

## **Living Everyday and Studying Everyday**

Sudarshana Sen

**Abstract:** *When we look around us, we find visual images, vibrant and vivid. The experiences we have form the basis of our subjective understanding of these visual images and ways of studying our every day. But when we study these vivacious but mundane, routine everyday that we live it becomes an object and subject of study. In anthropology engaging in experimental forms of writing there ushered in new ways to represent sensory embodied and visual aspects of culture, knowledge and experience. This encouraged the use of other modes and media of representation, including ethnographic film and photography, performance anthropology, and exhibition. Significantly it was during the 1980s and especially the 1990s that, as academics gradually converted their office practices to the use of computers; digital media became an increasingly normal part of everyday anthropological practices of writing and communicating. Within this context, the development of a theory and practice of hypermedia anthropology began to emerge in the 1990s. Since the publication of the first edition of the Handbook, in 2000, methods that go by the generic name of everyday experience methods have matured from the status of promising innovations to standard tools in social-personality psychology. By everyday experience methods, we prefer not to a specific instrument or procedure but rather to a paradigm for studying social-psychological phenomena as they occur in the ebb and flow of everyday life – to “capture life as it is lived” (Bolger, Davis & Rafaeli 2003: 580). Everyday experience methods offer more than just another methodological alternative; their focus on ordinary, spontaneous activity allows researchers to evaluate theoretical models and hypotheses from a perspective that differs fundamentally from traditional methods. The payoff is a detailed, accurate, and multifaceted portrait of social behaviour embedded in its natural context. This paper shall discuss possible ways on how this can be done.*

**Keywords:** Methodology of everyday life, everyday, dialogues, discourses, looking at everyday life.

### ***Introduction***

In trying to answer what is everyday and if *everydays* are differently portrayed in conventional research, it can be said that we live everyday but it is not reflected in its most minute details in traditional research and writings. Perhaps *everydays* are so pervasive; our *everydays* get entangled with that of others and so studying it becomes difficult. But as a student of sociology can it be a new problem for us? We have been trained to study social life while being a part of it! There has been an excess of dialogues, and discourses stating how detachment and involvement are to be managed to “look at” and “understand” what is going around us. Then what is our problem? Let me dissect this to recognize “what it is?” and “how is it to be studied?”

### ***What is “Everyday”: The Leading Question***

I first stumbled upon the concept “Sociology of Everyday Life.” It is not everyday per se but a sociological analysis of everyday. Therefore, it brings to the forefront the theories, paradigms, and approaches to the study of everyday. The everyday as lived, the everyday as practised, the everyday as memory and the everyday as to be studied - all are brought under the scrutiny of the “Sociological”. When it is brought under the theoretical lens of sociological analysis, we are perplexed at the complexities it can bring, the layered understanding of the “familiar”, the different vantage points through which it can be looked at. But is it not already a field studied? What I mean is for example the violence within family, is already a field navigated, a slice of life complexities we have already come across when we study say for example “the dark side of family?” Then where lies the significance of studying it through our *everydays*, daily experience? Once we had taken the journey of knowing it how can we know it differently from a different angle?

The second is while studying the everyday experience where do I position myself? Why I take this up because when I look at others’ everyday experiences I either look at them as objects of inquiry or I empathise. Another is that much of what matters to people in everyday life is obscured from the “view” of traditional research methods. For instance, what people do (practices/practical activity), what they feel (emotions/affect), their regularity and temporality (routine), and their *situatedness* about others (relationships) in their everyday lives are often done at home, in private and/or at times when researchers are not part of their lives. Not only is

everyday life continually moving on but significant parts of it are lived by people out of the radar of even their most intimate family members. My understanding of my everyday is also overloaded with the same question. Do I look at my moments as a detached observer or do I express the feelings surrounding my everyday moments as I had experienced them and leave the rest for the reader to digest?

To answer these questions let me take you through the three domains of inquiry distinctly important to understand everyday living. Moreover, because data are provided moment-by-moment, day-by-day, or event-by-event, distortions inherent in asking individuals to select, recall, and summarize many events varying in recency and memorability are precluded or at least attenuated (see Schwarz 2007; 2012, for reviews). Relying on observations that represent behaviour across multiple occasions and settings is also likely to enhance the representativeness and generalizability of data. Everyday experience studies permit researchers not only to investigate the operation of social processes in ordinary, self-selected situations but also to characterize those contexts in some detail.

