

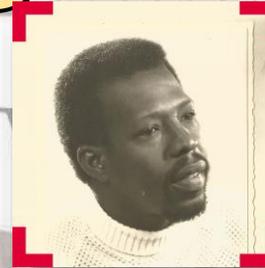
Covert Participant Observations

Covert participant observations require the researcher to become part of a group without revealing their true identity or that they are conducting research. This method has many **practical** and **ethical** issues.



An advantage of this method is that it allows researchers to experience first-hand the activities of the group. As the group are unaware of being researched they may act more naturally – increasing validity

Not only does the researcher have to establish a cover in order to access the group, they need to maintain that cover throughout the observation – in some instances years.

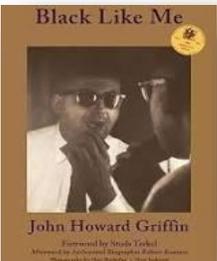


There are many practical issues however, including the recording of conversations and taking notes. The researcher is often reliant upon their memory and if found out could be at risk of losing research or worse.

Establishing a cover may involve modifying the researchers appearance – dramatically in some cases: McIntyre and Griffin are two examples of this

Sociologist Ken Pryce's body was found on the shores of a Jamaican beach after conducting research into Jamaican gangs

Ethically, researchers are deceiving their participants, failing to gain informed consent and potentially placing themselves and others at harm. Covert obs have to be approved by ethics committees



McIntyre was tattooed and Griffin – a white man- changed the colour of his skin to experience racism in society

However, they are useful for hard to reach groups and provide *verstehen* (insight) into lives of others

Sociological Research Methods