part of the object that they are studying; not all participant observation, however, are ethnography (Gobo & Marciniak, 2016). In doing ethnography, a researcher may also use interview and not only participant observation (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012). Similarly, a fieldwork that focuses more on exposing certain individual behaviors and case study does not require the researcher to get involved in the natural setting (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012; Gobo & Marciniak, 2016).

The important characteristics of the qualitative-design ethnography are the presence of direct observation and the active involvement in the studied phenomenon (Gobo & Marciniak, 2016). Techniques of data collection such as interview and reading document archives are supportive in observing the existing phenomenon in the community (Gobo & Marciniak, 2016). Related to the active observation conducted by ethnography researchers, it actually refers to the direct contact between the researchers and the participants; the researcher would interact with the participants and actively involved in their routines, and learning their group regulations as well as their codes in order to understand their behaviors (Gobo & Marciniak, 2016; Holt et al., 2013; Packer, 2011).

Packer (2011) also wrote the importance of observation and observation notes made by ethnography researchers regarding all things perceived by their senses and everything that they experience during the observation of a phenomenon; this underlines the importance of observation towards ethnography. Although Gobo and Marciniak (2016) emphasize the importance of observation among other techniques, Bengry-Howell and Griffin (2012) mentioned that data collection techniques

such as: interview, distributing questionnaires, unobtrusive measure such as stories circulated in the community, non-verbal behavior are vital to be mastered by ethnography researchers. A researcher needs to creatively use various different techniques to uncover the reality in the community, which often lead to an understanding that not one technique is capable of being consistently-used in ethnographic research (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012; Krane & Baird, 2005).

(Malinowski, 1922, as cited in (Packer, 2011)) stated that sometimes, in order to report a reality in a community, researcher may need to temporarily leave their observation notes and camera in order to enjoy the reality experienced by the participants. According to (Geertz, 1972, as cited in (Packer, 2011)), getting an access to a community and being accepted in a community is important for an ethnography researcher in order to show empathy and describe the reality of the community as if showed by the participants in that community. It is important for the researcher to be aware of their presence in the research setting in order not to obstruct the originality of the setting, bearing in mind that ethnography lies in the natural setting (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012; Gobo & Marciniak, 2016).

In ethnography research, a researcher will obtain experiences when conducting the research, either as an insider or an outsider (Spradley, 1980). Insider refers to the active role of an ethnography researcher as someone who got involved in the research and has a possibility to do rituals conducted by the community. At the same time, researcher also becomes an outsider, a person who observe the behavior being performed and explain that particular behavior (Spradley, 1980). The consequence of becoming an insider, the researcher may get involved in doing things which are against their beliefs or opinions on the phenomena. If the researcher chooses to be an outsider, there is a high possibility that they may experience bias in describing the phenomena, due to the possible clash with the researcher's beliefs or perspectives.

In conducting ethnography, the researchers would encounter three important parts of human experiences: behavior, cultural knowledge, and cultural artifact. Spradley (1980) explained this by providing an example of commuter behavior in Chicago. The behavior showed by the passenger was reading books inside the commuter. The cultural knowledge was related to how a person can understand the meaning of language in the book that he reads, while the cultural artifact was related to the shapes related to the reading culture, such as tickets and book (Spradley, 1980). Related to the three cultural aspects, ethnography researchers would have to decide their research focus, whether it is on behavior, cultural knowledge or cultural artifact, therefore the researchers is able to determine the strategy to understand the phenomenon (Suzuki et al., 2005).

Suzuki et al. (2005) mentioned that ethnography focuses on qualitative data and on culture and its process in a community (Gobo & Marciniak, 2016; Suzuki et al., 2005). The challenge for the researchers would be on how to gain trust from the other members of the community, which in turn results in a natural interaction between the researcher and the participant. Among the essential elements if for the researcher to learn are social norms, general behaviors, and habits within the group (Krane & Baird, 2005), which can bring possible impacts on the researcher. As such it is crucial for the researcher to always reflect on his experiences within the studied culture (Banister et al., 2006; Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012).

