

Chapter 3

Studying Culture



Learning Objectives

- 3.1 Compare the theoretical orientations of cultural anthropology that have developed over time.
- 3.2 Describe the methods used in ethnographic, ethnohistorical, and cross-cultural research.
- 3.3 Summarize the ethical issues faced by cultural anthropologists.

Ice had formed ahead of them, and it reached all the way to the sky. The people could not cross it. It was too thick to break. A Raven flew up and struck the ice and cracked it when he came down. Coyote said, "These small people can't get across the ice." Another Raven flew up again and cracked the ice again. Coyote said, "Try again, try again." Raven flew up again and broke the ice. The people ran across. (a Northern Paiute narrative of glaciation on the Snake River in Idaho, p. 83)

That in ancient times a herd of these tremendous animals came to the big-bone licks, and began a universal destruction of the bear, deer, elks, buffaloes, and other animals: that the great Man above, looking down and seeing this, was so enraged that he seized his lightning, descended on the earth, seated himself on the neighboring mountain, on a rock of which his seat and the print of his feet are still to be seen, hurled his bolts among them until the whole was slaughtered, except the big bull. (a Delaware narrative of mammoths in Virginia, p. 128)

The time ago, the water of the Pacific flowed through what is now the swamp and prairie between Waatch village and Neah Bay, making an island of Cape Flattery. The

water suddenly receded, leaving Neah Bay perfectly dry. It was four days reaching its lowest ebb, and then rose again 'til it had submerged the Cape That and in fact the whole country, excepting the tops of the mountains at Clioquot. The water on its rise became very warm, and as it came up to the houses, those who had canoes put their effects into them, and floated off with the current which set very strongly to the north. Some drifted one way, some another; and when the waters assumed their accustomed level, a portion of the tribe found themselves beyond Nootka, where their descendants now reside. (a Quillayute narrative of land transformations in Washington and British Columbia, p. 190)

(Source: Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact: Vine Deloria Jr., 1997, Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing) Specific sources: Paiute: Julian Steward, "Some Western Shoshoni Myths" Washington DC, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau American Ethnology, Bulletin 136, Anthropological Papers, no. 31, 1943, page 299.

Delaware: as Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, Boston: Thomas & Andrews, J. West, West & Greenleaf et al., 1801, pages 59–61. Quoted in Ludwell H. Johnson III: Man and Elephants in America" Scientific Monthly 75 (October 1952), page 217. Quillayute: James G. Swan, The Indians of Cape Flattery of Washington DC: Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge, no. 220, 1869, page 57.

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These stories can be interpreted on many levels. One kind of reading of narratives told by the Northern Paiute, Delaware, and Quillayute peoples may be as reference to ancient climatic and ecological events and upheavals in their territories. In this interpretation, the stories give accounts of natural or geological events and explanations for the appearance of animals, glaciations, or the formation of lakes and rivers resulting from floods and other catastrophic events. According to geologist Dr. Eugene Kiver, the "floods may have happened when people were around. Native Americans have myths about floods (Robbins 2004).

Stories that seem to parallel actual occurrences suggest the accuracy of people's memories of their past, even though events may be embellished in the rich, poetic language of tradition. **Narratives** may dramatize real events in symbolic form consistent with cultural practices of storytelling. Thus, they may transmit across generations the memories of people who witnessed events that changed their geographic landscape. We will never know whether these stories encapsulate such memories or whether they imagine an explanation for the landscape that existed when the people developed the narrative. Whatever the particular facts, narratives have the power to create and transmit a people's worldview.

Without a writing system, indigenous peoples use storytelling to preserve their history. Collecting and interpreting these stories is one form of cultural anthropology. Anthropologists analyze narratives to identify aspects of cultural identity, social values, moral themes, people's practices and attitudes, and artistic principles and motifs.

Traditional narratives may also be dramatic renditions of historical events. The accuracy of chronologies and events may be uncertain, but **oral traditions** like the story of Coyote and Wishpoosh have validity as artifacts of culture and experience. In 1997, for example, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in a land claims case brought by the Gitksan, an indigenous people of British Columbia, that oral traditions have validity as legal testimony and as records of the past. This chapter further explores the theories and methods involved in the anthropological interpretation of culture.

narratives

Stories and myths that dramatize actual memories or events in symbolic form consistent with cultural practices of storytelling.

oral traditions

Cultural narratives that have validity as artifacts of culture and experience.

