
7 Qualitative and ethnographic methods in economics

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7.1 INTRODUCTION

‘Modern economics’ begins with a factory visit (Smith 1776 [1937]). Alfred Marshall’s industry visits are equally well known. Arthur Pigou points out that what Marshall wanted was to get a ‘direct feel of the economic world’, something ‘more intimate than can be obtained from merely reading descriptions’. Such direct contact with economic actors would, Pigou argued, ‘enable one, with sure instinct, to set things in their true scale of importance, and not to put in the forefront something that is really secondary merely because it presents a curious problem for analysis’ (quoted in Reisman 1990, p. 96).

In this chapter we outline some arguments in favor of encouraging this tradition in economic research through the use of ‘ethnographic techniques’, alongside more commonly used quantitative primary and secondary data-based methods. We also acquaint the reader with what such techniques entail and how economists have used them in the recent past.

In the context of the natural sciences it is more or less non-controversial to assert that diverse approaches reveal more about a phenomenon than a single approach. ‘Mixed method approaches’ are the norm in biology, for example, though not referred to as such, and any modern neuroscience department houses researchers using molecular, cellular, cognitive, psychological, and computational techniques to understand brain function. On the other hand, the social sciences continue to be defined not only by their subject matter but also by the particular methods they use to study their subject. Anthropology is as closely identified with qualitative, ethnographic approaches, as economics is with quantitative, statistical ones.

Further, it is commonly observed that, unlike most scientists, empirical economists are data analysts rather than data gatherers working with data generated by someone else, in many instances an international or governmental agency, or a national or international non-governmental organization (NGO) (see Jacobsen and Newman 1997 for an analysis of data sources used in labor economics and industrial relations).¹ There has been a resurgence in empirical economics (development economics in particular; see Udry 2003) of researchers conducting their own field studies; however, these are still mostly quantitative exercises (increasingly in the form of randomized trials). In most of these cases, researchers outsource the actual work of data collection to data collecting agencies or NGOs. We may join Bewley (1999, p. 15) in asking: ‘should economics differ from other sciences, where researchers spend much of their time collecting data?’

Even though from Adam Smith’s division of labor, to Coase’s transaction costs, to Piore’s flexible specialization, economists have often relied on personal observations of a qualitative nature to create new and influential theoretical concepts, a researcher using

qualitative data is still very much an outsider in the profession. Out of 498 articles published between 2009 and 2011 in the *American Economic Review*, the *Journal of Political Economy*, and the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 82 (16.4 percent) used primary data collection either through lab experiments (42), field experiments (25), surveys (4), interviews (1), case studies (1), or some combination thereof (9). In five heterodox journals – *Review of Radical Political Economics* (RRPE, 2005–2011), *Cambridge Journal of Economics* (CJE, 2009–2011), *Feminist Economics* (FE, 2009–2011), *Capital and Class* (CC, 2008–2011) and *International Review of Applied Economics* (IRAE, 2009–2011)² – only 39 (7.6 percent) out of a total of 509 articles surveyed used primary data. As might be expected, lab or field experiments constituted only a small fraction (2/39) and most studies used some form of survey, interview, or case study analysis (Basole et al. 2012).

We argue that heterodox economists have much to gain by embracing qualitative methods in their work, given the nature of their interests. Participatory ethnographic methods can help in figuring out what the relevant questions should be, rather than having the research agenda predetermined by available data. These methods involve people in a way that is minimally structured and less hierarchical. Finally, data can be collected on those aspects of economic reality that are missed in official surveys but are central to the concerns of feminist, Marxist, institutional, and other heterodox economists. Ethnography can also be a building block for quantitative and survey-based techniques. However, we would like to emphasize that mainstream economics has as much, if not more, to gain from these methods. Ultimately, to paraphrase Duke Ellington, there are only two kinds of economics: good economics, and the other kind. We believe that qualitative research is important for good economics.

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. In section 7.2 we discuss the principal reasons why heterodox economists should be employing ethnographic techniques. In section 7.3 we enter into the specifics of various types of techniques and point readers to resources on how to do such work. In section 7.4 we discuss some recent studies in economics that have employed ethnographic methods. We do not attempt to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the research itself; rather we focus on how interviews, field observations, or other types of qualitative data lent insights that would not have been obtainable easily through other means. Section 7.5 outlines some proposals for encouraging more such work in economics, and concludes.

7.2 WHY QUALITATIVE AND ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS?

The terms ‘qualitative research’, ‘ethnography’, and ‘fieldwork’ are sometimes used interchangeably. In the next section we distinguish between these terms and provide more details on the methods themselves. At this stage, it is sufficient to say that interviews, focus groups, participant and non-participant observation, oral histories, diaries, and document analysis form the core of ethnographic work. Interviews are the most commonly used technique in economics and themselves can be of several types, such as structured, semi-structured, unstructured, in-depth, and so on.

As noted earlier, such techniques are usually identified with anthropology. One may say that economic anthropologists already do work on class, race, gender relations, labor process, informal sector working conditions, and so on. So what distinguishes an

economic anthropologist doing ethnography, from an economist doing the same? In the following pages we hope to convince the reader that such techniques can play a crucial role in economic research as well. Of course, we are not advocating a renunciation of the usual tools of empirical economic analysis. Rather, we make a case for the inclusion of ethnographic techniques such as interviews, focus groups, field observations, and participant diaries in addition to quantitative statistical analysis. We show that such data can play a crucial role in providing information that is missing from surveys, in building an intuition for economic phenomena, in creating an awareness of the larger social context in which economic decisions are taken, and in helping to generate better models. Further, the process of generating our own data can help us do research that is relevant to the needs of the participants and involves them in its planning.

Recent Interest in Ethnographic Methods

Bergmann (2007) complains that two bottlenose dolphin groups recently studied by biologists for hunting behavior have ‘probably received more close attention in this single study than any of the human groups known as business establishments had received from professional economists in the last 200 years’ (p. 1). She goes on to argue: ‘economists would do best if they adopted the strategy of anthropologists, who go to live with the tribe they are studying and become participant-observers’. Bergman’s is just one among a growing chorus of voices advocating the use of qualitative and ethnographic data in economics (Bewley 2002; Helper 2000; Piore 2006; Starr 2014).

Susan Helper, in a 2000 article in the *American Economic Review*, argues for the inclusion of interview-based data, based on the experience of the Sloan Foundation-funded National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) project on Industry Studies. The program invokes a time-honored tradition in economics of observing firms at work:

The intellectual roots of industry studies can be traced to the economists Adam Smith (1723–1790) and Alfred Marshall (1842–1924), who demonstrated that the scientific foundation of economics and its social effects are enhanced by grounding analysis in the practical experience of industry and in the direct observation of production processes . . . In his preface to *Industry and Trade* (1919), Alfred Marshall explains that he had a career-long practice of visiting manufacturing plants so that he might be better informed by the experience.³

A 1998 special issue of the *Journal of Industrial Economics* was dedicated to papers emerging out of this program. In their introduction to the special issue, Borenstein et al. (1998, p. 123) note:

We believe that these papers demonstrate the value of such a combined interview/observation/analysis approach. All of these papers present traditional economic evidence (primarily statistical analysis) for the propositions they advance, but they also have benefited by supplementing this evidence with qualitative information that can only be gathered by direct observation and discussion.