The philosophical approach in ethnography study follows those of qualitative approach, such as empiricism and social constructivism. Empiricism relates to how a researcher will have an experience in the form of direct involvement to the studied community (Bosse et al., 2006). This experience is obtained from a natural setting through the process of direct involvement and observation on the studied community. The concept of natural setting is different from the early approaches of psychology which uses experimental method with a full control on both the subject and the phenomenon, such as the one conducted by Wilhem Wundt towards the concept of experience (Gobo & Marciniak, 2016; Packer, 2011; Tanggaard, 2014).

Social constructivism is influenced by postmodernism. Michel Foucault stated that the truth described in any language utterance is influenced by the culture and the context when it was made (Banister et al., 2006). Consequently, whenever an ethnography researcher writes their research results in a certain language, it cannot be separated from the context of culture in which the researcher conducts their research. As such, it is necessary for the writer to reflect on it in order to minimize the influence of personal values and culture in describing the research results (Packer, 2011; Tanggaard, 2014). (Whyte, 1943 as cited in (Gobo & Marciniak, 2016)) stated that reflection is a part of self-awareness which is essential for a researcher in order to determine how far his personal position and values may influence the on-going research process.

Banister et al. (2006) noted that social constructivism aspect occur in the description of research questions and research results, of which every aspect interconnected and inseparable from individual subjectivity and group. Thus, the description about the situation and contexts on research results is important to obtain a holistic phenomenon in which researcher's subjectivity may influence the results of the research (Banister et al., 2006). Result tends to be interpretative; which leads to the inability of an ethnographic researcher to present an objective truth, but rather to interpret and translate everything in the community in accordance to the community's perspective (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012). Due to this understanding, a reality is not static or accurate, but rather a construction of the participant regarding the world and its reality (Brewer, 2000).

Humanistic approach has particular influence the design of ethnography study drawing from Erving Goffman's 1968, (Brewer, 2000) ethnography research in a hospital setting. The concept of a researcher with humanistic philosophical ethnography aims to describe the meaning of reality from the perspective of a participant and conduct the interpretation in the platform of shared interactions with the participant. Although not a participant, the researcher could understand and make interpretations towards the reality of the participants (Brewer, 2000; Packer, 2011). This humanistic concept relates to the interactionism approach, which states that there is a natural interaction between the researcher and the research subject as reported by (Herbert Blumer, 1930, as cited in (Gobo & Marciniak, 2016)). This interaction concept describes the equality between the researcher and the participant in which the researcher does not control the participant as a research object, but put the participant as someone with a free will to express their own self in accordance with the participant's subjective understanding regarding the undergoing reality in a community. In other words, when using ethnography design, a researcher must put himself in the perspective of the participant; it relates to the humanistic concept

on how a human being actively constructs these experiences (Gobo & Marciniak, 2016; Krane & Baird, 2005).

#### *Types of Ethnography Design*

Some of the types of ethnography design used in social sciences are as follows (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Eberle & Maeder, 2016; Suzuki et al., 2005; Taber, 2010):

##### 1. Life history

This design describes the life experiences of research participants and the contexts of the event influencing the participant's life. As a data collection strategy, a researcher can choose a key figure knowledgeable with culture context to represent the community being studied, as proposed by Suzuki et al. (2005). An example of this is a research conducted by (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1927, as cited in (Chase, 2005)) on Wlodek Wisniewski's life history as a Polish immigrant in the United States. In this research design, the participant shared his life experience as an immigrant in the United States verbally in his own words through interviews and journals.

##### 2. Memoir

Memoir contains researcher's notes while doing ethnographic research in a particular community. Researcher is independent and assumed to be more objective and capable to honestly describe the truth within a culture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). An example of memoir is a research trip by (Stoller & Olkes 1987, as cited in (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005)) to Songhay tribe in Western African Nigeria. The researchers were the apprentices of the Songhay sorcerers from 1976 to 1984 (Stoller & Olkes, 1987). The researchers experienced sorcerers practices such as memorizing magical incantations, participating in indirectly attack among sorcerers and other practices in order to describe the culture of the community (Stoller & Olkes, 1987). The researchers experienced sorcerers practices such as memorizing magic incantations, participating in indirect attack among sorcerers and other practices in order to describe the culture of the community (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Due to this condition, memoir can be alternative explanation should the researcher encounter dishonest informants