Anthropology and the Explanation of Cultural Diversity

3.1 Compare the theoretical orientations of cultural anthropology that have developed over time.

Although the field of anthropology as an academic discipline is only slightly more than a century old, its intellectual roots in Europe go back much farther. Although people everywhere may note cultural differences between themselves and others, anthropology has its roots in the exploration and colonial expansions that originated in Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Explorers, traders, and missionaries,

What are some oral traditions from your cultural group (such as your family) that you could analyze from an anthropological perspective?



The sixteenth-century Spanish missionary Bartolome de las Casas's description of the effects of colonial life on Native Americans led to humanitarian reforms.

bent on their far-flung journeys of discovery and conquest, often wrote about and commented on the differences they observed in the ways of life of the peoples they encountered.

Europeans wrote many journals, diaries, letters, and memoirs during the first centuries of colonization in North and South America, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific islands. Although many writers were biased and ethnocentric, they nevertheless often left detailed observations of cultures at the time of contact. For example, Jesuit missionaries wrote detailed accounts about working in North America in the seventeenth century. These men were better educated than most of the explorers and adventurers who preceded and followed them. They were familiar with the scholarly literary and philosophical works of their age. Although critical of many of the practices they described, the Jesuits often were astute observers and recorders. They sometimes judged native customs and attitudes to be superior to the French, for example, such as the people's rules for hospitality and generosity and their relatively harmonious, noncompetitive community life. In some ways, these missionaries were like anthropologists—both observers and participants in others' lifeways—although of course they had their own goal of converting native peoples to Christianity.

The goal of anthropology as a discipline is to record and account for the great diversity in human cultures. But today there is diversity in anthropology as well, as anthropologists choose different conceptual frameworks to achieve their goals. This section explores a number of perspectives that have been proposed to account for similarities and differences in human societies. These perspectives differ in their focus and in the kinds of theories that they offer to explain human behavior and cultural diversity. A cultural theory is one that attempts to formulate explanations that help us understand why particular practices originate and how they are developed and maintained in particular populations. From an understanding of cultural diversity, some anthropologists also propose theories that can help explain universal trends and processes.

Some approaches in anthropology that were developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as evolutionism, have been discarded as inadequate or incomplete, either because they were unscientific and based on fragmentary and poorly understood data, or because they were based on social attitudes and prejudices that were then prevalent. Nevertheless, the works of some early anthropologists continue to inform aspects of modern inquiry.

Evolutionism

During the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, European social philosophers, relying on the writings of earlier observers, took a comparative evolutionary perspective, and understood cultural diversity from the point of view of human "progress." Scholars focused on finding rational, reasoned, and scientific explanations for human differences. They understood that people adapt to their social environments and historical conditions as well as to their physical surroundings, with the goal of progress and the possibility of betterment. Enlightenment philosophers looked for evolutionary trends in the development of human societies. Thus, in **evolutionism**, human differences could be accounted for by different rates of progress, leading to different levels of achievement. Various hypotheses were put forward, demonstrating a progression from stages of "primitive" culture to "civilization." Even though distinct schemes were suggested by different theorists, they had in common an assumption of "unilinear evolution," that is, progression through rigid stages in a set order. Although these theories were ethnocentric, using European culture as a measure of progress, they laid the foundation for nineteenth-century anthropological thinking about sociocultural evolution.

Throughout the nineteenth century, European and American scholars concentrated on developing and refining comparative evolutionary approaches toward understanding the similarities and differences among cultures. The Englishmen Herbert Spencer (1877) and Edward Tylor (1871) and the American Lewis Henry Morgan (1877) proposed models outlining stages of cultural development from the

evolutionism

View held by early social philosophers that human differences can be accounted for by different rates of progress, leading to different levels of cultural achievement.

earliest human societies to late nineteenth-century European culture. Both Morgan and Spencer focused on understanding how cultures are integrated and systematized and how the various features of one culture indicate an evolutionary status in comparison with other cultures. For example, Morgan proposed three stages of cultural evolution: savagery, in which people subsist on wild plants and animals; barbarism, in which people start to use agriculture; and civilization, which begins with the invention of writing. Spencer, a social Darwinist, believed that European influence or domination over other peoples was the natural result of evolutionary progress. The social Darwinists applied some aspects of Charles Darwin's theories of biological evolution to social and cultural phenomena, particularly ideas about the survival of better-adapted organisms and the disappearance of maladaptive forms. These theories essentially justified European hegemony and empire throughout the world.