Articles advocating the use of mixed methods research have also appeared in a variety of other field journals (Berik 1997; White 2002; Burton 2007; Starr 2014). Noteworthy is the 2001 special issue of the *Journal of Financial Economics*, the field’s premier journal, on ‘Contemporary research methodologies: the interplay of theoretical, empirical and

field-based research in finance', which according to Burton (2007) has been responsible for a renaissance of qualitative methods in the field. Starr (2014) is a particularly useful review of mixed methods research in areas of interest to heterodox economists. The article surveys the 'small explosion' of qualitative research in the past decade and half in areas such as:

studies designing or gauging the effects of social programs, especially among lower income groups; studies of willingness to pay for environmental interventions; studies related to poverty and capabilities sponsored by the World Bank; case-study research into innovation, R&D [research and development], and technological diffusion; and feminist-economics research into the 'lived experiences' of women's economic lives. (Starr 2014, p. 1)

The author calls the growth of qualitative research 'surprising' and foresees a 'promising future' for it.

Objections to Ethnographic Data

We do not deal with commonly encountered objections such as lack of rigor or 'softness' of qualitative data since other economists advocating these methods address these critiques elsewhere (Bewley 1999, 2002; Helper 2000; White 2002; Starr 2014; see also Pickbourn and Ramnarain, Chapter 4 in this *Handbook*). Many advocates note that even economists who do not dismiss qualitative methods for lack of rigor resist attempts to introduce them into the profession on the ground that this is 'not economics'. The resistance is particularly strong among mainstream economists. That these economists are not shy of encompassing other areas' subject matter is clear. In the past few decades many subjects such as family, marriage, and religion, which were traditionally studied by other disciplines, have become legitimate subjects of economic analysis. Even as economics expands its domain of analysis, it refuses to accept methodological pluralism. In fact, an argument can be made that mainstream economics is open to a very wide range of topics (including 'heterodox' concerns such as altruism, co-operatives, irrational behavior, distribution of property rights, and so on), but a very narrow range of methods. But we expect non-mainstream paradigms to be, a priori, more welcoming on this score, if only because an important heterodox critique of mainstream economics is its excessive reliance on mathematical formalism and statistical analysis (econometrics).

Since many of the examples of qualitative research we cite here have to do with uncovering motivations and decision-making processes of economic actors, we deal with one common criticism of ethnographic approaches, noted by Bewley (2002): that people do not always know their motives, and so their comments in this respect should not be taken seriously. A related concern mentioned by Brav et al. (2005) is that market participants do not have to understand why they do what they do (just as Friedman's famous billiards player does not know the physics necessary to plan his stroke). The authors point out that the exclusive focus on the predictive value of a model, as advocated by Friedman (1953 [1970]), makes it impossible to provide explanations for economic phenomena. If we seek to understand the motivations behind actions of economic actors, we have to investigate the realism of assumptions.

Objections arising out of such methodological positivism have been considered and refuted in detail by Bewley (1999, 2002). He remarks that this attitude places too much

power in the hands of the economists. Noting that economists often privilege introspection over talking to economic actors as a source of assumptions needed to make theory, Bewley points out that workers and their employers take economic decisions under complex and stressful work conditions that may be unfamiliar to academic economists. Bewley (2002, p. 350) asks: 'Why should an investigator's prejudices take precedence over those of the people studied? If you give yourself the right to ignore evidence, such as what decision makers say, there is little limit to what you can assert.' To take the author's example, it may be true that a baseball player can catch a ball without knowing the mathematics of its trajectory (behaving 'as if' he does), and by extension that economic actors act unconsciously in accordance with a complicated model they know nothing about. But if you want to learn how to play baseball (or even just learn something about how baseball is played), you are better off talking to a baseball player than a mathematician (Bewley 1999).

Reasons for Undertaking Qualitative and Ethnographic Work

Everyone acknowledges that ethnographic work is time-consuming, expensive, and difficult. Is it worth it? Alongside many others whose work is cited here, we answer 'yes' to this question. In this section we outline some reasons for saying so.

Ritchie and Lewis (2003) outline some kinds of questions that require detailed information, warranting qualitative techniques, and contextual analysis of the information thus gathered. These include:

- Mapping the nature, features and dimensions of a phenomenon. For example, manifestations of racism, concepts around standard of living or a living wage, what 'good behavior' entails.
- Descriptions of meanings people may attach to an event, experience or circumstance. For example, homelessness or incarceration.
- Identification of typologies. For example, models of organizing 'self-help' groups, systems of managing household accounts, or approaches to including women in development interventions.
- The contexts in which certain phenomena, actions, or decisions might occur. For example, the shaping of beliefs around racism, welfare, or environmental protection; factors leading to racism, domestic violence or childlessness.

While many more justifications may be given for undertaking ethnographic work, we focus here on five broad categories: going beyond official and existing categories of data collection; understanding the larger context in which economic decisions are taken and relations built, and building intuition for economic processes as well as better models for them; developing inclusive research processes; achieving reflexivity; and triangulating results from a variety of approaches.⁴

Going beyond existing data

By far the most common reason economists undertake field research or employ ethnographic techniques in their work is because survey data (either pre-existing or author-generated) fail to provide the required type of information. Data gathered from such

methods are used either as a supplement to quantitative analysis or as the principal form of empirics.

A classic example of this is the ‘informal economy,’ which encompasses economic activity that is outside the regulatory reach of the state. In developing countries the informal sector is the dominant sector of the economy, and it encompasses sophisticated and intricate economic institutions and relationships that have evolved over centuries. Official data sources usually do a poor job of capturing these relations, when they do so at all. The study of the informal economy has thus benefitted hugely from fieldwork and qualitative research by anthropologists as well as economists. Barbara Harriss-White has been advocating (and practicing) qualitative field-based research in economics for decades. Regarding the functioning of small-town informal markets in India, she notes: ‘[since] official statistics for local trade are extremely poor there is no alternative to field research to find out how it works’ (Harriss-White 2003, p.9). Similarly, income and expenditure surveys as well as labor force participation surveys in developing countries are often poorly tailored to the local context. White (2002) advances the example of the Zambia Living Conditions Monitoring Survey that, in rural areas, asks questions about paid annual leave but not about payment in kind for hired labor. In a context where the former is rare and the latter abundant, such a survey would give a distorted picture of the rural labor market.

Berik (1997) similarly cautions against relying solely on other-generated survey data, for feminist economics. She argues, ‘survey-generated data bear the imprint of values and ideological beliefs in survey design and implementation, and often produce male-biased accounts’ (p. 121). Excessive reliance on secondary data isolates the economist from the economic life of their research subjects and they ‘[lose] the opportunity to understand the subtleties of economic life’ (p.122). And most importantly, empirical questions being circumscribed by available data, the method chosen prevents the asking of certain questions, especially when they are of marginal concern to data collecting agencies. For instance, Varley (1996), in her assessment of household headship data, remarks on the inadequacy of the category of ‘head of household’ since a patriarchal bias in data collection often means that the role is automatically ascribed to the oldest male in the family. Similarly, other feminist scholars have pointed to conflicting agendas and unequal power relations within the household, displacing the prevalent notion of the household as a unified (and non-controversial) economic unit (see, e.g., Katz 1997).