### ***Why take up the study of Everyday?***

Everyday experience studies have three general purposes: establishing the prevalence and or qualities of phenomena, testing theoretically generated hypotheses and propositions, and serving as a “discovery” technique for generating new hypotheses.

Reis (1994) described three domains of inquiry, each scrutinizing a phenomenon or process from a distinct perspective. Research programs that incorporate all three perspectives are likely to be most informative.

One perspective termed *exemplary experience*, consists of studies in which behaviour is observed in specific, restricted, or otherwise special settings. This includes laboratory experiments, in which behaviour is observed under controlled conditions, and observational studies, which are carried out in uniform, often intrinsically relevant settings, such as playgrounds, worksites, and kitchens (Cialdini & Paluck 2014).

Particular settings may induce optimal behaviour even when participants are unaware or unconcerned about being observed. Many contexts, notably including research laboratories, elicit polite, formal, cooperative, or thoughtful behaviour that departs from behaviour displayed in everyday settings. Marital interaction observed in the laboratory may differ from marital

interaction at home (Larson, Richards & Perry-Jenkins 1994); for example, in the laboratory, participants rarely leave the room when asked to self-disclose or carry out an unpleasant task, as spouses sometimes do at home. Situational cues provided by research laboratories have not been studied extensively (but see Shulman & Berman 1975), although it seems clear that the laboratory setting itself may prime certain expectations and scripts (e.g., scientific legitimacy, serious purpose, suspicion about possible deception, concerns about being observed, the need for attentiveness), all of which may affect participants' thoughts and behaviour in both intentional and unintentional ways.

The second perspective, also familiar to social-personality psychologists, is *reconstructed experience*. Here, participants are asked to evaluate, summarize, or otherwise describe in a questionnaire or interview format their experiences with specific entities or in particular situations. The third domain, *ongoing experience*, focuses on direct, usually immediate reports of everyday experience. Verifying causal antecedents with maximum internal validity is generally not the overriding concern; rather, these studies aim to maximize external validity by examining specific processes or phenomena within the stream of routine, voluntary activity. With suitable analysis, they permit specification of contexts in which target behaviours do and do not occur, they identify natural patterns of variation in target behaviours and co-variation with predictors and spontaneous consequences, and they document the prevalence and nature of phenomena.

What type of research fits this category? Generally, these studies share an interest in the ongoing, often mundane moments and occurrences of everyday life. They concern the diverse feelings, thoughts, and activities that occur spontaneously, filling people's waking time and occupying most of their conscious thoughts and attention. Daily life events have a structure and rhythm of their own, sometimes variable and fleeting, at other times stable and continuous. Some daily events are vivid and arousing, others are mundane and inconsequential. The central assumption behind this approach is that all such experiences matter and that when examined carefully, may provide valuable insights about human behaviour.

Our premise is that each domain offers a different but no less valuable perspective on a given process or phenomenon. Studies of exemplary experience are informative about behaviour in particular, well-specified contexts and help establish the causal impact of those contexts. Studies of reconstructed experiences tell us how people understand their lives and activities. Studies of everyday experience provide insights into thoughts,

feelings, and activities that occur in natural settings. Irrespective of methodological considerations, important conceptual benefits accrue from including all three domains in a research program.

Researchers have had a longstanding interest in the impact of major life events, such as marriage, divorce, bereavement, the birth of a child, major illness, and employment changes, on emotional well-being, health, and social activity (e.g., Kessler 1997; Lucas 2007). Everyday experience research adopts a different perspective, exploring the impact of minor, or mundane, events on the same general outcomes, based on the assumption that ordinary evenings spent in quiet conversation with a partner or irritating days at work may also be influential, especially when recurrent. Enduring patterns of emotion or interaction may matter in the long run, even if any single episode is negligible – habitual types of communication between spouses, ongoing patterns of interaction among teachers and students, or co-workers, supervisors, and employees, or chronic styles of self-regulation, for example.