Using eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideas and data, sources that varied widely in their reliability and accuracy, early anthropologists nevertheless advanced the study of human societies by proposing a more thorough analysis of cultural features and their significance for the development of social forms. For example, Morgan first explained the kinship systems of tribes making up the Iroquois Confederacy and the links between a kinship system and the economic system, family organization, and social structure. And while current anthropological thinking rejects the kind of evolutionism popular through the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries because of the privileging of some types of societies over others, at least it attempted to develop some theoretical understandings of cultural differences.

Empiricism

Anthropology began to take modern form as a discipline in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the work of the German-born American Franz Boas (1897), the Polish-born Briton Bronislaw Malinowski (1922), and several others. In this period, direct fieldwork, rather than speculation based on the data of others, became central to the pursuit of knowledge about human cultures. That is, anthropology came to be seen as a scientific inquiry into facts that can be observed directly.

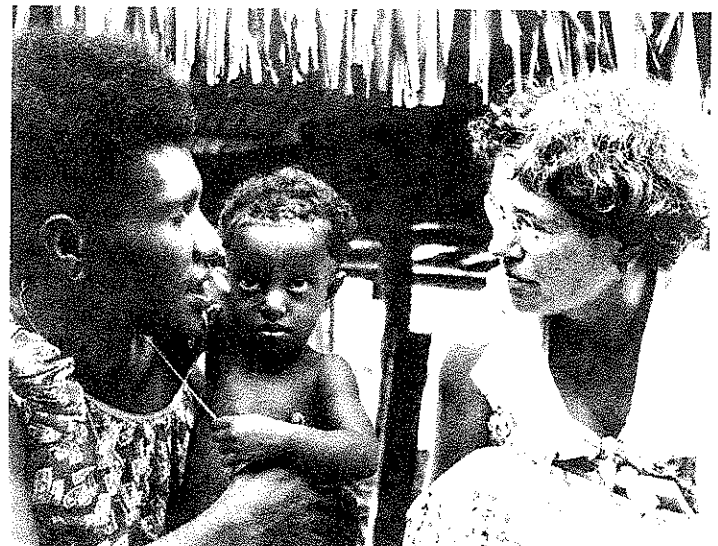
Boas began his career in Germany as a geographer, but on a trip to the Arctic to investigate northern waters in 1883, he became interested in the indigenous peoples and their cultures. He spent a year living with the Inuit, deepening his appreciation of cultural traits and his conviction that only by living with other people can one truly understand cultural differences. In 1886, Boas traveled to British Columbia to learn about Bella Coola (Nuxalk) culture, and two years later he immigrated to the United States. While studying the Kwakiutl of the Pacific Northwest and their ceremonial life, he became the major figure and driving force in the development of American anthropology. Boas trained many of the most prominent anthropologists of his and the next generation, including Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, sending them into the field to meticulously collect and archive data about many different cultures.

Boas consistently stressed the need for **empiricism**, the practice of formulating theories and analyses after conducting studies based on direct observation and objective description. Emphasis on empirical research stresses the primacy of collecting observable data rather than the construction of theories, although of course theories need to be based on empirical data, and the collection of data leads to the formulation of theories that explain those social facts. Boas also introduced the concept of cultural relativism and believed that each way of life is a unique adaptation to particular historical conditions, a view that critics referred to as "historical particularism." Boas refuted the earlier theories of

empiricism

The practice of conducting studies through direct observation and objective description.

Margaret Mead's reports about growing up in Samoa and living among the Manus of New Guinea astonished the public.



cultural evolutionism, criticizing these concepts as being essentially ethnocentric and racist. According to Boas, cultures should be understood and evaluated in their own terms, not in terms of the cultural practices, beliefs, and values of the observer. In his own work and that of his students, Boas stressed the importance of learning the native languages to understand the people's attitudes and beliefs literally in their own terms. Boas's work implicitly questioned Euro-American biases in interpreting other cultures and raised issues that today are concerned with examining the subjectivity of the observer and analyst.

Boas also stressed that similarities and differences should be understood as outcomes of the functions and meanings of cultural traits within a society. He pointed out that the same traits can have different meanings in different cultures. Polygamy, or plural marriage, for example, may occur for different reasons in different societies, depending on the cultural context. Marriage rules allowing men to take more than one wife, for instance, may function to signal a man's comparative wealth, power, and prestige; to relieve women of household burdens by providing additional labor; or to ensure that all women can have husbands in societies where women outnumber men. (These issues will be discussed further in Chapter 10 on Marriage and the Family.)

Functionalism

functionalism

The view that cultural traits have social functions that contribute to the smooth operation of the whole society.

If you were a functionalist, how would you argue that even negative practices, such as antisocial behavior, can have positive functions for society as a whole?