A third well-known example is Bewley (1999) on wage rigidity during the recession. Labor force surveys generally do not contain the information necessary to understand why firms prefer lay-offs to wage cuts during an economic downturn. Rather than treating these variables as ‘unobservables’, Bewley interviews managers, headhunters, advisers of the unemployed, labor leaders and lawyers, and management consultants (336 interviews in total, mostly managers) in the US Northeast to find out reasons for wage rigidity. He encourages the economic actors to produce their own understandings and explanations rather than only test pre-existing theories.

Building intuition, insight, and better models

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p.1) argue that researchers using ethnographic methods are better able to understand the issue they are researching. Further, over a period of time, such engagement develops economic intuition and builds a ‘bullshit

detector'. That is, the researcher begins to develop a sense of what types of information are plausible and what are anomalous or unreliable, what mechanisms are reasonable to pursue, and so on. Good instincts can be developed by contact with the phenomenon studied. In a recent interview given to the *Financial Times*, Angus Deaton, Nobel Laureate in Economics for 2015, mentions the following in regards to the work of his long-time collaborator, Jean Dreze:

... he and I have done a lot of empirical work together looking at calories and nutrition and poverty rates and so on in India, and for me he's invaluable because he wanders around the country in sandals all the time talking to poor people and trying to do things with them. He sharecrops with people for years on end – he really knows what's going on on the ground – and you can't get that by just looking at the data. (<http://ftalphaville.ft.com/files/2015/11/AngusDeatonTranscript.pdf>)

Colorful language about 'sandals' aside, Deaton makes a crucial point that both Alfred Marshall and Ronald Coase have also singled out. Helper (2000, p.229) quotes Coase (pers. comm.): 'It's important to go out and discover the facts for yourself.' Indeed, Coase's description of the data collection process for his article 'The nature of the firm' reads very much like a mixed methods strategy (Coase 1988, p.9):

During my time in the United States I attended very few classes and although I visited a number of universities, most of my time was spent in visiting businesses and industrial plants . . . I read the reports of the Federal Trade Commission and books describing the organization of different industries, such as Copeland's study of the cotton textile industry. I also read trade periodicals and used more unusual sources (for an economist), such as the yellow pages of the telephone directory, where I was fascinated to find so many specialist firms operating within what we thought of as a single industry as well as such interesting combinations of activities as those represented by coal and ice companies.

Burton (2007, p.5), introducing a special qualitative research issue of *Studies in Economics and Finance*, reviews the 'pedigree and renaissance' of qualitative research in finance and financial economics. Burton argues that this body of work, using mostly key informant interviews with market actors, has offered new empirical insights into intangible assets such as inside information as well as provided a basis for the development of theoretical models of asset pricing. The author also avers that 'conventional quantitative analysis' by itself could not have arrived at such insightful conclusions regarding information flows. Brav et al. (2005, p.487), in a study of financial pay-out behavior by firms, conclude:

Scrutiny of stated assumptions should be important to theorists for two reasons. First, following Friedman, our results can provide for an even wider range of assumptions than have been used previously, some of which might lead to improved predictability. Second, for those who favor more realistic assumptions, our ability to distill which assumptions are deemed important by managers, and thus relevant to their decisions, has the potential to lead to better explanatory models.

Similarly, Bewley (1999, p.7) notes:

The economics literature contains a great many tests of models of wage rigidity and unemployment, but most of these rely on indirect evidence, for economists usually obtain information only from introspection and from surveys made by public institutions that produce data on easily quantifiable variables.

Engaging directly with economic agents forces the investigator to acknowledge the complexities of human motivations, thinking, and behavior; that is, the context-based nature of decisions. This can lead to a nuanced understanding of survey and experimental data as well. To put it another way, to consider official surveys and censuses as objective may at times simply mean confusing ignorance with objectivity. Ignorance of the data generation process should not form the basis for believing in its 'objectivity'. Even brief fieldwork stints, a few months long, can help in understanding the social context, leading to better interpretation of research findings. An example of how qualitative and ethnographic research methods have led to nuanced findings is Koopman's (1991) work in Africa that debunked the prevailing notion that households pooled incomes. Similarly, Agarwal's (1994) work on gender and land tenure in South Asia presents a detailed analysis of use rights as different from rights of ownership.

Developing inclusive research processes

Berik (1997, p.121) points out that even when economists occasionally undertake fieldwork, the fieldwork most often takes the form of administering one's own survey questionnaire. Such scripted surveys and interview schedules – which also seek to minimize contact with respondents – ostensibly serve to minimize possible sources of bias in the data. It is the researcher who subsequently analyses the data thus collected, and formulates categories and definitions from the data to explain economic phenomena. The researcher therefore presents as the 'expert', untouched and above both the research process as well as the respondent population who are the objects of study.

In contrast, qualitative methods strive to describe economic phenomena as experienced by the study population (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Feminist researchers, in particular, have argued that the point of view of unrepresented and marginalized participants, as presented in their own terms, is likely to reveal new knowledge about socio-economic phenomena, grounded in the lived experiences of participants (Hartsock 2004).

The use of qualitative and ethnographic research methods is especially salient where respondents' views of their own situations are of interest, and where it is desirable to challenge the conventional hierarchy of the research process through an inclusion of the voices and participation of the studied. Esim (1997) remarks that in her study of gender-based constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in Turkey, respondents felt power hierarchies were strongest during survey research when respondents were forced to give specific answers. In contrast, during qualitative interviews and focus groups, women could express their voice on matters most important to them. Kim (1997) finds that allowing a freer participation of interviewees in setting the agenda improved the quality of research by reducing interviewer bias, improving response rates, and facilitating trust in answering questions that may have been sensitive in nature.

Further, because of its time-consuming nature, qualitative research methods can force a higher level of commitment to the study and the subject. Scholars also argue that the affective experience of ethnographic research provides a motivation to researchers to invest in the community they are studying (see, e.g., Smith and Kleinman 2010). Qualitative methods also provide significant opportunities to reduce distance between the researcher and the researched, and build a less instrumental and more empathic relation between the two. Participatory and action research frameworks have emerged from these

very antecedents. A sense of responsibility develops on the part of the researcher towards the group being studied, in turn reducing power hierarchies between the researcher and the researched (Esim 1997).

Achieving reflexivity⁵

A defining feature of sound ethnographic research is reflexivity (Banister et al. 1994). The value of reflexivity in qualitative and ethnographic research has become the subject of much scholarly discussion in the social sciences over the past decade. While economics lags behind due to an emphasis on objective, dispassionate approach to uncover social ‘truth’, sociologists, anthropologists, and geographers committed to ethnographic research underscore reflexive practice – critical, ongoing self-reflection of ‘the ways in which researchers’ social background, assumptions, positioning and behavior impact on the research process’ (Finlay and Gough 2003, p.ix) – as a way of placing the researcher within the social context being researched. Feminist researchers, in particular, have espoused reflexivity as a means of identifying relationships of power in social research, and the impact of these relationships on the findings of research. Rather than treat the researcher as an impartial, impersonal, and neutral observer of events in the field,⁶ reflexivity encourages acknowledgment of the values, opinions, freedoms, and preconceived notions of the researcher and a deeper reflection into how they may impact both the process and the outcomes of research.

