THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CULTURE

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THE METHODS

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Tau, Manu'a

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At dawn on March 8th, a boat arrived from Ofu and lured by thoughts of ethnological gain I decided to go back with the boat—a 15-foot rowboat. I decided it would be expensive but pleasant. So we set out in the broiling sun with a crew of some nine Samoans. The girls were desperately seasick but I rested my head on a burlap bag of canned goods, and enjoyed the three-hour pull in the open sea. The swell is impressive when viewed from such a cockleshell of a boat. The Samoans chanted and shouted.

The whole conduct of the *malaga* [ceremonial visiting party] was charming. My two companions were my talking chiefs, functionally speaking. They made all the speeches, accepted and dispersed gifts, prepared my meais, etc.

There were some slight difficulties. Once I killed 35 mosquitoes inside my net in the morning, and all had dined liberally. (Mead 1977:55-57)

Compared to the other three fields of general anthropology, cultural anthropology is most associated with participant observation as its primary technique for gathering data. Because archaeologists work mainly with artifacts from bygone cultures, they cannot truly participate in the cultures they study. Primatologists live in natural habitats for long periods of time, but the limited degree to which humans and nonhuman primates can communicate with each other constrains true participation. Linguistic anthropologists who work with contemporary populations most resemble cultural anthropologists in their use of fieldwork among living humans. They are able both to observe and to participate in the same ways that cultural anthropologists do.

In this chapter we explore how cultural anthropologists learn about culture through fieldwork and participant observation. The entire process of fieldwork is considered, from coming up with an idea for research to leaving the field, analyzing the data, and writing up one's findings. Later in the chapter, we consider some special topics, such as the importance of ethics and doing fieldwork in dangerous situations. Throughout this chapter, you might consider the similarities and differences between research in cultural anthropology and research in other areas of study such as psychology, economics, and history.

**CHANGING METHODS IN CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

Methods in cultural anthropology have changed significantly since the nineteenth century. This section presents a brief historical overview of research approaches and then introduces the key method of participant observation.

**From the Armchair to the Field**

Research in the early years of cultural anthropology was not based on fieldwork and participant observation. Referred to as "armchair anthropology," it involved reading reports from travelers, missionaries, and explorers and then providing an analysis. Edward Tylor (1871), who proposed the first definition of culture, was an armchair anthropologist. So was James Frazer, another famous founding figure of anthropology, who wrote *The Golden Bough* (1978 [1890]), a multivolume collection of myths, rituals, and symbols from around the world compiled from reading other people's reports. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some anthropologists left their homes and libraries and traveled to foreign countries, where they spent time living near, but...
not with, the people they were studying. This pattern is nicknamed “verandah anthropology” because typically the anthropologist would send out for “native” informants to come to the verandah for interviewing. Verandah anthropology was practiced by many anthropologists who worked for colonial governments. They lived within colonial settlements, not with the indigenous people. The current approach of fieldwork and participant observation replaced verandah anthropology in the early twentieth century.

The field can be anywhere: a school, a rural community, a corporation, a clinic, an urban neighborhood, in any part of the world. In some ways, the field is equivalent to a scientist's lab. A cultural anthropologist, however, does not perform experiments with people.

Participant Observation: An Evolving Method

An early lesson about the values of participant observation as a fieldwork method came from Lewis Henry Morgan, a nineteenth-century lawyer who lived in upstate New York near the Iroquois. Morgan did not do participant observation in the sense of living for a long time, say a year or two, with the people, but he did make several two-week field trips to Iroquois settlements (Tooker 1992). This experience, though brief, provided him with important insights into the lives of the Iroquois and formed the basis for his book, The League of the Iroquois (1851). This book helped dismantle the prevailing Euro-American perception of the Iroquois as “dangerous savages.”

Bronislaw Malinowski is considered the “father” of participant observation because he first used it while studying the people of the Trobriand Islands in the South Pacific during World War I. “For two years, he set his tent in their midst, learned their language, participated as much as he could in their daily life, expeditions, and festivals, and took everything down in his notebooks” (Sperber 1985:4). Malinowski made the crucial step of learning the local language, and therefore he was able to dispense with interpreters. Direct communication brings the researcher much closer to the lived reality of the people being studied, as is evident in his ethnography about the Trobrianders, Argonauts of the Western Pacific (1961 [1922]).

In the early days of cultural anthropology (the late 1800s and early 1900s), a primary goal was to record as much as possible of a people's language, songs, rituals, and social life because many cultures were disappearing. Given the belief that small, localized cultures could be studied in their totality, early cultural anthropologists focused on gaining a holistic view of a single group (Chapter 1). Today, few isolated cultures remain to be studied. The integration of most cultures into wider economic and political spheres generates new research topics and revised methods of study that can take in both local and global factors.

A methodological innovation that helps cultural anthropologists take globalization, complexity, and change into account is multi-sited research, or fieldwork in more than one location (Marcus 1995). Cultural anthropologists are adopting this approach, particularly in studies of migrant populations (Chapter 15). Studying migration challenges traditional cultural anthropology's focus on one village or neighborhood and creates the need to take into account national and global economic, political, and social forces (Lamphere 1992; Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994). Anthropologists study...
why people move and analyze their adjustments to living in a new place, especially the challenges and opportunities of maintaining their culture or constructing a new cultural identity. Fieldwork in rural Brazil, for example, is a first step, followed by research among Brazilian immigrants in New York City (Margolis 1994). This approach enables the anthropologist to compare Brazilian culture in these locations and to understand Brazilian New Yorkers' attempts to retain and recreate Brazilian culture in the new context.

Lanita Jacobs-Huey has been conducting multi-sited fieldwork for many years in order to learn about the culture of hair styles among English-speaking African American women (2002). She chose a range of sites in order to explore the many facets of this far-from-simple topic. She has conducted participant observation in beauty salons, regional and international hair expos, training seminars for lay and licensed stylists, Bible study meetings of a not-for-profit group of Christian cosmetologists, a computer-mediated discussion about the politics of black hair, and a cosmetology school in Charleston, South Carolina. Bronislaw Malinowski would be amazed at how methods have changed since the early part of the twentieth century!

DOING RESEARCH IN CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Conducting research in cultural anthropology is challenging, exciting, sometimes frustrating, and full of surprises. No doubt all cultural anthropologists would agree that their fieldwork experiences have altered their own lives immeasurably. Here we explore all the stages of a fieldwork research project, from the initial planning to the concluding analysis and writing up of the findings.

Beginning the Fieldwork Process

Two important activities characterize the first stage of cultural anthropology research: project selection and preparing for the field.

Project Selection

Cultural anthropologists often find a topic to research by reviewing reports on what has been done already. Through library research, also called secondary research, they may find a gap that needs to be filled. For example, in the 1970s, many cultural anthropologists began to focus on women because they realized that little previous research had addressed women's lives (Miller 1993). Other topics emerge because of historical events. The discovery of the HIV/AIDS virus and its social dimensions stimulated interest from cultural anthropologists, many working within the subfield of medical anthropology. The recent rise in the numbers of immigrants and refugees in the United States prompted studies of the adaptation of these groups of people. The fall of state socialism in Russia and Eastern Europe shifted attention to that region. Conflicts in Ireland, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, and other places have spurred cultural anthropologists to ask what keeps states together and what makes them fall apart (Harris 1992). Even luck can lead to a research topic. Spanish anthropologist María Cátedra (1992) stumbled on an important issue during exploratory fieldwork in rural northern Spain. A suicide occurred in a hamlet in the mountains near where she was staying. She learned that the local people did not consider suicide strange. In fact, the area was characterized by a high rate of suicide. Later she went back and did long-term research on the social dynamics of suicide in this area.