Functionalism, or the study of the social functions of cultural traits, was a hallmark of the research of Bronislaw Malinowski, whose work especially influenced British social anthropology. Malinowski believed that the social, economic, and political structures of societies were organized to satisfy human needs and that people's diverse institutions and practices have specific functions that address those needs. According to Malinowski, men and women living together in a community develop an "invisible network of social bonds" made up of shared values, attitudes, and practices that "integrate the group into a whole" (1922). All cultural behaviors and artifacts can be explained by understanding their role in maintaining this whole.

Like Boas, Malinowski was dedicated to fieldwork. Malinowski lived with the Trobriand Islanders of the western Pacific in Melanesia, immersing himself in Trobriand culture and language. Like Boas, he also stressed the importance of anthropologists learning the native language of the people they study, because people express their values and attitudes through their language. Malinowski used functionalism to explain his observations of Trobriand life. Students of Malinowski, such as A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and others, applied functionalist interpretations to field data collected among other Pacific Islanders, Africans, and Australian Aborigines. These interpretations are now sometimes criticized for overemphasizing functional stability rather than acknowledging societal tensions and change as ongoing, continuous processes. These criticisms arise specifically from the ways in which functional explanations, emphasizing stability, were used by colonial—especially British—authorities to rationalize their dominating control as a positive force in the colonial societies that they dominated.

Modern Theoretical Perspectives: An Overview

One of the criticisms of earlier theoretical approaches was the tendency to overly generalize about people's behaviors and beliefs and to depict other societies as bounded, homogeneous, and timeless. In contrast, some modern approaches attempt to uncover processes of change and adaptation or to analyze the conflicts and tensions that arise out of societal differences. Although these theories emphasize changes in social practices and beliefs, they differ significantly from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideas of unilinear evolution. Instead, concepts of "multilinear" change and adaptation developed that stressed the complexity of historical and cultural processes. One current approach in anthropological theory is to study culture from a materialist perspective, placing technological and economic adaptations at the center of cultural diversity. Another perspective analyzes cultures from a structuralist perspective, emphasizing the role of social structures in fulfilling human needs and integrating social systems. A variation of the structuralist perspective stresses the role of ideas and habits of mind

Table 3.1 Explaining Cultural Diversity

Materialist Perspectives	
Marvin Harris	Emphasizes the centrality of environmental adaptation, technology, and methods of acquiring or producing food in the development of culture.
Cultural Ecology	Cultural traits related to the satisfaction of basic human needs form a cultural core that is directly influenced by the physical environment.
Cultural Materialism	All aspects of a society's culture are derived from its economic foundation.
Structuralist Perspectives	
Claude Lévi-Strauss	Cultural diversity stems from differences in the forms by which people express universal meanings. These forms define and structure their lives and experiences and may serve universal social functions.
Interpretive Perspectives	
Clifford Geertz	Culture is a unique system of symbols with multiple layers of meaning. Through their behavior, people act out those meanings and communicate them to one another.
Conflict Perspectives	
	Culture is an expression of power relations within a society and between societies. Distributions of power are linked to distributions of wealth and status and affect gender relations as well as processes such as colonialism.

as the sources of diversity. A third orientation, the conflict perspective, places status and power relations at the center of diversity, focusing on how a worldwide system of dominance and subordination, power, and influence operates within and between societies. A fourth perspective is interpretive, with an emphasis on the meanings that people communicate through symbols. Table 3.1 summarizes some of the modern perspectives in anthropological theory.

Materialist Perspectives

Materialist perspectives emphasize environmental adaptation, technologies, and methods of acquiring or producing food in the development of culture. Humans adapt to their environments primarily through culture. Humans address the scarcity of resources by developing methods of extracting, exploiting, storing, and processing whatever foods are available. As you read in Chapter 1, these behaviors, and the satisfaction of other human needs, form a cultural core from which other aspects of society develop and are integrated. This analytic and explanatory focus in anthropology is called **cultural ecology**, a term introduced by Julian Steward in the 1930s. In societies that depend directly on their environment, ecological factors, such as resources, climate, and topography, have more pervasive effects on cultural development than they do in societies where people can control and modify their immediate environment.

Another materialist perspective centering on cultural adaptations through economic production is referred to as **cultural materialism**, developed by Marvin Harris (1979). This approach, influenced by the economic views of Karl Marx, gives greatest importance to economic systems and economic relations in the development of culture. Cultural traits are then explained as responses to economic necessities or benefits. Similarly, people need to organize work in order to produce and exchange foods, other goods, and services. From this basic organization, other features of culture follow. For example, to ensure adequate supplies of resources, people must regulate the size of their communities, increasing or decreasing population growth depending on resource availability. People also must develop methods of arriving at group decisions and controlling behavior to conform to those decisions. Basic economic behaviors and relationships influence how these traits are developed. In other words, what people do ultimately shapes what they believe, rather than the other way around.