A researcher using ethnographic methods that entail direct confrontation of those being researched and a degree of immersion into the social setting of the researched over a significant period of time is not only able to better understand the issue being researched, but also able to examine their motivations in reaching specific conclusions from the research. Given that researchers spend significant time reading about the context and the people they wish to carry out research amongst before even venturing into the field, it is likely that certain preconceived notions are formed regarding the group being studied. These notions may color the interpretation of any data – interviews, observations, or documents – collected during the course of research. Further, personal characteristics of the researcher (age, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, academic credentials, sexuality, among others) and geopolitical power disparities between the researcher and the researched can also mediate how data is collected in the field, or which data are collected. Through an awareness of these aspects and documentation of them, ethnographic and qualitative researchers acknowledge their integral role in the research process. Finlay and Gough (2003) argue that researchers using ethnographic methods increase the validity of their findings through reflexivity that transforms personal experience into public – and therefore accountable – knowledge (p. 4).

Fonow and Cook (1991, pp.2–5) outline the value of reflexivity in raising consciousness, forming collaborations and alliances, and examining hitherto unexamined stages of the research process. In addition to these noteworthy aims, we argue that the reflexivity afforded by ethnographic research methods is of especial value to heterodox economics, which embraces the notion of the ‘socially embedded individual’ and is ‘built upon the institutions-history-social structures nexus’ (Davis 2008, p. 58). Further, much heterodox economics research is inspired by considerations on the part of the researcher of contributing to positive social change (in the spirit of Marx’s ‘11th Thesis on Feuerbach’).

Rather than technical fads or ‘coolness’, the heterodox researcher is typically driven by the human and social significance of the subject. Branches such as feminist economics or Marxian economics are explicitly concerned with understanding how gender or class positions affect economic outcomes. Ethnographic research methods allow much more easily for acknowledgment of the researcher’s own class, race, or gender position, and reflection on how it affects the data generation process. Further, the social structures of inequality or privilege that make possible primary data collection can also be rendered visible. Finally, the research agenda itself can be brought under scrutiny. Talking to participants in open-ended sessions may disabuse the researcher of preconceived notions and contribute to the creation of a research agenda more in tune with the heterodox aims of the study.

Triangulation of quantitative results

Findings from qualitative data also help to corroborate results obtained through the use of quantitative techniques, or vice versa. This technique, known as triangulation, is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 15 in this *Handbook*. Here, we will simply mention that qualitative and quantitative methods can be used in conjunction with one another, as mixed methods, to validate research findings. Mixed methods have become increasingly popular within development economics in particular, including poverty research – for instance, in the Q-squared research by Kanbur and Shaffer (2007) – and in assessing the impacts of development and welfare programs (microfinance, health, education, infrastructure, and social services) (see, e.g., Goetz and Sen Gupta 1996; Olmsted 1996; Rao and Woolcock 2003; Bird et al. 2010).

7.3 ETHNOGRAPHIC TECHNIQUES

Harding (1986) distinguishes methodology from methods in that the former pertains to the broad principles of research being carried out, while the latter refers to specific tools, procedures, and techniques used in research practice. As such, a range of tools is available to the qualitative researcher, depending upon the aims of the research and the kinds of questions it seeks to answer. These different methods, and the specific kinds of data they yield, are discussed in the following sections.

Interviews

Personal interviews tend to be the most common ethnographic technique employed by economists. Categorized by degree of structure, interviews may be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured and open-ended. Structured interviews are usually carried out when the number of respondents is large, to ensure standardization and comparability across interviews (Starr 2014). Structured interviews follow a predetermined sequence of questions with little to no variation in phrasing of questions or the order in which questions may be posed. As such, structured interviews are typically used in survey research and produce quantitative data, rather than data suitable for qualitative analysis. Piore (1979, p. 561) remarks on the unsuitability of highly scripted, close-ended interviews to elicit respondents’ stories:

If I took the latter approach (i.e. forcing respondents to give a codable response to each item), the respondents soon lost interest in the project and began to concentrate on getting through the questionnaire and on to their next appointment. In this process, they often provided misinformation in order to avoid an anticipated follow-up question.

Semi-structured interviews are typically organized around a set of predetermined questions (an interview guide); however, the questions are open-ended, with other follow-up questions emerging organically from the conversation between the interviewer and the respondent. Semi-structured interviews are a scheduled activity (Bernard 2011, p.210). Unstructured interviews are more like guided conversations on a set of topics, with minimum control over responses. Questions can emerge over time, based on the researcher's observations of a set of practices or behaviors. As a result, unstructured interviews usually take place hand-in-hand with participant observation (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). Unstructured and semi-structured interviews are usually aimed at gathering respondents' perceptions on the issue(s) discussed in their own words; that is, they aim to recover largely 'unfiltered' responses from participants based on their lived experiences (Starr 2014; Bernard 2011).

Deep inquiries into lived socio-economic or cultural experience may also warrant personal in-depth interviews. While not very common in economics, in-depth interviews are especially useful in contextualizing lives in conflict or economic transition, and reconstructing perceptions of events and experiences relating to the topic (see, e.g., Olmsted 1997; Ruwanpura 2004). In-depth interviews are versatile in that the questions may be organically included to incorporate participants' interests, and can inform a wide range of research issues. Life histories are examples of a kind of in-depth interview focused on obtaining biographical information regarding important phases in a person's life. Starr (2014) notes that life histories, while not a commonly used method in economic research, can nevertheless facilitate inquiry into 'longitudinal processes that shape life outcomes' (p. 5), as for instance in Buckland et al.'s (2010) study on persistent poverty in Canada. Life histories are more common in interdisciplinary fields of research such as development. Davis (2006) collected life histories in nine locations in western Bangladesh in order to identify episodes of crisis in people's lives and the way in which these crises were dealt with. The aim of the research was to obtain a better understanding of informal forms of social protection.

Interviews typically require a careful record of data, either through detailed notes maintained by the researcher, or through recordings and transcriptions that may then be coded for analysis. The choice of interview techniques depends upon the topic of study, the circumstances in which interviews are carried out (time or location), and the preferences of the researcher. For instance, Bewley (2002, p.347) mentions that he took detailed notes in a labor study because he believed that participants might be inhibited in their responses if a recording device was used, while the extensive information and data he received during a pricing study necessitated the use of a recorder, with the permission of participants.