"Restudies" are another way to design a research project. Decades of previous anthropological field studies provide a base of information. It makes sense for contemporary anthropologists to go back to a place that was studied earlier to examine changes that have occurred or to look at the culture from a new angle. For her dissertation research, Annette Weiner (1976) decided to go to the Trobriand Islands, following in the footsteps of Malinowski. She was surprised at what she discovered about Trobriand women's lives. (See the Critical Thinking box.)

Preparing for the Field

Once the project is defined and funding secured, it is time to prepare for going to the field. Visas, or formal research
SHELLS AND SKIRTS IN THE TROBRIAND ISLANDS

A LASTING contribution of Malinowski's ethnography, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1961 [1922]), is its detailed examination of the kula, a trading network linking many islands in the region in which men have longstanding partnerships for the exchange of both goods such as food and highly valued necklaces and armlets.

More than half a century later, Annette Weiner (1976) traveled to the Trobriand Islands to study wood carving. She settled in a village less than a mile from where Malinowski had done much of his research and began making startling observations: “On my first day in the village, I saw women performing a mortuary [death] ceremony in which they distributed thousands of bundles of strips of dried banana leaves and hundreds of beautifully decorated fibrous skirts. Bundles of banana leaves and skirts are objects of female wealth with explicit economic value” (xvii).

She decided to investigate women’s activities and exchange patterns. Weiner discovered a cultural world of production, exchange, social networks, and influence that existed among women but that Malinowski had overlooked. Men, as Malinowski described, exchange shells, yams, and pigs. Women, as Weiner discovered, exchange bundles of leaves and intricately made skirts. Power and prestige derive from both. Reading Malinowski alone informs us about the dramatic and exciting world of men’s status systems. But that is only half the picture. Weiner’s *Women of Value, Men of Renown* (1976) provides an account of the linkages between domains of male and female power and value. She shows how understanding one domain requires know ledge of the other.

**CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS**

How is it possible that Malinowski missed the importance of women’s exchange patterns?

Do the findings of Annette Weiner simply provide another one-sided view?

Permission from the host government, may be required and may take a long time to obtain. The government of India, for example, is highly restrictive about research by foreigners, and “sensitive” topics such as “tribal people” and family planning are off limits. Some nations have been completely closed to anthropological research for decades and are only now relaxing their restrictions. China’s restrictions against American anthropologists doing research there have been lifted only in the past fifteen years or so, and Russia’s restrictive policies have changed even more recently. Recent rulings in the United States, largely inspired by concerns in the medical research community, require investigators who plan to do research with “human subjects” to get approval for their project from their university or funding agency before starting the research. Approval is contingent on satisfactory provisions safeguarding “human subjects” from any kind of harm related to the research.

Preparation for the field may involve buying equipment, such as a tent or special clothing. For example, fieldwork in Siberia may necessitate a special sleeping bag to keep one warm at nighttime where temperatures are below -20°F Fahrenheit. Health preparations may involve having a series of shots for immunization against contagious diseases such as yellow fever. For research in malaria-endemic areas, individuals are advised to start
Site Selection

The researcher often has a basic idea of the area where the fieldwork will occur—for example, a favela (shanty town) in Rio de Janeiro or a village in Scotland—but it is difficult to know exactly where the project will be located until after one arrives. Selecting a research site depends on many factors. It may be necessary to find a large village if the project involves looking at social class differences in work patterns and food consumption or to find a clinic if the study concerns health care behavior. Locating a place where the people welcome the researcher and the project, which offers adequate housing, and which fits the requirements of the project may not be easy.

Jennifer Robertson's (1991) selection of Kodaira as a research site in Japan for research on urban population change and interactions between long-time urban residents and immigrants was based on a combination of factors: good advice from a Japanese colleague, available housing, a match with her research interests, and the happy coincidence that she already knew the area:

I spent my childhood and early teens in Kodaira [but] my personal past did not directly influence my selection of Kodaira as a fieldsite and home... That I wound up living in my old neighborhood in Kodaira was determined more by the availability of a suitable apartment than by a nostalgic curiosity about my childhood haunts. As it turned out, I could not have landed at a better place at a better time. (6)

Gaining Rapport

Rapport is the relationship between the researcher and the study population. In the early stages of research, the primary goal is to establish rapport—probably first with key leaders or decision makers in the community who may serve as gatekeepers (people who formally or informally control access to the group or community). Gaining rapport involves trust on the part of the study population, and their trust depends on how the researcher presents herself or himself. In many cultures, people have difficulty understanding why a person would come to study them, because they do not know about universities and research and cultural anthropology. They may provide their own (often inaccurate) explanations based on previous experience with outsiders whose goals differed from those of cultural anthropologists, such as tax collectors, family planning promoters, and law enforcement officials.

Much has been written about the problem of how the anthropologist presents herself or himself in the field and how the local people interpret who the anthropologist is and why the anthropologist is there at all. Stories about such role assignments can be humorous. Richard Kurin (1980) reports that in the earliest stage of his research...
among the Karan in the Punjab region of northwest Pakistan, the villagers thought he was a spy—from America, Russia, India, or China. After he convinced them that he was not a spy, the villagers came up with several other acceptable roles for him—first as a teacher of English because he was tutoring one of the village boys, then as a doctor because he was known to dispense aspirin, then as a lawyer who could help villagers in negotiating local disputes because he could read court orders, and finally as a descendant of a local clan through the similarity between his last name and that of an ancestral king! He gained acceptance in the village in all these roles, but the crowning touch, for him, was being considered a true "Karan."

Gift Giving and Exchange

Giving gifts to local people can help the project proceed, but gifts should be culturally and ethically appropriate. Many cultural anthropologists working in developing countries have provided basic medical care, such as treating wounds. Some have taught in a local school part time. Others have helped support individuals in obtaining a degree in higher education outside their homelands.

Learning the local rules of exchange is important, including what constitutes an appropriate or an inappropriate gift, how to deliver the gift (timing, in private or public, wrapped or unwrapped), and how to behave as a gift giver (for example, should one be modest and emphasize the smallness of the gift?). Matthews Hamabata (1990) learned about the complex forms of gift giving in Japan during his study of Japanese business families. He had developed a close relationship with one family, the Itoos, and had helped their daughter apply for admission to universities in the United States. When the applications were completed, Mrs. Itoo, the girl's mother, invited him to an expensive restaurant to celebrate. After the dinner, she handed him a small, carefully wrapped package, expressing her embarrassment at the inadequacy of her gift in relation to all that he had done for her daughter. When he returned home, he opened the gift. It was a box of chocolates. Upon opening the box to share the chocolates with some friends, he discovered 50,000 yen (about US $250). At first he was shocked and insulted: "Who do the Itoos think they are? They can't buy me or my services!" (21-22). Once his anger had cooled, he consulted some Japanese friends about what to do. They told him that returning the money to the Itoos would be an insult to them because the gift implied a wish to have a longstanding relationship. They advised him to give a return gift, at a later time, in order to maintain the relationship. They advised a gift that would leave him ahead by about 25,000 yen, given his status as an academic researcher in relation to the Itoos' status as a rich business family.