The study of minor life events and states lends itself well to the everyday experience approach. By definition mundane, these events tend to be unmemorable, compromising retrospective methods. Moreover, people tend to have difficulty perceiving regularities or cyclical variations within a series of relatively inaccessible events, so that global self-reports are likely to be uninformative or misleading. In contrast, repeated, contemporaneous reports of even the most forgettable feelings or events allow researchers to identify whatever meaningful patterns may exist and whatever consequences they may have.

Everyday experience studies may also reveal the repercussions of major events and chronic stressors. Certain life events, such as divorce, spousal loss, or a heart attack, may have their greatest impact by disrupting everyday routines and altering ongoing mood and thought (Caspi, Bolger & Eckenrode 1987). Similarly, several studies have found that daily stressors account for differences in daily well-being associated with more chronic stressors, such as low socioeconomic status (Gallo, Bogard, Vranceanu & Matthews 2005) and chronic racial discrimination (Ong et al. 2009). Retrospective impressions of major life events may elicit naive theories about the presumptive impact of transformative events rather than objective accounts (Ross 1989). On the other hand, their actual impact can be established with diary records, in longitudinal (i.e., comparing pre-event and post-event experiences) or cross-sectional designs.

Daily life protocols are intended to “capture life as it is lived” (Bolger, Davis & Rafaeli 2003: 580)—that is, to describe behaviour as it occurs within its typical, spontaneous setting. By documenting the “particulars of life” (Allport 1942), these methods provide extensively detailed data that can be used to examine the operation of social, psychological, and physiological processes within their natural contexts. A key premise of the daily life approach is that the contexts in which these processes unfold matter - in other words, that context influences behaviour, and that proper understanding of behaviour necessarily requires taking contextual factors into account. As the accessibility and popularity of daily life methods have increased, so too has researchers’ ability grown in both range and complexity to ask and answer important questions about behaviour.

The rationale for daily life measures is often couched in methodological terms; for example, they eliminate retrospection bias or minimize selectivity in describing experiences (see Schwarz 1912). To be sure, these are important advantages, especially in those topical areas that must rely on self-reports (e.g. when the individual’s personal experience is the focus of research). Nevertheless, the conceptual advantages of daily life protocols provide an equally, if not more, compelling justification for their implementation. Daily life methods allow researchers to describe behaviour as it occurs in natural contexts - a fundamental difference from investigations based on global self-reports or behaviour in the laboratory (Reis 1994); perspectives that presently predominate in the behavioural science literature. Thus, daily life methods make available a different kind of information than traditional methods do, information that provides a novel and increasingly valuable perspective on behaviour. The conceptual benefits of daily life methods are as important a reason for their growth as their methodological benefits.

Daily life protocols begin with the premise that ecological validity matters, in the sense that by studying behaviour within its natural, spontaneous context (hence the name *ecological momentary assessment*; Stone & Shiffman 1994), the generalizability of settings and conditions is inherently less of an issue here than in laboratory research. To be sure, this will not always be the case. Studies conducted in very unusual settings (e.g., the National Science Foundation research station in Antarctica) might have little generalizability to other settings. Studies using invasive technology (e.g., placing prominent video cameras throughout the home, or having participants wear cumbersome physiological monitors) might alter settings sufficiently to nullify their representativeness. Ecological validity, in other

words, is not guaranteed by the use of daily life methods but it reflects the correspondence between the conditions of a study and the conclusions that are drawn from it.

By observing phenomena in their natural contexts, without controlling other influences, behavioural processes can be investigated within the full complement of circumstances in which they are most likely to occur. Consider, for example, the possibility that alcohol consumption often takes place in the presence of others who are also drinking. Depending on its design, a laboratory study might not differentiate the effects of drinking in social and solitary settings; a study using daily life methods would do so (e.g., Mohr et al. 2001), thereby providing information about alcohol consumption that better reflects how people drink.