Key-Informant Interviews

Emerging from participant observation, key-informant interviews are a valuable interview methodology. Originally developed in cultural anthropology, key-informant interviews

have been used within economics in studies on pricing, firm behavior, and the labor market (see, e.g., Bewley 1999; Brav et al. 2005). Bewley (2002) emphasizes the importance of finding key informants, ‘people in critical institutions [or] that are very knowledgeable about the topics studied’ (p. 345). A significant advantage of key-informant interviews is that good-quality data may be collected within a short period of time, which may then be useful in further developing research questions.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are loosely structured group discussions with multiple participants sharing their perspectives on a given issue, mediated by a facilitator-researcher. The focus group methodology emerged from marketing research (Bernard 2011) and is usually used in economic research in conjunction with other qualitative and quantitative methods. The data generated through focus groups typically includes not only what was said, but also observations regarding group dynamics, thought processes of respondents, and points of agreement or conflict. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) warn that each focus group represents a single entity within a sample of groups and therefore, these are not shortcut methods for collecting data from several respondents at the same time.

For van Staveren (1997, p. 132), the value of focus group research lies in the fact that it is able to bridge the dichotomy between theory and empirics in important ways:

First, the researcher steps down from the position of objective and detached scientist, confident that she always asks the right questions . . . Second, a focus group makes it possible to include active participation and diverse representation from the start by opening up the first phase of the research to empirical input from its context.

As such, focus groups are invaluable tools that ground research in the context in which it is carried out, as well as contribute to the reflexive process of the researcher in terms drawing awareness to held beliefs and values. For instance, van Staveren’s research in Nairobi with African women allowed her to re-examine her own assumptions about the value of economic independence for women:

I was accustomed to regard economic independence as a basic right, or a goal in itself. The African women who participated in the group, however, indicated that economic independence or empowerment can also be viewed as a necessary but insufficient means for human flourishing . . . economic independence was regarded as a group issue for women, not as an individual matter. (Van Staveren 1997, p. 133)

Focus groups are also useful tools to explore the reasoning behind decision-making processes. For instance, Albelda and Shea (2010) use data collected through focus groups to understand the ways in which the employment focus of anti-poverty programs and corresponding reductions in levels of public support for poor families have impacted the decisions parents make about whether or not to work more.

Besides development and feminist economics, focus groups have also been used in environmental economics as a method of valuating natural resources (Kaplowitz and Hoehn 2001), in contingent evaluation (Johnston et al. 1995), and ecological preservation programs (Kline and Wichelns 1996).

Ethnography and Participant Observation

While various types of interviews and focus groups can all be considered ‘ethnographic methods’, we use the term ‘ethnography’ to specifically describe a prolonged stint of fieldwork including participant observation.⁷ Starr (2014) considers 1–3 years as the required amount of fieldwork for ethnography. Such work is even more rare in economics than research based on qualitative data collected via interviews or non-participant observation (discussed next).

Participant observation is a mode of ethnographic research that entails spending time with, observing, and listening to respondents over a period of time, outside of interviews or structured interaction situations, ‘without any pretension of detachment’ (Berik 1997, p. 124). The researcher, rather than relying on direct inquiries into the motivations and behaviors of the study population, carefully documents everyday interactions and occurrences with the aim of understanding the nuances of complex and interconnected socio-economic processes within the community under study. Participant observation is therefore an active research process – indeed, a ‘mode of being-in-the-world for researchers’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 1996, p. 249) – that enables the researcher to confront their assumptions, preconceptions, and initial conceptual framework, and to carry out revisions to the framework to reflect social reality better.

While economists have not typically used ethnography and participant observation, sociology, geography, anthropology, and interdisciplinary areas of study (such as development studies) have used these methods to examine topics of economic significance. Some select examples include Keith Hart’s (1973; see also 1987) seminal work on the informal economy in Ghana; Venkatesh’s (2006) exploration of the underground economy of a poor, black community in Chicago’s Southside; David Mosse’s (2005) ethnography of development aid policy; Carla Freeman’s work on the impacts of globalization in the Caribbean; and Elizabeth Chin’s (2001) study of consumption. Economists have also co-authored works with scholars from disciplines that use ethnographic methods. A popular and oft-cited example is the collaborative exploration undertaken by economist Steven Levitt and anthropologist Sudhir Venkatesh on drug gangs and urban youth (Levitt and Venkatesh 2000, 2001). James Boyce, an economist, and Betsy Hartmann, a development studies scholar, undertook ethnographic work in rural Bangladesh (Hartmann and Boyce 1983) to understand the nature of poverty and the political economy of development, reporting their findings in *A Quiet Violence* (see also Starr 2014 for other examples).

Non-Participant Observation (Site Visits)

A distinction is sometimes drawn between the participant observer, that is, the researcher who plays an established participant role in the research, and the non-participant researcher who simply observes but does not actively participate or play a designated role. Non-positivist scholars who observe that researchers cannot study the social world without participating in it have criticized this dichotomy (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). At the same time, however, within economic studies, there are examples of non-participant observation (pure observation). Examples include studies that rely on site visits to workshop and factory floors where the researcher has simply recorded observations regarding the production process. Adam Smith’s notes on the pin factory and the

18 stages of producing a pin – resulting in the development of theories on the division of labor and productivity – are a notable example here. Site visits may take place in conjunction with other ethnographic methods such as interviews, or quantitative methods such as surveys, being used to gather data.

Document Analysis

Document analysis is a qualitative method used to systematically examine and evaluate documents to order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen 2009; Corbin and Strauss 2008). The documents could include reports produced by institutions and organizations, memos, background papers, evaluation studies, diary entries, newspaper and magazine articles, books, meeting minutes, maps and charts, letters and other communication, or various public records available in libraries, archives, and through organizational record-keeping. Analysis of these documents may include obtaining and synthesizing data, information, figures, or excerpts that can then be used to provide support for the researcher's arguments when organized into major themes or case examples (Bowen 2009, p. 28).

While economists do analyze documents as part of their research, document analysis rarely occupies the center stage. Most frequently, the analysis of documents appears as a part of the literature review, serving as the background for quantitative or qualitative data analysis, as a source of research questions, and as context for the interpretation of results. Documents and reports produced by international agencies often serve as the starting point for a scholarly investigation: for instance, Brück and Schindler (2009), in their analysis of widow-headed households in the aftermath of conflict, point to the large number of policy-oriented empirical case studies produced by development organizations, such as the United Nations, that address the role of women during wartime and the reconstruction period, in comparison to the relatively sparse scholarly work on this issue (Brück and Schindler 2009, p. 6). Document analysis has also been used on rare occasions for an analysis of the discourses prevailing in economics, and for self-reflection into the discipline's direction; Fine's (1999) critique of social capital based on previous studies and World Bank reports is a notable example here.

7.4 RECENT STUDIES EMPLOYING ETHNOGRAPHIC TECHNIQUES

As the foregoing discussion makes clear, qualitative research methods have been recently employed in a wide variety of areas: development economics, poverty and inequality, industrial organization, environment, social and institutional economics, labor economics, feminist economics, and financial economics.

In this section we discuss some recent studies in economics that have made use of ethnographic methods. In considering a study to be 'in economics' we employed the following criteria: one of the authors should be in an economics department or have a PhD degree in economics, or the study should have been published in an economics journal. Another recent review of such studies is Starr (2014), who also offers a schematic look

at the value added by qualitative approaches. While our typology differs from Starr's, we would like to direct the reader to her paper for more examples.