Microcultures and Fieldwork

An anthropologist's class, race, gender, and age all affect how he or she will be interpreted by local people. An anthropologist who is a young, unmarried female studying child-rearing practices may not be taken seriously because she is not herself a mother. Bearded males who look like "hippies" may alienate local people whose experiences with true hippies have not been positive. In the rest of this section, we offer some examples of how class, race/ethnicity, gender, age, and other factors can influence the rapport an anthropologist is able to achieve with the population.

Class  In most fieldwork situations, the anthropologist is more wealthy and powerful than the people studied. This difference is obvious to the people. They know that the anthropologist must have spent hundreds or thousands of dollars to travel to the research site. They see the expensive equipment (camera, tape recorder, video recorder, even a vehicle) and valuable trade items (stainless steel knives, cigarettes, flashlights, canned food, medicines). The pattern of the anthropologist having more wealth and status than the people being studied has tyrified cultural anthropology throughout its history. Laura Nader (1972) urged a departure from this pattern. She says that some anthropologists should "study up" by doing research among powerful people such as members of the business elite, political leaders, and government officials. As one example, research on the high-fashion industry of Japan placed an anthropologist in touch with many members of the Japanese elite, influential people capable of taking her to court if they felt she wrote something defamatory about them (Kondo 1997). "Studying up" has contributed to awareness of the need, in all fieldwork situations, for recognition of the anthropologist's accountability to the people being studied. Some anthropologists deal with this need through collaborative forms of research, which helps ensure that the research "subjects" are part of the research process themselves.

Race  For most of its history, cultural anthropology has been dominated by Euro-American White researchers who have studied "other" cultures, most often non-White and non-Euro-American. The effects of "Whiteness" on role assignments range from the anthropologist being labeled as a god or ancestor spirit to his or her being reviled as a representative of a colonialist past. While doing research in Jamaica, Tony Whitehead (1986) learned how race and status interact. For Whitehead, an African American, being essentially the same "race"—of African descent—did not automatically create solidarity
between him and the African-descent residents of Haversham. The people of Haversham have a complex status system that relegated Whitehead to a position that he did not predict:

I am a black American who grew up in the rural South to impoverished sharecropper parents. Regardless of the upward mobility I experienced when I went to Jamaica, I still perceived of myself as one of the little people... (i.e., lower status) because of my experience as an ethnic minority in the United States.... With such a self-image in tow, I was shocked when the people of Haversham began talking to me and referring to me as a “big,” “brown,” “pretty-talking” man. “Big” was not a reference to my weight but to my higher social status as they perceived it, and “brown” referred not only to my skin color but also to my higher social status.... More embarrassing than bothersome were the references to how “pretty” I talked, a comment on my Standard English speech pattern.... Frequently mothers told me that their children were going to school so that they could learn to talk as pretty as I did. (214–215)

Whitehead’s fieldwork was not impeded by the Jamaicans’ assignment of him to a higher-status role than he expected, but it did prompt him to rethink the complexities of race and status cross-culturally. For Lanita Jacobs-Huey, in her research on African American women’s hair culture, being an African American herself did not automatically gain her acceptance (2002). Hair style is a sensitive subject, and her Internet informants wanted her to tell them how her hair was styled.

Gender Gender is another important factor in fieldwork. If a female researcher is young and unmarried, she is likely to face more difficulties than a young unmarried male or an older female, married or single, because people in most cultures will consider a young, unmarried female who is on her own as extremely unusual (Warren 1988). Rules of gender segregation may dictate that a young unmarried woman should not move about freely without a male escort, and her status may prevent her from attending certain events or being in some places. Gender boundaries exist cross-culturally to varying degrees, and a researcher probably can never fully overcome them. A woman researcher who studied a male gay community in the United States comments that:

I was able to do fieldwork in those parts of the setting dedicated to sociability and leisure—bars, parties, family gatherings. I was not, however, able to observe in those parts of the setting dedicated to sexuality—even quasi-public settings such as homosexual bath houses.... Thus my portrait of the gay community is only a partial one, bounded by the social roles assigned to females within the male homosexual world. (Warren 1988:18)

Gender segregation may also prevent male researchers from gaining access to a full range of activities. Californian Liza Dalby (1998) lived with the geishas of Kyoto, Japan, and trained to be a geisha. Through this, she learned more about the inner workings of this microculture than a man ever could.

Age Typically, adult anthropologists are responsible for studying people in all age categories. Although some children and adolescents readily welcome the participation of a friendly adult in their daily lives and respond to questions openly, others are more reserved. Margaret Mead (1986) commented that “Ideally, a three-generation family, including children highly trained to understand what they experience, would be the best way to study a culture” (321). She recognized that this ideal would not be possible or practical, and that the best a fieldworker could do was to be imaginative and flexible in order to gain rapport with members of special age categories. This may involve learning and using age-specific language. A team of anthropologists studying sexuality among American adolescents discovered that using age-appropriate language made it easier to establish rapport.
In our experience, when asking an adolescent, especially a younger adolescent, a sensitive question such as “Have you ever had sexual intercourse?” the child spends far too much time in awe of the word “intercourse,” investigating its meaning, and giggling at this clinical term. It is better for the researcher to ask simply, “Have you ever had sex?” (Weber, Miracle, and Skehan 1994:44)

Other Factors The fieldworker’s role is affected by many more factors than the characteristics listed above, including religion, dress, and personality. Being the same religion as the elderly Jewish people at the Aliyah Center in California helped a Jewish anthropologist (Myerhoff 1978) establish rapport. This is evident in a conversation she had with an old woman named Basha:

“So, what brings you here?”
“I’m from the University of Southern California. I’m looking for a place to study how older Jews live in the city.”
At the word university, she moved closer and nodded approvingly. “Are you Jewish?” she asked.
“Yes, I am.”
“Are you married?” she persisted.
“Yes.”
“You got children?”
“Yes, two boys, four and eight,” I answered.
“Are you teaching them to be Jews?” (14)

She was warmly accepted into the lives of people at the Center, and her plan for one year of research grew into a longstanding relationship. In contrast, being Jewish posed a potential problem for another Jewish woman anthropologist (Freedman 1986). She conducted research in Romania, a country where anti-Semitism is strong. She was hesitant about telling the villagers that she was Jewish, but she was also reluctant to lie. Early in her stay, she attended the village church. The priest asked what her religion was. Upon revealing that she was Jewish, she found to her relief that this did not result in her being alienated from the community.

Culture Shock
Culture shock consists of persistent feelings of uneasiness, loneliness, and anxiety that often occur when a person has shifted from one culture to a different one. The more “different” the two cultures are, the more severe the shock is likely to be. Culture shock happens to many cultural anthropologists, no matter how much they have tried to prepare themselves for fieldwork. It also happens to students who study abroad, Peace Corps volunteers, and anyone who spends a significant amount of time living and participating in another culture.

Culture shock can range from problems with food to the language barrier. Food differences were a major problem in adjustment for a Chinese anthropologist who came to the United States (Shu-Min 1993). American food never gave him a “full” feeling. An American anthropologist (Ward 1989), who went to an island in the Pacific named Pohnpei, found that language caused the most serious adjustment problems. She spent much time in the early stages of her research learning basic phrases and vocabulary, and she reports on the frustration she felt:

[Even dogs understood more than I did... I will never forget the agony of stepping on a woman’s toes. Instead of asking for forgiveness, I blurted out, “His canoe is blue.”(14)]

A psychological aspect of culture shock is the feeling of reduced competence as a cultural actor. At home, the anthropologist is highly competent. Everyday tasks like shopping, talking with people, mailing a letter, or sending a fax can be done without thinking. In a new culture, the most simple task becomes difficult and one’s sense of self-efficacy is undermined. In extreme cases, an anthropologist may have to abandon a project because of an inability to adapt to the fieldwork situation. For most, however, culture shock is a temporary affliction that subsides as the person becomes more familiar with the new culture.