In sum, everyday experience methods are adept at both description and hypothesis testing. Their main advantage is enhanced ecological validity, an important criterion that too often receives short shrift in social and personality psychology (but see Brewer & Crano 2015). Because phenomena are assessed within natural contexts, artefacts attributable to a setting or other incidental aspects of the research process are greatly reduced. Although maximum internal validity is sacrificed, the emphasis on contemporaneous reports repeated over time and context minimizes retrospection and other forms of self-report bias, making the loss of internal validity less than with other non-experimental methods. There are several other reasons why daily life protocols may have greater ecological validity than other protocols. For one, daily life studies can examine the nature and repercussions of events that cannot ethically or pragmatically be studied in the laboratory, such as health crises or abusive behaviour in families. Of course, these events can be studied retrospectively, but such findings may be distorted by methodological biases, such as those reviewed by Schwarz as well as by suggestibility and lay theories about these events (e.g., Loftus 2000; Ross 1989). Another reason is that daily life methods are well suited to tracking how behavioural processes unfold over time; for example, how people adapt to divorce or chronic illness (Bolger et al. 2003). As mentioned earlier, retrospective accounts of change over time may be influenced by lay theories of change. Daily life measures, in contrast, assess change in real-time and are also sensitive to contextual factors that convey adaptation to such events (e.g., divorce and chronic illness are often accompanied by changes in financial status and patterns of family interaction). A third and final reason is that real-time daily life measures typically assess respondents while they are physically located in the focal behavioural setting.

Retrospective reports, in contrast, are usually obtained in different locales. Properties of the physical environment (including others present) can influence self-reports and behaviour.

Of course, ecological validity in daily life studies does not come without a cost, and that cost is typically less internal validity. This is most clearly the case in correlational (non-experimental) designs, in which the target variables are tracked or recorded for some time, and then correlated in theoretically relevant ways. The vast majority of published daily life studies rely on correlational designs, although there are also many true experiments (i.e., studies in which participants are randomly assigned to different conditions) and quasi-experiments (i.e., designs that include controls for certain potential artefacts of correlational approaches) (Campbell & Stanley 1966). In these cases, internal validity fares better, although there still may be significant loss due to the inability to standardize the participants' environment.

Whatever one's position on these issues, debates about the relative importance of internal and external validity obscure a more fundamental point. No single study can minimize all threats to internal validity while simultaneously maximizing generalizability. Internal validity requires careful control of context, whereas external validity requires letting contexts vary freely. Because all methods have advantages and drawbacks, the validity of a research program is most effectively established by *methodological pluralism* using diverse paradigms, operations, and measures to triangulate on the same concepts (Campbell 1957; Campbell & Fiske 1959). Every method has benefits and drawbacks, insights that it can and cannot impart. Methodological triangulation, embracing diverse strategies and procedures, is the best way to prevent theoretical insights from being method-bound. Of course, methods ought not to be chosen anyway; they should complement one another in addressing conceptual concerns and methodological shortcomings.

To research the everyday ethnographically we need to be “in there” and part of the very flow of life that we are researching. Yet simultaneously, we need to order what we find into manageable analytical units so that it will be meaningful in the academic literature – that is, in a representational world where the everyday becomes abstracted into categories for scholarly analysis. While this is a simple point, it is often not reflected in everyday life research. It is, nevertheless crucial to account for if we want to understand the relationship between everyday life as lived and everyday life as studied. This tension between flow and representation is reflected in

contemporary literature across cultural studies, anthropology and geography. For instance, in the interest in both anthropology and human geography in the non-representational (e.g. Ingold 2011; Thrift 2008), and in the work of everyday life scholars such as Michael Gardiner (2009: 385) and Michael Sheringham (2006: 390) who describe us as already “immersed” in the everyday. We are therefore challenged to conceptualise the world as ongoing, continually changing and not necessarily something we can slice across and capture. Yet we are also required to represent both what people do and feel, and the environments in which they act so that we can approach these contexts analytically and communicate our findings to other scholars. Thus, rather than focusing on the “flow” itself, scholars of everyday life have used concepts such as “practices”, “emotions”, or “routines” as analytical entry points to research its events, experiences and temporalities.