Cultural materialism makes a distinction between *subjective* explanations for cultural behavior that are offered by the people engaged in that behavior—**emic** views—and *objective* explanations for cultural behavior that are given by anthropologists or

materialist perspectives

Explanations of cultural differences that emphasize environmental adaptation, technologies, and methods of acquiring or producing food.

cultural ecology

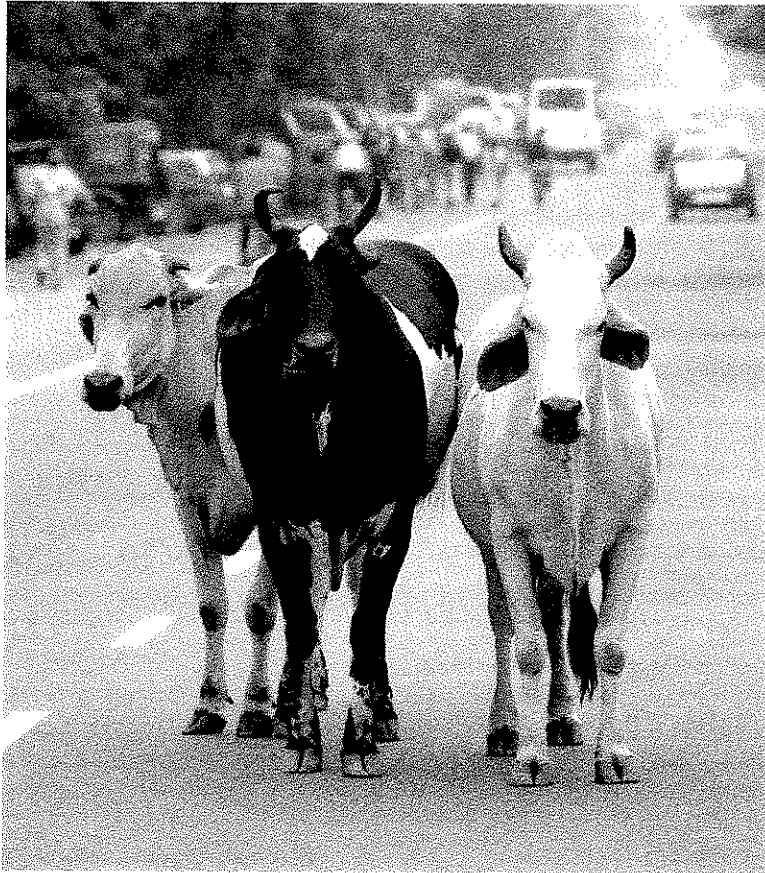
Field that studies cultures as dynamic wholes based on the satisfaction of human needs through cultural behaviors.

cultural materialism

Explanations of cultural differences as the results of cultural adaptations through economic production.

emic

Subjective, based on insiders' views, as in explanations people have for their own cultural behavior.



From the perspective of cultural materialism, cattle are too important for agriculture to be slaughtered in India.

etic

Objective, based on outsiders' views, as in explanations of people's behavior by anthropologists or other observers.

structuralism

View that cultural differences can be explained by differences in forms or conceptual categories rather than in meanings.

other observers—**etic** views. Cultural materialists claim that people usually are not aware of the underlying adaptive reasons for their actions. Thus, researchers look for explanations of people's behaviors based on observations and other objective criteria developed from an understanding of broad cultural and historical processes. These explanations are derived, in part, from theories that emerge from the comparative and holistic focus in anthropology. That is, by considering data from many societies, anthropologists can uncover the ways that particular practices are correlated and integrated with environmental constraints, economic systems, and social meanings.

In his popular book *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches: The Riddles of Culture* (1974), Harris contrasted emic and etic explanations of why Hindus in India do not eat or even kill cows. According to an emic analysis, Hindus do not kill cows because cows are sacred animals, symbolic of "everything that is alive." This is an explanation that a Hindu believer might give. In an etic analysis, however, the meaning of the sacredness of cows is analyzed in the context of the economic needs of farmers in India. For example, Indian farmers use cattle to pull their plows, and they use the dung as fuel for cooking fires and as insulation in their houses. Harris concluded that cattle are considered "sacred" to protect them from slaughter, because they are vital to Indian farming. Harris's work has been influential in its focus on understanding the

ecological and materialist meanings and origins of systems of belief and practice. He has shown that such practices are not random but instead are grounded in the necessities of survival and the organization of daily life.