“Reverse culture shock” can occur on returning home. An American anthropologist (Beals 1980) describes his feelings on returning to San Francisco after a year of fieldwork in a village in India:

We could not understand why people were so distant and hard to reach, or why they talked and moved so quickly. We were a little frightened at the sight of so many white faces and we could not understand why no one stared at us, brushed against us, or admired our baby. (119)

Fieldwork Techniques
Fieldwork is devoted to collecting data for subsequent analysis. The main approaches to data collection, quantitative research and qualitative research, provide different kinds of data and follow different analytical routes (Bernard 1995; Hammersley 1992). Quantitative data and analysis include numeric information, counting, and the use of tables and charts in presenting results. Qualitative methods are aimed at generating descriptions, and they avoid counting or quantifying. Some researchers concentrate on quantitative data, some rely on qualitative data, and others use a combination. But in all cases, participant observation is the basic research method through which the data are collected.

Varieties of Participant Observation
Once in the field, cultural anthropologists use particular methods to learn about culture. Within the overall
approach of participant observation, several different methods are available. The choice of methods for data gathering and the subsequent interpretation and analysis of the data depend on the anthropologist's theoretical perspective. For example, cultural materialists and interpretivists approach the study of culture differently. According to the former, the goal of cultural anthropology is to describe the cultures of all human societies and explain why they differ in some respects and are similar in others (Harris 1975:144). Cultural materialists are likely to use a deductive research method, which involves posing a research question or hypothesis, gathering data related to the question, and then assessing the findings in relation to the original hypothesis. Thus, fieldwork should be devoted to the collection of detailed observational and interview data in order to learn what people do as well as how people explain what they do and why they do it. Deeper causes for certain forms of behavior and ideas are sought through cross-cultural comparison.

In contrast, for interpretivists, the goal of anthropological research lies in the pursuit of detailed information on insiders' views (Geertz 1983:5). The primary source of information is discourse—people's talk, stories, and myths. People's discourse reveals their perceptions of important themes and concepts. In this view, cross-cultural comparison is a waste of time, because each system of local knowledge makes sense only in itself. Attempts to find causal connections between, say, a people's economic system and its religious beliefs are also rejected as too deterministic and generalizing. Thus interpretivists favor a more inductive research approach that avoids hypothesis formation in advance of the research and instead takes its cues from the culture being studied.

Cultural anthropologists use two terms that are related to deductive research and inductive research, respectively. Etic (pronounced like the last two syllables of phonetic) refers to data gathering and analysis by outsiders that will yield answers to particular questions about the culture posed by the outsider. In contrast, emic (pronounced like the last two syllables of phonemic) refers to descriptive reports about what insiders say and understand about their culture. Cultural materialists favor an etic approach to explaining cultural patterns. Interpretivists say that we need an emic approach because cultures can be understood only in their own terms, not through the imposition of outside analysis.

Being a participant means that the researcher tries to adopt the lifestyle of the people being studied, living in the same kind of housing, eating similar food, wearing similar clothing, learning the language, and participating in the daily round of activities and in special events. Participation over a long period improves the quality of the data. The more time the researcher spends living a "normal" life in the field area, the more likely it is that the people being studied will also live "normal" lives.

In this way, the researcher is able to overcome the Hawthorne effect, a phenomenon first discovered in the 1930s by which informants altered their behavior in ways that they thought would please the researcher. No matter how well accepted into everyday life the anthropologist becomes, however, the very nature of anthropological research and the presence of the anthropologist will have an effect on the people involved. Since the 1970s, anthropologists have increasingly considered how their presence affects their fieldwork and their findings, an approach called reflexive anthropology or reflexivity. An emphasis on reflexivity involves "constant awareness, assessment, and reassessment by the researcher of his or her own contribution to, and influence on, intersubjective research and the consequent research findings" (Salzman 2002:806). This approach is certainly a good corrective to the assumption that an anthropologist can go to the field and conduct research just as a scientist can in a lab. Working closely with real people in their everyday lives is a highly interactive and mutually influencing process: Everyone is changed in some way through the anthropological enterprise because it is a social process itself.

While participating in everyday life, the researcher carefully and thoroughly observes everything that is going on: who lives with whom, who interacts with whom in public, who are leaders and who are followers, what work people do, how people organize themselves for different activities, and far more. Obviously, not everything can be covered. Unstructured observations form the basis for a daily fieldnote diary in which the researcher attempts to record as much detail as possible about what has been observed. This process generates masses of qualitative data.

More formal methods of gathering quantitative data involve planned observations of a particular activity. One type of quantitative observational research is time allocation study, which can be an important tool for understanding people's behavior: work and leisure patterns, social interactions and group boundaries, and religious activities. This method relies on using Western time units as the basic matrix and then labeling or coding the activities that occur within certain time segments (Gross 1984). Each coding system corresponds to its particular context. For example, activity codes for types of "garden labor" designed for a horticultural society—burning, cutting, fencing, planting, soil preparation, weeding, and harvesting—would not be useful in a time allocation study in a retirement home. Observation may be continual, at fixed intervals (for instance, every forty-eight hours), or on a random basis. Continuous observation limits the number of people that can be observed because it is so time-consuming. Spot observations may inadvertently miss important activities. In order to increase cou-
verage, time allocation data can be collected by asking people to keep daily logs or diaries. Of course, self-reporting may include intentional or unintentional biases, but observations by the researcher can help correct some of these.

**Interviews and Questionnaires**

In contrast to observing and recording events as they happen, an interview, or the gathering of verbal data through questions or guided conversation, is a more purposeful approach. An interview involves at least two people, the interviewer and the interviewee, and more during group interviews. Cultural anthropologists use varying interview styles and formats, depending on the kinds of information they seek, the amount of time they have, and their language skills. The least structured type of interview is called open-ended. In an open-ended interview, the respondent (interviewee) takes the lead in setting the direction of the conversation, the topics to be covered, and the amount of time to be spent on a particular topic. The interviewer does not interrupt or provide prompting questions. In this way, the researcher discovers what themes are important to the respondent.

Surveys and questionnaires administered during an interview session are more formal because they involve structured questions. Structured questions limit the range of possible responses—for example, by asking informants to rate their positions on a particular issue as very positive, positive, negative, very negative, or “no opinion.” Ideally, the researcher should have enough familiarity with the study population to be able to design a formal questionnaire or survey that makes cultural sense (Fitchen 1990). Researchers who take ready-made questionnaires to the field with them should, at the minimum, ask another researcher who knows the field area to review the instrument to see whether it makes cultural sense. Additional revisions of the questionnaire will doubtlessly be required in the field to make it fit local conditions. Conducting a pilot survey before proceeding with a formal survey will reveal areas that need to be changed before the final version is used. Such a trial run should be considered an essential step.

**Combining Watching and Asking**

Many cultural anthropologists agree that formal interviews and questionnaires must be complemented by observational data on what people actually do (Sanjek 2000). For example, people in a particular culture may tell the anthropologist that sons and daughters share equally in the family property when their parents die. Research into the actual patterns of inheritance, however, may reveal more varied and complex patterns such as the daughters giving their shares to their brothers in exchange for their continuing care and support. It is important for the anthropologist to know both what the parents say and what happens—both are “true” aspects of cultural discourse and practice. Similarly, if an anthropologist studied the laws of a particular culture and found that discrimination on the basis of skin color was illegal, that's one part of the story of that culture's race relations. But this anthropologist should also study whether and how discrimination occurs.

