

CASE STUDY

Cressey's methodological analysis

To my knowledge, only two methodological works on ethnography were published in this period: Palmer's textbook (1928) and the notes written by Paul G. Cressey (1901–55), who is best known for his book *The Taxi-Dance Hall*. Published in 1932, this was the Chicago qualitative monograph that perhaps comes closest to what today we would call ethnography. Cressey's study was based on research conducted under Robert Burgess's supervision between 1925 and 1929 for an M.A. at the University of Chicago. It can be considered an authentic precursor of studies on deviance and subcultures.

Taxi-dance halls were extremely popular in the United States during the early 1900s. The patrons could dance with the girls for payment just as if they had hired a taxi: on payment of ten cents they selected a dance hostess who kept half of the fee for herself. The clientele was mixed, although it consisted mainly of men stigmatized for various reasons, ranging from their ethnicity (many of them were of Filipino origin) to those with an unattractive appearance. The owners of the taxi-dance halls were frequently Greek-Americans who had specialized in the business. The hostesses were also of foreign origin – Polish in many cases – and their work at the dance saloon might presage a 'downward' career into outright prostitution or into marriage with a client.

Cressey's methodological analysis is set out in a text that was unknown until 1983, when it was first published in the journal *Urban Life*, following its discovery by Martin Bulmer as he researched in the University of Chicago archives for his monograph (1984). Cressey describes three possible roles for the participant observer: the 'friend' (who knows and is known by the others as such), the 'sociological stranger' (who is recognized as a researcher and is accepted as such) and finally the 'anonymous stranger' (who is not recognized as a researcher and acts as if he or she is an acquaintance or friend) (Bulmer, 1983; Cressey, 1983). The last two roles relate to approaches subsequently called 'overt research' and 'covert research,' where the researcher either declares his or her identity or conceals it from the person that he or she intends to study. It is truly unfortunate that Cressey's text was not published at the time it was written.