

Behavioral versus Cognitive Research Methods in Ethnobotany

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Research with the Highland Maya in Chiapas, Mexico, explored the differences between cognition and actual behavior with regard to medicinal plants. Two overlapping medicinal floras are compared: one based on actual use and one based on informant consensus. Actual use was determined by tracking daily medicinal plant use for 208 individuals over a period of one year. Informant consensus was determined through interviews using 200 medicinal plants with high informant agreement across the Highlands. While the two data sets are similar, there are notable differences. These knowledge and utilization differences occur at the inter-household and inter-community levels and also across ecological zones. The two methodologies are compared and their utility in different ethnographic contexts is discussed.