**Other Data-Gathering Techniques**

Besides participating, observing, and asking questions of various types, cultural anthropologists use many other methods to gather data to fit their project goals. This section describes some of these methods.

**Life History** A life history is a qualitative, in-depth portrait of a single life experience as narrated by that person to the researcher. A life history provides the most “micro” perspective on culture possible. In the early days of life history research, the anthropologist tried to choose someone who was somehow typical, average, or representative. Anthropologists differ in their views about the value of the life history as a method in cultural anthropology, however. Early in the twentieth century, Franz Boas rejected this method as unscientific, because informants might lie or exaggerate (Peacock and Holland 1993). Others disagree, saying that a life history reveals rich information on individuals and how they think.
One of the Sri Lankan women whose life story Gananath Obeyesekere analyzed, a priestess to the deity Kataragama, stands in the shrine room of her house holding her long matted hair.

Think of how hair styles in a culture that you know express a person's religion or marital status. (Source: Gananath Obeyesekere)

It is not possible to find any one person who is representative of an entire culture. Thus some anthropologists seek informants who occupy a particularly interesting social niche. For example, Gananath Obeyesekere's book Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience presents the life histories of four Sri Lankan people, three women and one man (1981). Each one became a religious devotee and ascetic, physically distinguished by thickly matted hair that became mysteriously twisted in a snake-like fashion. These four people cannot comb out their hair: It is permanently matted. The devotees explain that the god's presence is in their hair. Using material in the life histories of these people, Obeyesekere provides an interpretation suggesting that they all suffered deep psychological afflictions, including sexual anxieties. Their matted hair symbolizes this suffering and provides them with a special status as holy and thus outside the bounds of normal married life and sexual relations.

Life histories of several people within one social category can provide a picture of both shared experiences and individual differences. James Freeman's book Hearts of Sorrow (1989) is an example of this approach. It presents "cuts" from several life stories of Vietnamese refugees living in southern California. Together, the story cuts portray both the shared sadness of the refugees about the loss of their homeland and a range of adaptive experiences of the different individuals.

The ability of informants to present a story of their lives varies, depending on the cultural context. An attempt to gather life histories from women on Goodenough Island of Papua New Guinea was difficult because telling one's life story is a masculine style of presentation, and the women were reluctant to adopt it (Young 1983). Marjorie Shostak (1981), in contrast, found a willing and extremely expressive informant for a life story in Nisa, an indigenous woman of the Ju/’wasi of the Kalahari Desert in southern Africa. Nisa’s book-length story, presented in her voice, includes rich details about her childhood and several marriages.

Texts Many cultural anthropologists collect and analyze texts. The category of "text" includes written or oral stories, myths, plays, sayings, speeches, jokes, and transcriptions of people’s everyday conversations. In the early twentieth century, Franz Boas collected thousands of pages of texts from Native American groups of the Northwest Coast of Canada, including myths, songs, speeches, and accounts of how to perform rituals. These texts are useful records of cultures that have changed since the time of his fieldwork. Surviving tribal members have even referred to the texts to recover forgotten aspects of their culture. Texts also provide data with which linguistic and symbolic analyses can be undertaken.

Historical Sources History is culture of the past, and it therefore has much relevance to understanding contemporary cultures. Ann Stoler (1985, 1989) is a pioneer in the anthropological use of archival resources in her study of Dutch colonialism in Java. Her research exposed details about colonial strategies, the culture of the colonizers themselves, and their impact on indigenous Javanese culture. Most countries have libraries and historical archives in which written records of the past are maintained. Local official archives are rich sources of information about land ownership, agricultural production, religious practices, and political activities. National archives in London, Paris, and Amsterdam contain records of colonial contact and relations. Parish churches throughout Europe have detailed family histories. Land-
Fieldwork among living people can also yield rich historical information. The “anthropology of memory” is a current research topic. Anthropologists study patterns of what people remember and what they don’t, how culture shapes their memories and how their memories shape their culture. Jennifer Robertson’s (1991) study of neighborhood people’s memories of life in Kodaira, Japan, before the influx of immigrants is an example of this kind of research. She relied on interview data, in addition to archival data, to reconstruct people’s remembered past.

Whereas Robertson looked at how people adjusted to what can be seen as a relatively normal process of population change, Emma Tarlo (2003) gathered personal narratives from people who had experienced a traumatic event—the Indian “Emergency” of 1975–1977. During this period, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared martial law and denied human rights to a large segment of the population, mainly the poorest people. Tarlo’s research site was a low-income area of New Delhi where people had been forcibly relocated during the Emergency. She focused on people’s memories of this traumatic period, in which harsh state intervention affected their entire lives. In order to “clean up” the city, the government bulldozed the settlements of thousands of poor people, forcing them into resettlement areas on the outskirts of Delhi. Thousands were also forcibly sterilized (vasectomy for men, tubectomy for women) as part of the population control program. The many narratives that people shared with Tarlo reveal both their experience of oppression and the many facets of human agency in response to state actions. For example, people were told that unless they were sterilized, they would lose their job. Some men who were at the end of their fertile years signed up to be sterilized. Doctors were often complicit in such ruses, allowing these men to be sterilized.

Multiple Research Methods and Team Projects

Most cultural anthropologists use several different methods for their research, because just one would not provide all the kinds of data necessary to understand a given problem. For example, a small survey of forty households provides some breadth of coverage, but adding some life histories (of five men and five women, perhaps) provides depth. Triangulation is a technique that involves obtaining information on a particular topic from more than one angle or perspective (Robson 1993:290). Asking only one person something provides information from only that person’s viewpoint. Asking two people about the same thing doubles the information and often reveals that perspectives differ. The researcher may then want to check other sources, such as written records or newspaper reports, for additional perspectives (see the Lessons Applied box on page 40).

Team projects that involve cultural anthropologists and researchers from other disciplines provide additional skills. A research project designed to assess the effects of constructing a dam on the agricultural and fishing practices of people in the Senegal River Valley, West Africa, included cultural anthropologists, hydrologists, and agronomists (Horowitz and Salem-Murdock 1993). In another project, a cultural anthropologist and a nutritionist worked together to study the effects of adopting new agricultural practices in the Amazon (Gross and Underwood 1971).

Recording Culture

How does the anthropologist keep track of all this information and record it for future analysis? As with everything else about fieldwork, things have changed since the early times when a typewriter, index cards, and pencils were the major recording tools. Yet there is continuity: Taking copious notes is still the trademark method of recording data for a cultural anthropologist. This section begins with a discussion of note taking, a process that

New Delhi citizens read a newspaper billboard reporting the electoral defeat of Indira Gandhi in 1977. This event marked the end of the Emergency and martial law. Consider why and how Emma Tarlo's research on the Emergency differed from standard anthropological fieldwork based on participant observation. (Source: © Bettman/CORBIS)
THE UNITED WAY of Canada, a philanthropic agency, wanted to find out what the highest priorities were for their funding operations in Saskatoon, a relatively poor city located in Canada's southwestern prairie (Ervin et al. 1991, van Willigen 1993:204–205). Anthropologist Alexander Ervin led a team of researchers from the University of Saskatchewan's Department of Anthropology and Archaeology to respond to the United Way's request. At the time of the study in 1990, the city's population was about 200,000. The economy includes agriculture, mining, forestry, and some manufacturing. The unemployment rate was 10 percent, and food banks and soup kitchens were being increasingly used.