##### 3. Narrative ethnography

In the narrative ethnography, the participant writes his/her experiences and understanding towards his cultural reality. In this process, the researcher assists in the inquiry by providing feedback to participant that aims to improve the writing to be more holistic in describing his community's culture. An example of narrative ethnography is a research by (Myershoff, 1979, as cited in (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005)) on Shmuel Goldman, a Jewish immigrant elderly working as a tailor in California. As the researcher, Myershoff gave reflective questions to assist Goldman in reviewing and improving their writing about society (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

4. Auto-ethnography

In auto-ethnography the researcher writes and describe their own journey while experiencing a culture (Packer, 2011). Jones and Munro (2005) published a research article about his experiences and his feelings in relation to his study as a graduate student. In the article, Jones and Munro (2005) further elaborated his understanding on the concept of auto-ethnography in his personal narration in the form of poetry and performance. Another example of auto-ethnography is by Taber (2010) who wrote about how her learning on feminism helps to reflect on her position as a woman in a military unit.

5. Fiction

Fiction is an ethnography design in the form of short stories, poem, novels and performance, of which descriptions and cultures of the participant from the participant's perspective are presented. Jones and Munro (2005)' writing (2005) about his experiences as a graduate student in the California State University is also an example of a fiction ethnography, particularly the poem "Dear Grandpa" due to his insomnia following deep sadness for his grandfather's passing. The recital of the poem was held as a performance, which is also one form of a fiction (Jones & Munro, 2005; Suzuki et al., 2005).

6. Applied ethnography

The design is related to ethnography studies of a social change or the effectiveness of a community empowerment program (Pelto, 2016; Suzuki et al., 2005). The researcher will use ethnography approach in the description of the culture of a community as a tool to apply intervention or as a basis for implementing a policy. For example, feeding practices of children aged 12 until 24 months in a community to provide a description on a proper intervention program to be conducted by an NGO towards that particular community (Pelto, 2016).

7. Ethnography decision model

Ethnography decision model is is regarded as a contemporary approach of ethnography design (Suzuki et al., 2005), which relates to the decision-making process of a group of people on something (Beck, 2005). The researcher identifies factors influencing a participant of a community in making a decision. The example of ethnography decision model is in a study by Young 1980 in (Beck, 2005) on a decision in a selecting disease handling method conducted by a farming family living in West Mexico.

8. Institutional ethnography

The design is introduced by Dorothy Smith 1987 in (Taber, 2010) which aims to describe daily life of a group of people in the relations to rules or a system. This concept based on the idea that not everyone in the community easily complies to domination of regulations, and thus, it is necessary understand how people react to a certain system and a particular regulation in order to provide

input in making regulations and policies (Taber, 2010). As an example, how a mother as a single parent interacts with her child's school system in a community (Taber, 2010).

#### 9. Organizational ethnography

This ethnography is based on multi-method approach (the use of observation technique, interview, document analysis, assessment on artifact use) that aims to understand daily operation of a certain social structure of organization. In this design, the researcher needs to consider the theory to be used in explaining the cultural condition in an organization or social structure (Eberle & Maeder, 2016). An example is a study by Gary Alan Fine 1996, in (Eberle & Maeder, 2016) on the working culture in a restaurant as an organizational entity. Eberle and Maeder (2016) further explained that researcher can work or become a member of the organization being studied.

#### *Understanding and Using Ethnography in Psychological Research*

The use of ethnography in studies of psychology is related to the challenge faced by ethnography researchers with regards to building a good rapport with the members of the community and being aware that the researchers are also parts of the community being studied (Banister et al., 2006; Suzuki et al., 2005). Ethnography researchers are further expected to maintain dialog with the informants with aims to formulate study objective, for which the community understand best the urgency of the study. As such, researcher's interest aligns with community vision (Spradley, 1980).

In ethnography design, the process of understanding and describing the psychological phenomena is developed not with the control of the researcher, but the natural situation free from any control; the latter is important to acquire a holistic interpretation from the participants about the world and the reality that they live in (Gobo & Marciniak, 2016; Packer, 2011; Tanggaard, 2014). In that regards, Eberle and Maeder (2016) underline that ethnography ought to create a dialog between social sciences and the surrounding community to come to a consensus in reviewing a phenomenon (Eberle & Maeder, 2016).