Structuralist Perspectives

Taking a different turn in the analysis of culture, some anthropologists emphasize the centrality of forms and structure in the expression of culture, a perspective known as **structuralism**. For example, the French scholar Claude Lévi-Strauss used theories from structural linguistics (Saussure 1916) to analyze symbolic expressions of culture in terms of their structures or patterns, in addition to their meanings. His goal was to identify the underlying patterns that all the expressions have in common or the underlying codes on which all the expressions are based. Cultures could then be understood in terms of pattern variance.

Lévi-Strauss was interested in explaining why myths from different cultures around the world seem so similar. Treating mythology as a form of language or symbolic communication, he proposed a "principle of opposition" that all myths share, much like novels have a protagonist who engages in some kind of struggle that is somehow resolved. In mythology, heroic struggles involve a contest between opposites, especially between various forms of good and evil, with or without third-party mediation. Myths can be told and retold with elaborations, but the basic structure is always the same. In this case, understanding cultural differences would involve identifying the particular hero, type of struggle, type of mediation, if any, and type of outcome in each case. One can use a structuralist approach to uncover a widespread narrative structure and narrative arc recognizable in most myths and folklore. These narrative structures exist as well in popular culture in the form of films, for example, where protagonists are confronted with conflicts or problems that they have to

overcome. Finally, these narrative forms can also be found to underlie personal stories that people tell each other about incidents in their lives, demonstrating their ways of dealing with life's challenges.

Through his work, Lévi-Strauss essentially developed a theory of the mind, based on structural analysis, to explain cultural differences as variations in basic themes of universal human thinking. Lévi-Strauss also applied this method to the study of kinship (1949). He was interested in the fact that kinship structures are limited in the number of basic types and are strongly supported by myths and taboos. He looked for a basic unit of kinship that could explain all the variations. For any society requiring a man to marry outside his own hereditary line, for example, Lévi-Strauss identified a cluster of four roles—brother, sister, father, and son. These roles structure the exchanges that maintain the circulation of women in the society and establish cooperative relationships or alliances among kin groups. He proposed that marriage is the means through which people, and men in particular, form alliances that promote social cohesion and stability. Marriages forge alliances through a reciprocal exchange between one group that gives women as wives to another group, receiving gifts in return. This sets up patterned relationships between wife givers and wife receivers that over time establish enduring bonds between the groups. Chapters 9 and 10 further explore these topics. Understanding cultural differences in this case would involve identifying and comparing marriage rules, kin roles, forms of exchanges, and forms of alliances. Although Lévi-Strauss has been criticized for his focus on men as the primary social actors in these relationships, the perspective of structuralism remains useful today in its emphasis on patterned relationships among people occupying particular roles in society.

Interpretive Anthropology

In contrast to structural-functional analyses, some anthropologists focus on culture as meanings rather than as forms and functions. American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), for example, focuses on mental and cognitive processes in the development and transmission of culture. This kind of analysis, sometimes called **interpretive anthropology**, stresses the multilayered symbolic meanings of people's actions. From this perspective, cultural behavior is the acting out of those meanings.

Geertz developed his theory while working among the Javanese. According to Geertz, "Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun; I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning" (1973, 4–5). Geertz has called culture an "acted document" that is essentially public and therefore observable and analyzable. Doing ethnography, then, is like trying to read or construct a reading from a manuscript. To understand culture, interpretive anthropologists pay close attention to people's expressions of values, attitudes, meanings, intentions, and the felt importance of their actions (9–10). As the collective characteristics of a group, these meanings help define cultural differences among different groups. In order to uncover cultural meanings, working in the native languages is crucial since interpreters, no matter how adept and knowledgeable in the two languages, cannot translate subtle and symbolic nuances not directly expressed but covertly understood by native speakers.

interpretive anthropology

View that cultural differences can be understood as complex webs of meaning rather than through forms.

Conflict Perspectives and the Analysis of Culture and Power

Conflict perspectives focus on social problems or social issues in societies, especially those that arise as a result of the distribution of power among groups or social categories. Much of this analysis focuses on the relationship between culture and various forms of social, economic, and political power. Its adherents often use a Marxist framework to analyze how capitalist institutions penetrate and transform indigenous societies to suit their own needs.