The team designed its research to provide baseline data on perceived social needs to assist the United Way in decision making. The assessment included six data collection activities: reviewing available written reports relevant to Saskatoon's needs, analyzing economic and social indicators, organizing 3 public forums, conducting 135 interviews with key informants from community agencies, holding focus groups, and interviewing 28 United Way agency executive directors. These activities provided breadth and depth about community opinion and agency priorities and interests.

The research team produced a report that included a list of over 200 needs identified. The list was organized into 17 sectors, among them general health, mental health, the senior population, Native American issues, racism, and discrimination, and immigrant and refugee resettlement. The report also included a set of recommendations for the United Way.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Conducting a community needs assessment entails a research approach quite different from traditional fieldwork in cultural anthropology. What are some of the pros and cons of anthropologists conducting such applied research?

Tape Recording, Photography, and Videos

Tape recorders are an obvious aid to fieldwork because they make possible the accurate recording of much more information. However, tape recording may raise problems such as informants' suspicions about a machine that can capture their voices, and the ethical issue of maintaining anonymity of informants whose actual voices are preserved on tape. María Cátedra (1992) reports on her use of tape recording during research in rural Spain in the 1970s:

At first the existence of the "apparatus," as they called it, was part wonder and part suspect. Many had never seen one before and were fascinated to hear their own voice, but all were worried about what I would do with the tapes... I tried to solve the problem by explaining what I would do with the tapes: I would use them to record exactly what people told me, since my memory was not good enough and I could not take notes quickly enough... One event helped people to accept my integrity in regard to the "apparatus." In the second braik [small settlement] I visited, people asked me to play back what the people of the first braik had told me, especially some songs sung by a group of men. At first I was going to do it, but I instinctively refused because I did not have the first people's permission... My stand was quickly known in the first braik and commented on with approval (21-22)
A problem with tape recordings is that they have to be transcribed (typed up), either partially or completely. Each hour of recorded talk takes between five and eight hours to transcribe. Even more time is needed if the recording is garbled, many voices are heard at once, or complications in translation arise.

Like tape recordings, photographs or videos capture more detail than scratch notes. Any researcher who has watched people performing a ritual, taken scratch notes, and then tried to reconstruct the details of the ritual later on in field notes will know how much of the sequencing and related activity is lost to memory within just a few hours. Reviewing photographs or a video recording of the ritual provides a surprising amount of forgotten, or missed, material. But there is a trade-off. Using a camera or video recorder precludes taking notes simultaneously. Since field notes are invaluable, even if the video is also available, it is best to use a team approach.

Kirsten Hastrup (1992) provides an insightful description of her use of photography—and its limitations—in recording the annual ram exhibition in Iceland that celebrates the successful herding in of the sheep from mountain pastures. This event is exclusively for males, but she was allowed to attend.

The smell was intense, the light somewhat dim and the room full of indiscernible sounds from some 120 rams and about 40 men. A committee went from one ram to the next noting their impressions of the animal, in terms of its general beauty, the size of the horns and so forth. Measurements were made all over but the decisive measure (made by hand) was the size and weight of the ram's testicles. The air was loaded with sex and I realized that the exhibition was literally and metaphorically a competition of sexual potency... I heard endless sexual jokes and very private remarks. The bursts of laughter followed by side-glances at me conveyed an implicit question of whether I understood what was going on. I did.

Hastrup took many photographs. After they were developed, she was struck by how little of the totality of the event they conveyed.

Photographs and videos, just like field notes and other forms of recorded culture, provide only partial images of a cultural event. Furthermore, photographs and videos are no more objective than any other form of recorded culture because it is the researcher who selects what the camera will capture. Visual records are best regarded as important complements to other forms of cultural data.

Data Analysis

During the research process, a vast amount of data is collected in many forms. The question is how to put these data into some presentable form. In data analysis, as with research, two basic varieties exist: qualitative (prose-based description) and quantitative (numeric) data. Often, researchers analyze qualitative data in qualitative terms, as described below. Similarly, quantitative data lend themselves to quantitative analysis. But matters are never this straightforward. Qualitative data are often rendered in quantitative terms, and reporting on quantitative results necessarily requires descriptive prose to accompany graphs, charts, and computations.

Analyzing Qualitative Data

Qualitative data include descriptive field notes, informants' narratives, myths and stories, and songs and sagas. Relatively few set guidelines exist for undertaking a qualitative analysis of qualitative data. One general procedure of qualitative analysis is to search for themes,
or regularities, in the data. This approach involves exploring the data, or “playing” with the data, either “by hand” or with the use of a computer. Jennifer Robertson’s analysis of her Kodaira data was inspired by writer Gertrude Stein’s approach to writing “portraits” of individuals, such as Picasso (1948). Robertson says that Stein was a superb ethnographer who was able to illuminate the “bottom nature” of her subjects and their worlds through a process that Stein referred to as “condensation.” To do this, “she scrutinized her subjects until, over time, there emerged for her a repeating pattern of their words and actions. Her literary portraits . . . were condensations of her subjects’ repeatings” (Robertson 1991:1). Like Stein, Robertson reflected on all that she had experienced and learned in Kodaira, beginning with the years when she lived there as a child. Emerging from all this was the dominant theme, furusato, which literally means “old village.” References to furusato appear frequently in people’s accounts of the past, conveying a sense of nostalgia for a more “real” past. Many qualitative anthropologists use computers to help sort for tropes (key themes). Computer scanning of data offers the ability to search vast quantities of data more quickly and perhaps accurately than with the human eye. The range of software available for such data management—for example ETHNO and The Ethnograph—is expanding. Of course, the quality of the results depends on, first, careful and complete inputting of the data and, second, an intelligent coding scheme that will tell the computer what it should be scanning for in the data.

The ethnographic presentation of qualitative data relies on the use of quotations of informants—their stories, explanations, and conversations. Although most ethnographies also include analytical commentary, some provide just the informants’ words. Lila Abu-Lughod followed this approach in her book Writing Women’s Worlds (1993). She presents Bedouin women’s stories and conversations within a light authoritative framework that organizes the stories into thematic clusters such as marriage, production, and honor. Although she provides a traditional, scholarly introduction to the narratives, she offers no conclusion, because a conclusion would give a false sense of authorial control over the narratives. She prefers to prompt readers to think for themselves about the meanings of the stories and what they say about Bedouin life.

Some anthropologists question the value of interpretive analyses on the ground that they lack verifiability. Too much depends on the individual selection process of the anthropologist, and too much is built around too few cases. Qualitative anthropologists would respond that verifiability in the scientific sense is not their goal and is not a worthwhile goal for cultural anthropology in general. Instead, they seek to provide a plausibly attractive interpretation, an evocation, or new understanding that has detail and richness as its strengths rather than representativeness or replicability. They criticize purely quantitative research for its lack of richness and depth of understanding, even though it has the appearance of validity.

Analyzing Quantitative Data

Analysis of quantitative, or numeric, data can proceed in several directions. Some of the more sophisticated methods require knowledge of statistics, and many require the use of a computer and a software package that can perform statistical computations. In my research on low-income household budgeting patterns in Jamaica, I used computer analysis first to divide the sample households into three income groups (lower, medium, higher). I then used the computer to calculate percentages of expenditures in the three categories on individual goods and groups of goods such as food, housing, and transportation (see Table 2.1). Because the number of households I was working with was relatively small (120), the analysis could have been done “by hand.” However, using the computer made the analysis proceed more quickly and more accurately.