Yet this is not the only challenge of the study of everyday life as lived. Another is that much of what matters to people in everyday life is obscured from the “view” of traditional research methods. For instance, what people do (practices/practical activity), what they feel (emotions/affect), their regularity and temporality (routine), and their *situatedness* about others (relationships) in their everyday lives is often done at home, in private and/or at times when researchers are not part of their lives. Not only is everyday life continually moving on but significant parts of it are lived by people out of the radar of even their most intimate family members. The practice of art therapy and art historical studies of practice offer ways of accessing and accounting for the world that both transgress the categories of the social sciences and enable routes to these invisible domains. It is to these we turn to seek alternative ways to research and theorise the everyday.

### ***Possible ways to study the everyday***

Our everyday experiences always provide an important context to study as an aspect of our everyday life. Everyday experience studies have three general purposes: establishing the prevalence and or qualities of phenomena, testing theoretically generated hypotheses and propositions, and serving as a “discovery” technique for generating new hypotheses. Diary data are commonly used for tallying and describing particular phenomena or constructs. The frequency of given events in everyday life, such as social interaction or exercise, may be estimated from reports of each occurrence, whereas their qualities can be revealed from detailed descriptions contained in each report. Protocols based on sampling and units of time, with either

random or fixed schedules, yield estimates of the frequency and pattern of given activities in daily life. When recording immediately follows events, retrospection biases are greatly diminished, resulting in relatively accurate accounts, at least from the respondent's point of view.

Here are a few examples. Wheeler and Nezlek (1977) used social interaction diaries, one for each interaction lasting ten minutes or longer, to characterize college students' socializing along several dimensions, including frequency, distribution across partners, intimacy, and satisfaction. Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayr, and Nesselrode (2000) examined how age was associated with positive and negative emotional experiences over a week. Diener, Larsen, Levine, and Emmons (1985) examined the relative frequency of high- and low-intensity emotional states with daily mood reports. Pinkus, Lockwood, Schimmack and Fournier (2008) recorded instances of upward and downward social comparisons among married couples. There is no reason why theoretical propositions cannot be evaluated with everyday experience data, much as they are tested in laboratory experiments. Of course, causal inference requires experimental manipulation and random assignment, conditions that can be difficult to achieve in naturalistic contexts (but see Cialdini & Paluck 2014). However, everyday experience methods are meant to complement, not substitute for, experimentation. It should be remembered that establishing a theory's validity, scope, and importance demands more than simply demonstrating that predictable effects can be evoked under controlled laboratory conditions (Brewer & Crano 2015; Smith 1994). Although the laboratory is best suited for establishing cause and effect, everyday experience studies indicate whether the same effect occurs under voluntary, self-selected conditions, when additional, perhaps unexpected, factors come into play. Moreover, the advent of sophisticated procedures for evaluating mediational models and propositions (see Bolger & Laurenceau n.d.; Judd, Yzerbyt & Muller 2014) makes everyday experience research increasingly useful for theory-building.

### ***Conclusion***

Everyday experience studies offer one avenue for bridging some of the field's more imposing gaps: between laboratory experiments and survey questionnaires, between one-shot observations and global retrospections, between theorizing about contextual variations and examining them empirically, between internal and ecological validity, between highly controlled situations and those encountered in natural activity, and between

abstract theories and the details of ordinary life. An analysis of everyday sensory practice shows us how individuals use categories, knowledge and acts to maintain, bounce off, imitate, invert or resist moralities they hold as conventional. As such, it presents us with a route to studying how our diverse everyday ways of living identities and selves introduce new cultural conventions and moralities. This sociological analysis is limited in its definition of individual difference as doing it “my way”. The value of this approach is that it demands an awareness of how our informants’ (and our own) subject positions intersect in “the field”. This allows us to see simultaneously how informants construct differences “on their terms” and the ambiguities of their own “destabilising practices” (Battaglia 1999: 115). It invites us to deconstruct doing it “my way” as a complex and intersubjective practice that has inherent contradictions, is about diversity and agency and reveals how individuals participate in unevenly patterned processes of change.