Instead of evaluating a study's merits, we focus on the author's aims and how qualitative data is used to achieve this aim. In the process we create five broad categories that emerge from these studies as particularly amenable to a qualitative approach:

1. Trust, social networks, institutions (family, kinship, community), and norms: studies that investigate the role of trust in market transactions, or identify the role played by social networks of economic actors, as well as informal institutions and norms in economic outcomes.
2. Power relations between actors in institutions: qualitative approaches have been particularly useful in understanding how gender, race, or ethnic hierarchies constrain participation of oppressed groups in economic decision-making.
3. Motivation, decision-making processes: interview techniques have frequently been employed in economics to describe the motivations of economic actors or to understand their decision-making processes.
4. Identity and perceptions: techniques such as interviews and observation have also helped economists investigate how people perceive effects of macroeconomic events (such as recessions) or outcomes of policy measures.
5. Labor process and managerial strategies: a classic concern of Marxist economists, qualitative methods have been employed to investigate working conditions, challenges to unionization, and deskilling.

In Table 7.1 we present 23 studies that fall within one of these categories.

7.5 EMERGING HORIZONS, NEW FRONTIERS: ENCOURAGING MORE ETHNOGRAPHIC AND QUALITATIVE WORK

In this chapter, we have examined the relevance of ethnographic and qualitative methods for the discipline of economics. We have presented evidence that qualitative observations have always been an important part of economic theory, from Smith, Marshall, and Coase to contemporary researchers. In recent times, there has been increasing interest in qualitative and mixed methods research in economics that utilizes data collected through ethnographic techniques; interviews, focus group discussions, participant observations, site visits, and document analyses have been applied to varying degrees in mainstream and heterodox research in development, applied microeconomics, feminist economics, institutional economics, and labor economics.

Despite these developments, qualitative and ethnographic methods remain on the sidelines within the discipline. Even as more studies have emerged in recent times that attempt to bridge methodological (and disciplinary) divides, several structural constraints remain in place that discourage scholars and students from methodological pluralism. The most substantial barrier in economics remains lack of training and the methodological imperialism of econometrics and models. Indeed, a primary reason that heterodox economists and graduate students do not take on projects requiring

Table 7.1 Recent studies employing ethnographic techniques

Theme	Study	Abstract	Method and Sample
Trust, social networks, informal norms, and kinship relations	Adato et al. (2006)	<p>This is an article on post-apartheid South Africa. The authors argue that an apartheid pattern continues, leaving few avenues for upward social mobility and trapping poor blacks in a cycle of poverty; failure of the Washington Consensus suggests a very persistent poverty. Qualitative research shows that social connections are important in helping households look for work, get by in times of need, or cope with shocks. Yet, they are not connections that provide pathways out of poverty. Thus, social capital becomes more narrowly constructed and increasingly ineffective as a mechanism of capital access for poor people in a country facing a legacy of horizontal inequality and social exclusion.</p>	<p>The study uses the 1993–1998 KIDS (KwaZulu Natal Income Dynamics Study) panel data set, collected from a random selection of households in KwaZulu Natal selected in 1993 and then interviewed again in 1998. It also uses in-depth interviews gathered from a subset of 50 KIDS households in 2001.</p>
	Lyon and Porter (2009)	<p>This study explores market institutions and trust in Nigeria. Although the authors are not economists, the article deals with a central question in economics: the role of trust and moral norms in complex market transactions without formal systems of contracts. The authors focus on the vegetable market in the Jos region of Nigeria. They are also interested in asking whether trust is a result of a power relation between non-equals.</p>	<p>The database consists of 80 interviews with farmers and traders in rural, semi-urban, and urban markets. The sampling is purposive, as is usually the case in interview-based research, and attempts to cover a cross-section of different economic activities, gender, and wealth status. While analyzing data the authors draw on grounded theory.</p>
	Sanghera and Satybaldieva (2009)	<p>This study contributes to an understanding of how economies are socially instituted and embedded. The case is Kyrgyzstan's transition to a market economy. It examines how</p>	<p>The data come from semi-structured interviews with 33 interviewees from a broad spectrum of occupations, who possessed some experience of the Soviet planned economy,</p>

economic pressures, unregulated markets, and economic and social inequalities can affect moral sentiments and emotions, and can override ethical considerations: morality is typically ignored in orthodox economics, or assumed to be value and judgment neutral. The study includes narratives and oral interview quotations on the transition to a market economy: examples of increased freedom and better planning, how corruption has also increased (experience of payment of bribery), experiences and observations of how market systems care little for poor and vulnerable groups, and anger about inequality. Respondents also talk about how the public sector has changed in terms of cost-cutting, and lack of commitment of officials, and how grades in schools can be bought ('tariffs for different grades').

Wolf (1990)

This study examines the role of kinship in determining the decision of daughters to work outside the house in factory employment in two contexts: Java and Taiwan. While Javanese daughters have relative autonomy in seeking factory employment, sometimes against their parents' wishes, Taiwanese daughters are obliged to work for years to contribute to household income. Javanese daughters are able to do so due to a greater acceptance of women as economic agents, while Taiwanese daughters are more constrained due to the patriarchal view of daughters as 'temporary' family members who must repay their debt to their parents.

and were asked questions on their views of the transition to a market economy. The interviewees were chosen to cover different professions, age groups, ethnicities, and genders. Furthermore, one of the authors worked in universities in Novosibirsk in Russia and Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan for four years, and both authors have had several years of opportunity to observe social life in the region.

The author uses ethnographic and qualitative data collected through fieldwork in both Java and Taiwan to contrast the two cases, and to complicate the conventional economic understanding of the household as a unified entity. She argues that kinship structures matter in how daughters are able to exercise their agency.

Table 7.1 (continued)

Theme	Study	Abstract	Method and Sample
Trust, social networks, informal norms, and kinship relations	Colin (2008)	This study looks at access to land in African households. Categories of private versus communal property, or modern versus customary systems, do not provide an adequate framework for the understanding of the variety of property rights encountered in the African context. Further, intra-family land relationships usually remain as a black box, even if kinship relations constitute a major institution governing access to land and land management. Finally, the concept of household as the main analytic unit regarding resource access may be questioned in a number of situations in Africa, where men and women separately conduct productive enterprises within households and where the family relationships regarding access to productive resources and transfers of wealth are far from circumscribed within the limits of the conjugal and residential unit.	This study addresses the weaknesses listed alongside through ethnographic study alonged in institutional economics as well as legal and economic anthropology. The author has performed long-term ethnography among matrilineal Baoules settled in the village of Djimini-Koffikro, in Lower Ivory Coast.
Power relations between various actors within an institution	Akbulut and Soylu (2012)	This study investigates how local power imbalances can subvert participatory resource management systems implemented by the Turkish state. The authors use their case study data to argue that even as resource management programs are participatory on paper, local power structures neglected at the policy formation stage do not allow for the opinions of all stakeholders to be included. For example, almost no women knew about the meetings being held in the community to solicit opinions	The authors use a case-study approach based on surveys, focus groups, and interviews (including key informant interviews with state officials in charge of implementing policies).