The use of ethnography in studies of psychology is, further, related to the limitation of quantitative approach as the dominant approach in psychological research worldwide (Banister et al., 2006). Brewer (2000) argued that quantitative approach is unable to uncover the depth of human experiences (Brewer, 2000). However, Banister et al. (2006) emphasized that in using qualitative method, psychology researchers do not need to set a dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative traditions, but rather to focus the qualitative method to the context and integrate the data found to disclose the studied phenomena.

Ethnography focuses on the culture and perspective of the society in living their behaviors in relation to certain underlying cultures within the society (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012). When using ethnography, the researcher conduct interpretations of the findings in relation to people's experiences situated in context where the study takes place (Banister et al., 2006; Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008). These findings are relatively flexible and changes in accordance to the environment condition in which the individuals gain their experiences, so that every phase in data collection serves as a process

(Banister et al., 2006; Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008). Such process is closely related to psychological science.

There are three things to consider before conducting ethnography research design in Psychology. First, ethnography is suitable for pilot study and preliminary research (Brewer, 2000) to expose a phenomenon at early stages or less frequently studied. Ethnography research could also function as an assessment towards the intervention conducted to a community and organization, on how an intervention may influence the existing culture of a community and organization (Gobo & Marciniak, 2016). A sample of an ethnography study with an aim to provide assessments on a group of individuals is the one conducted by Ninin et al. (2020), in which the researchers used ethnography to conduct assessment on three groups of society in natural settings to describe the people who live in the temporary housing in Jakarta, coffee farmer in Garut and the behaviors of teenagers and technology in Tasikmalaya district.

Second, ethnography is better suited to studies of a community and/or the behaviors a group of people influenced by particular underlying cultures in that community (Case et al., 2014). In such studies, ethnography can better expose how the culture and context formulate a subjective meaning of the community and the social process in formulating the norms of a community (Case et al., 2014). For example, Kral et al. (2011) study on the Inuit tribe in Nunavut Canada Arctic explored the high rate of suicide among teenagers of Inuit tribe. It aimed to understand the well-being of the teenagers of the Inuit tribe. Communication as well as family and cultural values of Inuit tribe which affect the well-being of Inuit teenagers were among themes being explored. The findings provide recommendations to prevent teenager suicide in Inuit community (Kral et al., 2011). Similar research was also conducted in Indonesia by Teluma and Kartini (2019) on the Lamaholot society in East Flores who joined a Facebook group "*Suara Flotim*".

Third, ethnography has been used in psychological research in organizational setting and the particular culture related to the organization (Eberle & Maeder, 2016). In example, Smets et al. (2014) study on the broker of reinsurance company who advised the insurance company about the possible risks in the London stock exchange. Researcher actively participate through direct observation and video observation about the communication between the company's consultant with a client to properly describe the existing organizational culture in the insurance company and the process of on-going share trading. Active observation of the researcher did not focus on one place alone, but also several other sites (multi-sites), such as the market shares, the client company, conference room and places when participants conducted his activities. (Smets et al., 2014).

#### *Challenges on the Use of Ethnography Psychological Studies*

There are at least five challenges identified from the literature in employing ethnography in psychology studies. First is the self-representation of the researcher in their description of culture of the studied community (Suzuki et al., 2005). This representation is connected to the way cultural-related text produced by the researcher; whether the explanation from the researcher's perspective as active participant observer is enough to be generalized as the whole description of the culture, whereas

the researcher only communicate with several key individuals (Suzuki et al., 2005). The choice of participants might have different psychological dynamics, for which might challenge in drawing conclusions. Critic is also related to accuracy of the collected data (Suzuki et al., 2005), due to the direct involvement of the researcher that pose a risk of researcher's influence. As such, it is also necessary to consider the researcher's psychological dynamics in writing the narrations of the collected data. Data accuracy from the perspective of a participant is also a challenge since it is related to participant's honesty in writing the narrations (Stoller & Olkes, 1987, as cited in (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005)).