### **Reference**

- Allport, G. C. 1942. *The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science*. New York: Social Science Research Council.
- Battaglia, D. 1999. ‘Towards an ethics of the open subject. Writing culture in good conscience’. In H. Moore (ed.), *Anthropological Theory Today*. Cambridge: Polity Press: 114–50.
- Bolger, N., & J. P. Laurenceau, (in press). *Intensive Longitudinal Methods: An Introduction to Diary and Experience Sampling Research*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Bolger, N., A. Davis & E. Rafaeli. 2003. ‘Diary Methods: Capturing Life as It is Lived’. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 54: 579-616.
- Brewer, M. B. & Crano, W. D. 2015. *Principles and Methods of Social Research*. New York: Routledge.
- Campbell, D. T. 1957. ‘Factors Relevant to the Validity of Experiments in Social Settings’. *Psychological Bulletin*, 54: 297–312.
- Campbell, D. T., & D. W. Fiske. 1959. ‘Convergent and Discriminant Validation by the Multitrait– Multimethod Matrix’. *Psychological Bulletin*, 56: 81–105

- Campbell, D. T., & J. C. Stanley. 1966. *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research*. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Carstensen, L. L., M. Pasupathi, U. Mayr & J. R. Nesselroade. 2000. 'Emotional Experience in Everyday Life Across the Adult Life Span'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79: 644-655.
- Cialdini R. B. & Paluck, E. L., 'Field Research Methods'. In H. T. Reis & C. M. Judd (Eds.), *Handbook of Research Methods in Social and Personality Psychology*. Cambridge University Press: 81-97.
- Diener, E., R. J. Larsen, S. Levine & R. A. Emmons. 1985. 'Intensity and Frequency: Dimensions Underlying Positive and Negative Affect'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 48: 1253-1265.
- Gardiner, Michael. 2000. *Critique of Everyday Life: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Ingold, T. 2000. *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. London: Routledge.
- Judd, C., V. Yzerbyt and D. Muller. 2014. 'Mediation and Moderation'. In H. T. Reis & C. M. Judd (Eds.) *Handbook of Research Methods in Social and Personality Psychology*. Cambridge University Press: 81-97.
- Loftus, E. F. 2000. 'Suggestion, Imagination, and the Transformation of Reality'. In A. A. Stone, J. S. Turkkan, C. A. Bachrach, J. B. Jobe, H. S. Kurtzman, & V. S. Cain (Eds.), *The Science of Self-report: Implications for Research and Practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum: 201-210.
- Mehl, M. R. and T. S. Conner (eds.). 2012. *Handbook of Research Methods for Studying Daily Life*. New York: The Guilford Press
- Mohr, C. D., S. Armeli, H. Tennen, M. A. Carney, G. Affleck & A. Hromi. 2001. 'Daily Interpersonal Experiences, Context, and Alcohol Consumption: Crying in Your Beer and Toasting Good Times'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80: 489-500.
- Pinkus, R. T., P. Lockwood, U. Schimmack, & M. A. Fournier. 2008. 'For better and for worse: Everyday Social Comparison Between Romantic Partners'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95: 1180-1201.

- Reis, H. T. 1994. 'Domains of experience: Investigating Relationship Processes from Three Perspectives'. In R. Erber & R. Gilmour (Eds.), *Theoretical Frameworks for Personal Relationships*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum: 87-110.
- Ross, M. 1989. 'Relation of Implicit Theories to the Construction of Personal Histories'. *Psychological Review*, 96: 341–357.
- Schwarz, N. 2012. 'Why Researchers Should Think "Real-time": A cognitive Rationale'. In M. R. Mehl & T. S. Conner (Eds.), *Handbook of Research Methods for Studying Daily Life*. New York: Guilford Press:22-42.
- Sheringham, Michael. 2006, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*.UK: Oxford University Press
- Smith V, 1994. 'Economics in the Laboratory'. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 8 (Winter):113–31.
- Thrift, N. 2008. *Non-Representational Theory Space, Politics, Affect*. UK: Routledge
- Vernon, L. Smith. 2003. Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopaedia. Retrieved January 24, 2023, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vernon\\_L.\\_Smith](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vernon_L._Smith)
- Wheeler, L. & J. B. Nezlek. 1977. 'Sex Differences in Social Participation'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35: 742-754.