One important concern in the analysis of power is the issue of gender, which also plays a role in anthropology. Many anthropological writings (by both male and female

conflict perspectives

Understanding cultural differences as a consequence of conflict in the interests and goals of various groups within a society and focusing on issues of power and resistance.

egalitarian ethics

Social principles that support equal access to resources and to social prestige within a community.

**Have you ever been a newcomer?
What preconceptions did you bring
with you?**

anthropologists) have a conceptual male bias. This bias often results in the assumption that male dominance exists (and has existed) in all societies. Reconstructions of indigenous social life prior to European contact tell a different story about the roles of men and women, however. Evidence indicates that in many societies, especially in communities relying on a hunter-gatherer economy, gender relations were often essentially equal, certainly more equal than after European conquest or colonization led to conformity to a European cultural model (Etienne and Leacock 1980; Leacock 1981). This conformity also led to patterns of leadership and decision-making procedures in many of the societies that European powers confronted and overwhelmed. Indigenous societies often were based on **egalitarian ethics**—principles under which community members had fundamentally equal rights to available resources and to social respect. Attitudes about communal and family control of land were undermined and altered as notions of private property and individual control of resources became the norm, in keeping with European economic systems. Students of power and colonial control often use conflict perspectives, feminist perspectives, or Marxist frameworks to analyze how indigenous cultures have been transformed.

Conflict perspectives are especially helpful in understanding culture change, whether that change is derived from internal processes or from external sources. For example, changes in attitudes and in practices may result from tensions among distinct segments of society based perhaps on class, gender, or ethnic differentiation. These tensions may over time lead to innovations or to fundamental alterations in the ways that societies are ordered and the ways that social roles are understood and enacted. Conflicts resulting from warfare and other sources of aggression between societies may also lead to change as one group may come to dominate another and impose not only their military control but also their cultural norms and practices.

Finally, conflict perspectives can help us understand the kinds of challenges and resistance to power expressed by dominated groups. Such resistance may take overt forms of refusal to acquiesce to power, but it may also take covert forms of creative expression through song, artwork, and storytelling, as well as through the transmission of secret knowledge.

Interpretive and conflict perspectives, in particular, share an emphasis on including multiple voices and perspectives within a community. From an interpretive framework, meaning is not homogeneous but rather is produced and interpreted by different people depending on their particular experiences and statuses within society. From a conflict framework, a society consists of people with different status- and role-related interests and privileges. And these differences need to be heard and analyzed (see Controversies feature). As Lila Abu-Lughod suggests, “Generalization, the characteristic mode of operation and style of writing of the social sciences, can no longer be regarded as neutral description. . . . When one generalizes from experiences and conversations with a number of specific people in a community, one tends to flatten out differences among them and to homogenize them. . . and tends to smooth over contradictions, conflicts of interest, and doubts and arguments, not to mention changing motivations and circumstances” (2008, 58). Anthropologists therefore need to focus on “the particular” to understand the complexity, variability, and inconsistencies of human experience.

Reflexive Anthropology

reflexive anthropology

The anthropology of anthropology, which focuses on the labels that anthropologists use, the impacts of anthropologists on the people they study, and professional ethics.

Reflexive anthropology has been developed and championed by anthropologists in the tradition of postmodernism. The goal of such studies is to understand cultural impacts on the observations and writings of anthropologists, which must be taken into account in understanding other cultures (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

Early anthropologists saw their study populations as “primitive.” As a result of colonialism and imperialism, societies were created that often appeared as static, timeless, and “traditional” to later European and American anthropologists, when they were not. Other labels often used but still difficult to define include the terms *non-Western*, *native*, and *indigenous*.

Today, rather than viewing societies as isolates and ideal types with unique sets of cultural traits, anthropologists investigate how the cultural practices and attitudes

of a society relate to processes of globalization, such as modernization and economic development. Many anthropologists look for ways to apply their knowledge and theories to address these contemporary problems. In addition, anthropologists recognize that many voices cooperate and compete in the production of meaning, creating **polyphony**—the many sounds and voices of people in all segments or groups in a society. In this context, some anthropologists question the choice of voice in the texts that they produce and their own role in the process of presentation (see the Controversies feature later in this chapter for more discussion of these complex issues).

polyphony

The many voices of people from all the different segments and groups that make up a society; a quality of ethnographic writing today that presents multiple views of a culture.