	of the local population. In interviews, women confessed to thinking that their opinions were probably considered irrelevant.	
Harriss-White (2003)	Capital accumulation at the local level, class formation in villages and smaller towns, are all mostly missing from large-scale surveys and require the researcher to do field research. The author constructs a narrative account of evolving gender relations, capital accumulation at the local level, caste-based market institutions, and how access to the state is shaped by religion, ethnicity, and gender. Long-term ethnography creates a rich description of commerce in small-town India.	Harriss-White has been visiting the southern Indian town of Arni (population around 100 000) for more than three decades. But she rarely uses direct quotes from interviews, preferring to construct a narrative based on qualitative and quantitative information gathered from repeated visits.
Sangameswaran (2008)	The author investigates the construction of an 'ideal village' community in the context of a watershed development project in western India. The study looks at how diverse interests within a village are reconciled to produce a 'community'. Villagers' visions of justice and development are explored, as are the roles of volunteer labor and self-help groups in the implementation of the watershed development project. The study challenges narratives that depict 'the community' as homogenous (conflict-free) or 'ideal' on the one hand, and backward and divided on the other.	Based on a three-month stay in the village the study employs a combination of semi-structured interviews, participation in village-level activities, open-ended discussions, and observation. These are combined with secondary data collected from village officials and organizations implementing the watershed development program.
Koopman (1991)	This is a classic study that challenges the characterization of rural African households as 'unified production/consumption units' having one objective function ('benevolent dictator' or identical preferences). It shows that men and women conduct separate enterprises and manage separate budgets. It measures differences in women's and men's labor times, incomes, and investment capacities.	Five years of fieldwork doing qualitative and quantitative work in rural Cameroon.

Table 7.1 (continued)

Theme	Study	Abstract	Method and Sample
Power relations between various actors within an institution	Rao (2008)	The study takes the case of the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh to investigate the operation of a women's empowerment program. The content of the empowerment policy is investigated and the author shows that the state lowered shares of expenditure devoted to social reproduction, while women's empowerment was equated with micro-credit programs. Determinants of participation in these programs are investigated. Qualitative data show that programs: (1) lack administrative support; and (2) tend to rely upon the expenditure of time and resources by participants, which eventually undermines the broader project of empowerment.	The study uses a combination of econometric estimation and qualitative interview data. Data collected from two villages over nine months include participant observation as well as surveys and interviews.
	Dema-Moreno (2009)	The study focuses on financial decision-making among dual-income heterosexual couples in Spain. The author provides evidence that, despite claims of equality, there are decisions about income pooling and income use that are not negotiated or made by consensus. Established social norms and gender relations are important and, frequently, there are issues that couples exclude from negotiation. In-depth interviews were employed because they give insights into the internal dynamics and negotiation strategies of each member through the observation of real negotiations.	Qualitative, in-depth interviews were undertaken with couples, with each couple being interviewed together and separately. This allowed researchers to study financial decision-making processes and to detect gender inequalities that may appear during negotiations. The author notes that surveys are frequently used tools in this kind of study, but do not provide much information on the financial decision-making process, and about the role each family member plays.
Motivations and decision-making processes of economic actors	Bewley (1999)	The principal finding of the study is that managers are reluctant to lower wages during a recession for fear of destroying employee morale, a result that the author says he would	Adopting an ethnographic approach Bewley interviewed 246 managers in small and large manufacturing and service sector firms in the Northeast of the US.

not have taken seriously prior to undertaking the study. The study presents extensive interview data in the form of direct quotations. The author was motivated to undertake the study because the usual survey variables such as wages, salaries, employment status, firm size, age, sex, and race of workers are not sufficient to distinguish between theories of wage rigidity.

This study investigates factors that drive dividend payment and stock-repurchase decisions. The authors believe that the 'field interviews provide a benchmark describing where academic research and real-world dividend policy are consistent and where they differ' (p. 484), and note that interviews allow for open-ended questions so that answers can guide further questions (unlike preset survey questions).

This study explores the gray area between formality and informality in the US labor market. The subject of the study lends itself to an ethnographic analysis since official data sources and other secondary data are likely to underreport undocumented migrants and their economic activity. The study reports some counter-intuitive findings based on worker interviews. For example, some workers report preferring wages below the legal minimum wage. This is because being paid at the legal rate would reduce take-home pay due to taxes.

The study documents increased rate of exploitation of wood harvesters in the North Maine Woods and a transition from a 'high-road' to 'low-road' labor relations over a

Brav et al. (2005)

Based on a survey of 384 financial executives and 23 in-depth interviews. The authors combine regression analysis with analysis of interview data.

Cobb et al. (2009)

Based on 12 in-depth (hour-long) and 80 shorter interviews with Mexican migrant workers in Oregon.

Goldstein and Hillard (2008)

Uses a mark-up pricing model alongside quantitative survey data from the Maine Department of Labor and qualitative interview data.

Table 7.1 (continued)

Theme	Study	Abstract	Method and Sample
Motivations and decision-making processes of economic actors		20-year period. The qualitative portion of the study attempts to 'uncover the motivations, strategies, and responses of the interacting classes that led to a high-road policy and its later reversal through extensive interviews/oral histories of industry experts, industry decision makers, labor movement leaders, and independent logging contractors'. The authors do not use extensive quotes (a companion paper does this) but instead use the data to create a narrative of changing corporate strategies in the paper industry. The focus is on managing supply chain uncertainty and the diffusion of mechanical harvesting technology.	
	Scheibl and Wood (2005)	The investment behavior of firms in the British brick industry is studied. The authors ask how investments are coordinated between firms to avoid excess capacity in the industry. They adopted an exploratory approach to theory building, using inductive methodology to draw insights from qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data are used to 'get inside the black box of the market adjustment process'.	The authors address the question using interview data. Methods and instruments were adapted as the study progressed. Interviews were conducted via site visits and by telephone (senior managers of larger firms). Authors report not using a tape recorder due to the sensitivity of the information.
	Morgan and Olsen (2011)	The authors study micro-credit programs in the form of women's self-help groups (SHGs) in two villages in the state of Andhra Pradesh, in south India. Looking specifically at loans taken for cow ownership, the authors explore escalating debt and aspirational components of borrowing by the poor. They also look at the	Authors have been conducting research in the area since 1985. Data are collected via questionnaires completed by a representative sample from each village followed by semi-structured interviews. Interestingly, the authors have also made interview transcripts as well as field notes available with the ESRC