Writing About Culture

Ethnography, or descriptive writing about culture, is one of the main projects of cultural anthropology. Ethnographies have been categorized into several different types; two of the most distinct categories can be called realist ethnography and reflexive ethnography (Van Maanen 1988). Both types provide insights about culture.

In realist ethnography, authors include little material about themselves directly in the text. The author typically reports the findings in a dispassionate, third-person voice. The ethnography includes attention to the behavior of members of the culture, theoretical coverage of certain features of the culture, and usually a brief account of why the work was undertaken. The result is a description and explanation of cultural practices. Realist ethnographies attempt to present findings that any skilled and objective person would be able to discover about another culture. Most classic works by such anthropologists as Malinowski, Mead, and Radcliffe-Brown fall in the category of realist ethnography. Realist ethnography is still the predominant form of ethnography. For example, Katherine Verdery’s study of economic and political change in Romania, What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next? (1996), is a realist ethnography. She writes about how Romanian socialism operated politically and economically and how its effects are being felt in terms of Romanian nationalism and nationalist sentiments in the postsocialist era.

In contrast, the main goal of reflexive ethnography is to explore the research experience itself. Reflexive ethno-
TABLE 2.1 Mean Weekly Expenditure Shares (Percentage) in Eleven Categories by Urban and Rural 
Expenditure Groups, Jamaica, 1983–1984

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Households</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>65.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry Goods</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuel</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
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<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total*</td>
<td>100.4</td>
<td>99.5</td>
<td>100.3</td>
<td>100.2</td>
<td>99.4</td>
<td>99.8</td>
<td>99.7</td>
<td>99.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Totals may not add up to 100 due to rounding.


SPECIAL ISSUES IN FIELDWORK

This section considers some enduring and emerging issues in anthropological fieldwork. The first topic is the important matter of fieldwork ethics. No one should undertake any kind of research without training in ethical principles and careful consideration of how to protect people involved in the project from harm. The second topic is that of danger to the researcher while conducting fieldwork. Last is a topic of emerging importance: accountability in cultural anthropology. Our discussion of this topic includes questions of who benefits from the research and how, and in what way the research can be relevant to the people studied.

Fieldwork Ethics

Anthropology was one of the first disciplines to devise and adopt a code of ethics. Two major events in the 1950s and 1960s led cultural anthropologists to reconsider their role in research in relation to both the sponsors (or funders) of their research and the people whom they were studying. The first was the infamous "Project Camelot" of the 1950s. Project Camelot was a plan of the United States government to influence political leadership and stability in South America (Horowitz 1967). To further this goal, the United States government employed several anthropologists, who were to gather detailed information on political events and leaders in particular countries, without revealing their purpose, and then report to their sponsor (the United States government) about their findings. It is still unclear whether the anthropologists involved were completely informed about the purposes to which their data would be put.

The second major event was the Vietnam War (or the American War, as it is called in Vietnam). This brought to the forefront conflicts about government interests in ethnographic information, the role of the anthropologist, and the protection of the people studied. Two bitterly opposed positions emerged within anthropology. On one side was the view that all Americans as citizens should support the American military effort in Vietnam and that...
SEX IS A SENSITIVE TOPIC

RICHARD PARKER went to Brazil to study the historical and political aspects of Carnaval (1991). As he explored the festival and got to know participants, he began to realize how closely linked it is to sexual symbolism and sexuality, both heterosexual and homosexual. Simultaneously, he realized how important an understanding of these topics was to a better understanding of Brazilian culture in general. As his research continued, he began to be trusted by both heterosexuals and gay men and lesbians and therefore gained access to their multiple cultural worlds. The quality of his personal relationships with his some thirty participants was the key factor in the success of the study. Parker mentions passing “a set of initial barriers,” though he does not elaborate on these (177).

Parker's focus on sexual culture, in fact, supported a shared sense of breaking the rules of social decorum, something that would not arise out of a study of a less sensitive topic such as work roles or family life. Parker found that once he had gained people's trust, “informants often seemed to take a certain pleasure in being part of a project which seemed to break the rules of proper decorum... that while they often resisted, understandably, speaking too directly about their own sexual lives, they seemed to enjoy (and, at times, to take a positive delight in) the opportunity to speak freely about the question of sex more generally” (177).

Parker's personal skills and rapport with his informants are evident in the rich data that he collected on such taboo topics as masturbation, oral sex, and anal sex. Thus the sheer sensitivity of a topic does not always prevent its study—as long as the researcher is sensitive, too.

A participant in Carnaval in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Throughout the world, the celebration of Carnaval is a time of heightened merriment and display of sexuality. Think of a special event, or events, in your microcultural experience in which fun and sexuality are expressed in an “out of bounds” way. What are the characteristics of this special event? (Source: © AFP/Corbis)

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Do you think that sexual behavior is a sensitive topic in all cultures? Is it in your microculture(s)?

In what ways might the Internet be changing how some people talk about sexuality?

Do you think Parker could do research on Brazilian people's sexuality through the Internet as effectively as in person—or perhaps even more effectively?

any anthropologists who had information that could help subvert communism should provide that information to the United States government. The conflicting position stated that the anthropologist's responsibility is first and always to protect the people being studied and that this responsibility takes priority over politics. Anthropologists in this position tended to oppose the United States's participation in the war and to see the people of South Vietnam as victims of Western imperialist interests. They revealed cases in which anthropological research about local leadership patterns and political affiliations had been turned over to the United States government and had resulted in military actions against those people. This period was the most divisive in the history of American anthropology.

In 1971 the American Anthropological Association (AAA) adopted a code of ethics. It stated that the anthropologist's primary responsibility is to ensure the safety of the people being studied. By implication, individuals wishing to help their government during wartime by providing sensitive information on people that could result in the people's deaths should not do so in the role of an anthropologist. A related principle is that cultural anthropology does not condone covert or "undercover" research. The people being studied should be informed that they are being studied and should be told the pur-
poses for which they are being studied. The principle of informed consent requires that the researcher fully inform the research participants of the intent, scope, and possible effects of the study and seek their consent to be in the study. Many anthropologists say that the nature of anthropological research often makes it difficult to apply the strict standards of informed consent that are used in medical settings (Fluehr-Lobban 1994). For example, people in nonliterate societies may be frightened by being asked to sign a typed document of consent that they cannot read. Given that the intent of informed consent is a good one—people should be aware of the purpose and scope and possible effects of a study involving them—each anthropologist should consider some way to achieve this goal. Holding a “town meeting” with all community members present and explaining the research project is one approach.

In presenting one’s research results, whether in a book or in a film, one should make every effort to protect the anonymity of the people in the study unless they give permission for their identities to be revealed. The usual practice in writing ethnographies has been to change the name of the specific group, area, or village, blur the location, and use made-up names for individuals mentioned.

Some research topics are more sensitive than others, and some topics are sensitive to some groups and not to others (Lee and Renzetti 1993). Governments may decree that certain subjects are simply off limits for research by foreigners. Strictly speaking, an American anthropologist should abide by the AAA code of ethics guideline stating that rulings of host governments are to be respected.

Sexual behavior is a potentially sensitive research issue, more from the point of view of informants than from that of host governments. In most cultures, homosexuality is even more difficult to research than heterosexuality, because it is more likely to be taboo in terms of mainstream norms or even laws. (See the Unity and Diversity box.)