Second, ethnography focuses on the subjectivity of the studied community that challenges the 'mainstream' approach in psychology that uses theories as frameworks in the attempt of describing and understanding of phenomena. For instance, the concepts of abnormality disturbance that adopts psychological theories on abnormality would view abnormal behaviors in a different perception than the abnormality based on an ethnography study. An ethnography approach with high subjectivity content would be difficult to address research problems requiring theoretical framework as a starting point. As stated by Brewer (2000), ethnography studies are more suitable to new or less explored phenomena.

Third, the objectivity of the researcher when describing the phenomenon needs to be considered. Presentation of ethnography narration often use researcher's view as the first person perspective while the majority of literatures in psychology use a third person perspective (Banister et al., 2006; Suzuki et al., 2005). For instance, ethnographic researcher will encounter difficulties in describing the client's perspective in Counseling Psychology (Suzuki et al., 2005).

Fourth, ethnography is known to require a substantial time duration data collection and a total involvement in natural setting (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012; Suzuki et al., 2005). Researchers require at least 6 months – 1 year to get actively involved in the studied community to understand the setting of the study (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012; Suzuki et al., 2005). On cases requiring immediate intervention towards the community, the use of this design would pose time challenges.

Fifth, participant observation in ethnography is only conducted in one community or a single place (single site) in classic ethnography approach. When conducting ethnography, there is a possibility for the participants in the studied community to be in several places so that the researchers must be ready to conduct observation in various places (multiple sites). This happens, for instance, to organizational psychology studies with the aim of exposing the culture of an organization. There is a possibility that the culture happens on several organizations and industries; thus, it is necessary to do modification on active observation to not focus only on one research place, but on several places (Smets et al., 2014).

#### *Suggestions in Applying Ethnography in Psychological Studies*

There are several suggestions to address challenges described above if a psychological researcher considers using ethnography. First, a continuous reflection by both researchers and participants is required when describing narration of findings to ensure the that the data would accurately describe the target culture of the target community (Gobo & Marciniak, 2016; Packer, 2011; Tanggaard, 2014). If

the reflection is conducted by the participants, the researchers may actively assist the process by giving reflective inputs and questions that provide a more holistic descriptions on the reality in accordance to the target community (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012).

Second, it is advisable to combine several data collection methods besides participant observation in order to expose the culture of that community, such as conducting interviews, studying the files on the archives of the target community, questionnaires or online interactions of the community (Smets et al., 2014; Tanggaard, 2014). The definition of ethnography lies on the observation and narration produced by the researcher, however recent development advise to modify the techniques of data collection to have a more holistic description on the culture of the target community (Gobo & Marciniak, 2016). Researchers also need to be considerate in determining the data collection methods to use with the participants, and as such flexibility is important to get involved actively in describing the reality of the target community, from both the perspective of the researchers and the participants (Gobo & Marciniak, 2016; Tanggaard, 2014).

Third, it is advisable to choose which ethnography design is well-suited to the studied phenomena (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012). The choice of design needs to also consider available time resources, some phenomena require a quick research and vice versa, and thus, the use of ethnography method needs to be properly considered.

Fourth, it is necessary to ensure a strategy to flee to safety when entering and leaving the research sites (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012). Another way to do this is by contacting fellow researchers when entering or leaving the research sites. Besides that, it is also important to consider the safety of the research participants, along with the careful implementation of research ethics in regards to research participants (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012).

## Conclusion

Ethnography is a qualitative research approach that requires involvement of the researcher in a natural situation to expose the culture, values and social meaning of a group of people, which hold a promising opportunity to psychological research. The challenge in using this design is a high subjectivity due to the description of the phenomenon is in accordance with the social constructivism approach. This subjectivity may occur to both the researcher and the participant, requiring a continuous reflection to help the narration of findings to capture the actual situation in that particular community. It is also necessary to creatively use data collection techniques addressing the level of engagement with community and their circumstances, thus not limiting data collection to only with observation and interview.

Those challenges on ethnography design do not stop the possibility of using ethnography for studies in psychology due to the capability of this design to holistically expose a certain behavior in its natural setting (Gobo & Marciniak, 2016). Researches are to design the research carefully by considering the problems that may arise, so that the results of the research may expose the studied phenomena properly (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012). It can be concluded that ethnography holds a

great potential for qualitative psychological research, especially to seek an understanding of a culture on a certain group which underlie the behavior of people in that group.

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#### *Conflict of Interest*

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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