<p>‘fallacy of composition’ effect, that is, falling incomes in petty production due to increased competition resulting from proliferating micro-businesses.</p>		<p>QualiData Archive (http://www.esds.ac.uk/qualidata/).</p>
<p>Gezici (Chapter 16 in this <i>Handbook</i>)</p>	<p>The author uses mixed methods: interview data from semi-structured discussions with the managers of 33 manufacturing companies in Turkey. The variables that are salient in the interviews are then used in the investment specification, which is then tested econometrically with panel data.</p>	<p>33 interviews with managers of firms in Turkey to identify the factors impacting investment of manufacturing firms.</p>
<p>Clark et al. (2000)</p>	<p>This is a study of contingent valuation (CV) and willingness to pay (WTP). Authors note that in the debates about the validity and legitimacy of CV, researchers do not engage directly with respondents to explore what survey-generated the WTP figure means. The study uses qualitative methods coupled with a CV survey performed to appraise conservation policy in the UK. The results show that respondents have problems in contextualizing the worth of a scheme in both monetary and non-monetary terms, and express feelings that values for nature are not commensurable with monetary valuation. Participants also challenge claims that the CV process democratically incorporates public values in policy decisions. Instead they argue for a decision-making institution where local people can contribute to environmental policy decisions.</p>	<p>The qualitative research was conducted with respondents after they had completed the CV questionnaire. The principal technique employed is in-depth group discussions with lay people to explore values, meanings, knowledge, and practices.</p>

Table 7.1 (continued)

Theme	Study	Abstract	Method and Sample
Motivations and decision-making processes of economic actors	Albelda and Shea (2010)	The authors explore factors taken into account by low-income parents when deciding about how much to work. Parents make decisions based not only on immediate needs, but also taking into account future opportunities. They also weigh long-term risks that accompany more work and less time with children. The study reveals that mothers are forced to choose between the families' immediate financial and care needs and investing in the labor market for (uncertain) long-term pay-offs.	Data were collected from 22 focus groups with 166 parents whose incomes ranged from 75 per cent to 325 per cent of the federal poverty line. Conversations lasted 1.5 hours during which participants were asked to comment on specific scenarios such as: 'a low-income single mother, receiving housing assistance and health insurance, finds herself being offered more hours of work, and with it more pay but likely less government support'. Participants were asked what they would do in such (and other) situations. Participants were paid \$25 and food was provided. Childcare was available on-site. The survey was then carried out in textile, food, and furniture sectors from February to April 2002. The questionnaire was administered to 240 people: 120 workers and 120 small employers. Sampling was purposive. Questionnaire included open- and close-ended questions. Each interview took about 35–40 minutes.
Identity and perceptions	Erbaş and Turan (2009)	This study investigates the social impact of the 2001 Turkish economic crisis through fieldwork conducted among workers and small employers. The impact of the crisis is analyzed in terms of both the changes in household expenditures and people's perception of neoliberal policies. The authors use qualitative data to understand how the participants evaluate the crisis.	

Olmsted (1997)	<p>This study is a brief account of education and employment patterns among Palestinian women. The author motivates the qualitative approach by noting that she could not separate lived (or qualitative) experience from quantitative data. Neoclassical models obscured the complexity and interrelatedness of observed processes and outcomes. Through the stories of three Palestinian women, the author identifies questions such as how we gather evidence, and what is considered acceptable evidence within economics.</p>	Life histories of three women.
Labor process and managerial strategies	<p>This study is an account of a successful unionization campaign among casino dealers, based on an ethnographic study of workers in Atlantic City, New Jersey's 11 casinos. Objective is to look into whether economic development strategies are creating jobs that provide workers with the resources they need to build fulfilling lives, and what constitutes a 'good' job. Casino gaming has become more competitive, with cost-cutting strategies in place: temporary dealers and fewer full-time dealers hired as part of cost cutting, benefits reduced or taken away, penalties for sick days increased, work intensity increased (serving more tables), and more electronic games. The smoking ban in public places is not applicable for casino floors. These factors emerge from the interviews with employees that authors report on: context and factors are made explicit here.</p>	Based on interviews with nonrandom sample of employees.

ethnographic techniques and qualitative data collection is that they lack methodological preparation. Coursework in economic methodology generally consists of mathematics and econometrics. Students seeking to incorporate any alternative methods into their research must, as a result, either educate themselves by reading materials on these techniques on their own, or seek such training in other departments such as sociology, anthropology, or education. The difficulty here is the relative isolation that economics graduate student researchers interested in alternative methodologies find themselves in. The isolation is compounded by the fact that since these techniques have not been used, advising on them may be inadequate.

There are a myriad other challenges for scholars who transgress traditional methodological boundaries. Qualitative research is frequently expensive, time-consuming, and requires a local professional support network. In cases of ethnographic research or participant observation, it may also take the researcher to unfamiliar (and occasionally unsafe) locales where they may confront linguistic barriers or new social positioning based on their class, ethnicity, gender, and/or race. These challenges are not insurmountable, however. Some departments in other disciplines require fieldwork as a dissertation component. Special funding opportunities could be set up to encourage methodological pluralism. Most crucially, a refereed outlet for the publication of methodologically diverse research would be a valuable addition to further the discussion on methods within the discipline.

In heterodox economics, in particular, ethnographic and qualitative research methods broaden the scope of economic inquiry afforded by existing data sets and allow us to map some of the power dimensions of the research questions we pursue; an essential contribution to transforming the discipline. Indeed, the examples cited above illustrate the value of ethnographic methods in capturing social reality more accurately, be it mapping the role of social institutions, cultural norms, and social networks in determining economic outcomes, developing a better understanding of the economic decision-making process, tracing the role of social hierarchies and cultural norms in decision-making, or exposing power relations between actors in social and economic institutions. Further, since heterodox economics aims to be self-aware of the hierarchies prevalent in data collection and knowledge construction, it is hoped that an inclusion of ethnographic methods will allow for more inclusive and accountable research processes, greater involvement of the researcher in and accountability to the groups that have participated in the research, and greater self-reflection on the part of the researcher towards the goals of the research. As we economists venture out into the world more and more, we will undoubtedly discover, in the words of Truman Bewley (1999, p.39), that ‘it is better to face economic reality than to invent it’.

NOTES

1. ‘Economists rely heavily on a few data sources, particularly on those collected by the federal government, and are much more likely to use survey data collected by another party. Papers with at least one non-economist author are much more likely to use self-collected data (for example, interviews, author-designed surveys, experiments)’ (Jacobsen and Newman 1997, p. 129).
2. The journals were chosen such that their overall rank in the world of heterodox journals (Lee et al. 2010) was in the top 25, and the research they published covered a broad range of paradigms and approaches.

3. 'What is industry studies?', <http://www.sloan.org/major-program-areas/recently-completed-programs/industry-studies/what-is-industry-studies/>.
4. Helper's (2000) reasons include the following: 'researchers can ask people directly about their objectives and constraints, fieldwork allows exploration of areas with little preexisting data or theory, fieldwork facilitates use of the right data, fieldwork provides vivid images that promote intuition'.
5. Note that we use 'reflexivity' to mean critical self-reflection here; it is not used in the sense used by George Soros (2008, 2013) in his theory of economic agents.
6. England (1994) attributes this idea of the researcher to the prevalence of 'positivist-inspired training' emerging from the 'methodological hegemony of neopositivist empiricism' (p. 242). The emphasis on objectivity within neopositivist empiricism entails a strict dichotomy between the subject and object of study in this framework.
7. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) draw attention to the controversy around the term 'ethnography', which has been difficult to define. They state: 'For some it refers to a philosophical paradigm to which one makes a total commitment, for others it designates a method that one uses as and when appropriate. And, of course, there are positions between these extremes' (p. 248).

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