Danger in the Field

Fieldwork can involve serious physical and psychological risks to the researcher and to members of his or her family if they are also in the field. The image of “the anthropologist as hero” has hobbled, to a large degree, both the physical dangers and the psychological risks of fieldwork. Dangers from the physical environment can be fatal. The slippery paths of the highlands of the Philippines caused the death in the early 1980s of Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, a major figure in cultural anthropology of the later twentieth century. Disease is another important risk factor.

Violence figures prominently in some recent research experiences. During the five years that Philippe Bourgois (1995) lived in East Harlem in order to research crack culture, he witnessed a shooting outside his window, a bombing and machine-gunning of a numbers joint, a shoot-out and police car chase in front of the pizza parlor where he was eating, the aftermath of a fire-bombing of a heroin house, a dozen serious fights, and “almost daily exposure to broken-down human beings, some of them in fits of crack-induced paranoia, some suffering from delirium tremens, and others in unidentifiable pathological fits of screaming and shouting insults to all around them” (1995:32). He was rough-handled by the police several times because they could not believe that he was “just a professor” doing research, and he was mugged for the sum of $8. Bourgois’s research placed him in physical danger and at psychological risk. Nevertheless, it also enabled him to gain an understanding of oppression from the inside.

Research within combat zones is another area where danger is clearly present, and the anthropologist must be especially prepared (Hoffman 2003). Frontline anthropology, or research conducted within zones of violent conflict, can provide important insights into topics such as the militarization of civilian lives, civilian protection, the cultural dynamics of military personnel, and the prospects for postconflict reconstruction. Frontline anthropologists require special training and experience in how to behave and survive in a conflict zone, and the most effective frontline anthropologists have, in addition to anthropology coursework, previous experience in conflict zones as workers in international aid organizations or the military.

What do we know about danger in fieldwork in supposedly normal situations? After more than twenty years of fieldwork in Southern Africa, Nancy Howell suddenly had to confront the issue of danger in the field:

[I]t came horribly into focus for me in June 1983 when my 14-year-old son, Alex Lee, was suddenly killed and my other son, David, was injured, in a truck accident in Botswana. In the months that followed that accident, many anthropological friends and acquaintances offered information on similar and different fieldwork accidents. (1990:ix)

She pointed out to the American Anthropological Association the lack of attention to fieldwork safety. The AAA responded with financial support for her to undertake a detailed inquiry into regional variations, and types of hazards within anthropology. She devised a way to draw a sample of 311 anthropologists listed as employed in the AAA’s Guide to Departments. She sent them a questionnaire asking about their gender, age, work status, health status, and work habits in the field, and she asked them to give reports of health and other hazards they had experienced in the field. Of the 311 people in the sample,
The food ration queue at an emergency clinic near Buedu, Sierra Leone. While conducting his dissertation research in war-torn Sierra Leone in 2001, Danny Hoffman combined traditional fieldwork techniques such as participant observation and interviews. But he also had to be alert to sudden danger and other risks specific to research during war. He believes anthropologists must be willing to take such risks in order to provide essential knowledge about the complex causes and consequences of war that are overlooked by war correspondents writing for the media. Do you agree or disagree with this position? (Source: © Danny Hoffman)

236 completed the questionnaire. Regional variations appeared, Africa being the area of highest hazard rates, followed by India, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America. Howell ends her study with recommendations about how fieldworkers can prepare themselves more effectively for risks they may face.

Accountability and Collaborative Research

The freedom of a cultural anthropologist to represent a culture as she or he perceives it is a power issue that is increasingly being brought into question, especially by indigenous peoples who read about themselves in Western ethnographies. The people whom anthropologists have traditionally studied—the nonelites of rural India, Ireland, and Papua New Guinea—are now able to read English, French, and German. They can therefore critique what has been written about their culture. Annette Weiner (1976) learned from people in the Trobriand Islands that some Trobrianders who had read sections of Argonauts of the Western Pacific thought that Malinowski had not gotten things right (xvi).

One of the newest directions in cultural anthropology fieldwork is the attempt to involve the study population in actively shaping the data collection and presentation. This change reflects a commitment on the part of anthropologists not to treat people as “subjects” and to consider them more as collaborators in writing culture. Anthropologists also are taking more responsibility for the effects that their work may have on the cultures they study.
KEY CONCEPTS

culture shock, p. 35

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reflective anthropology, or reflexivity, p. 36
triangulation, p. 39

SUGGESTED READINGS


from how to design a research project to data analysis and presentation.


Peggy Golde, ed. Women in the Field: Anthropological Experiences. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. This text provides fifteen chapters on fieldwork by women anthropologists, including Margaret Mead's fieldwork in the Pacific, Laura Nader's fieldwork in Mexico and Lebanon, Ernestine Friedl's fieldwork in Greece, and Jean Briggs's fieldwork among the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic.

Bruce Grindal and Frank Salamone, eds. Bridges to Humanity: Narratives on Anthropology and Friendship. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1995. The fourteen chapters of this text explore the "humanistic" dimension of fieldwork, in which the anthropologist reflects on the friend-
ships established in the field, how they contributed to the fieldwork, and how or whether they can be continued once the anthropologist leaves the field.

Joy Hendry. *An Anthropologist in Japan: Glimpses of Life in the Field.* London: Routledge, 1999. This book is a first-person account of a research project in Japan. It includes information on her original research design, how the focus changed, and how she reached unanticipated conclusions.

Choong Soon Kim. *One Anthropologist, Two Worlds: Three Decades of Reflexive Fieldwork in North America and Asia.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002. The author reflects on his fieldwork, conducted over thirty years, on Japanese industry in the American South and, in Korea, on families displaced by the war and partition. Korean-born and educated in the United States, Kim is of multiple cultural worlds himself.


HOW do cultural anthropologists conduct research on culture?

Cultural anthropologists conduct research by doing fieldwork and using participant observation. Fieldwork and participant observation became the cornerstones of cultural anthropology research after Malinowski's fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands during World War I. These methods emphasize the importance of living for an extended period of time with the people being studied and learning the local language.

WHAT does fieldwork involve?

The first steps in doing fieldwork include site selection, gaining rapport, and dealing with culture shock. Depending on one's theoretical perspective, specific research techniques may emphasize gathering quantitative or qualitative data. Cultural materialists tend to focus on quantitative data, whereas interpretivists gather qualitative data. Taking notes by hand has always been the hallmark of data recording, but now it is complemented by other methods, including laptop computers, photography, and audio and video recording. Data analysis and presentation, like data collection, are guided by the anthropologist's theoretical orientation and goals. Emphasis on quantitative or qualitative techniques of data collection shape the way the data are organized and presented-for example, whether statistics and tables are used or avoided. Interpretivist anthropologists attempt to present accounts that are as emic as possible, with little analysis by an outsider.

WHAT are some special issues in cultural anthropology research?

Questions of ethics have been paramount to anthropologists since the 1950s. In 1971 American anthropologists adopted a set of ethical guidelines for research to address their concern about what role, if any, anthropologists should play in research that might harm the people being studied. The first rule listed in the AAA code of ethics states that the anthropologist's primary responsibility is to maintain the safety of the people involved. Thus anthropologists should never engage in covert research and should always endeavor to explain their purpose to the people in the study and to preserve the anonymity of the location and of individuals. Special issues include the safety of anthropologists who are conducting research in dangerous conditions.