REVIEW The discipline of anthropology developed in the nineteenth century; however, some missionaries, explorers, and colonists made detailed accounts of other cultures beginning in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Evolutionism influenced nineteenth-century works by Herbert Spencer, Edward Tylor, and Lewis Henry Morgan. Two important figures in early twentieth-century anthropology are Franz Boas, who called for an anthropology based on cultural relativism and empiricism, and Bronislaw Malinowski, who explained cultural traits from the perspective of functionalism. Anthropologists may also use a materialist perspective (either cultural ecology or cultural materialism), structuralist perspectives and symbolic analyses, or conflict perspectives involving the analysis of culture and power to describe and explain culture. Interpretive anthropology focuses on the interconnectivity, subjectivity, and multiplicity of cultural meanings. And reflexive anthropology seeks to uncover and make visible the perspectives of the anthropologist him/herself in the processes of observation, analysis, and presentation of data about other cultures.

Ethnography and Fieldwork

3.2 Describe the methods used in ethnographic, ethnohistorical, and cross-cultural research.

Fieldwork—living with the group under study—remains a hallmark of modern anthropological methods. Writing about fieldwork, Paul Rabinow stated that “Culture is interpretation. The ‘facts’ of anthropology, the material that the anthropologist has gone to the field to find, are already themselves interpretations” (1977, 155). These interpretations are in effect translations from one cultural system into another. In the past, most anthropologists worked in societies different from their own, but today many work in their own countries and some even in their own communities. In addition, some anthropologists focus on secondary analyses of existing data rather than gathering primary data. Two types of studies based on secondary sources are comparisons using databases and ethnologies based on historical documents.

fieldwork

In anthropology, living and interacting with the people or group under study.

Cross-Cultural Comparisons

In 1949, anthropologists at Yale University founded the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) to gather in one database and codify all the known cultural facts and details about the world’s peoples. HRAF data consist of facts extracted from ethnographies written by anthropologists doing fieldwork in all parts of the world. The collection is divided into five world areas: Africa, Asia, North America, South America, and Oceania. Hundreds of cultural features and practices are coded and cross-referenced for making **cross-cultural comparisons**. Researchers use the HRAF data to find statistical correlations among certain cultural features or to test hypotheses about what cultural facts or forms are likely to be found in association with other facts or forms. The HRAF database can be accessed through university library systems that subscribe to the service.

cross-cultural comparisons

Means of understanding cultural differences and similarities through data analysis rather than direct observation.

For example, a study by Melvin Ember and Carol Ember (1996a) used HRAF data to propose hypotheses about the cultural settings in which couples choose to live near the family of the husband after marriage, in contrast to those in which couples choose to live near the wife's family. Another HRAF-based study by the Embers (1996) showed a strong correlation among different kinds of violence in societies. Societies that frequently engage in warfare also are more likely to tolerate high levels of violence in other social contexts, such as murder, rape, assault, and domestic abuse.

Although large-scale comparative studies like those done by the Embers can uncover associations among cultural traits, comparing data that have been collected from numerous ethnographies and articles written by different researchers is difficult. An initial problem is that the data may not be comparable. In addition, when gleaned from ethnographies, practices and traits are taken out of their full cultural and historical contexts, which also may make them difficult to compare. Another danger in comparative studies is imputing causality: Although certain traits may appear in association, it may not be clear whether they are causally related at all or whether one trait causes or is an effect of another.

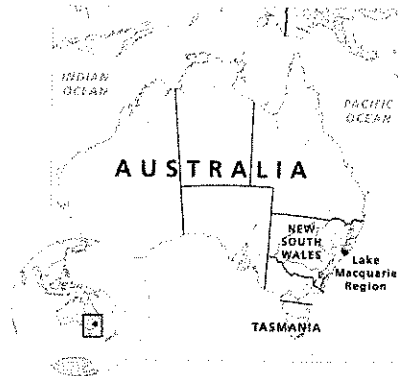
Culture Change

Documenting Changes in the Lives of Australian Aborigines

Using historical and ethnographic data, Australian ethnohistorians piece together the processes of transformation in the lives of Aborigines before and after the arrival of Europeans on the continent. They base their studies on documents describing interactions between Aboriginal peoples and Europeans, and on the policies carried out by agents of change, such as explorers, missionaries, traders, settlers, and government officials. Maps, photographs, biographies, and oral traditions are other sources of data ethnohistorians use in understanding change.

Ethnohistorians also document how societies invent and reinvent themselves and their cultures in response to internal and external forces. For example, the Aboriginal Family History Project of the South Australian Museum researches Aboriginal genealogies and community histories. The project uses material collected by museum anthropologists, ethnographers, and historians over the past century, but in particular the records of Norman Tindale and Joseph Birdsell, early twentieth-century anthropologists who collected data on Australian Aborigines. The museum's collection includes thousands of photos taken at Aboriginal sites around Australia.

Among many other Australian ethnohistory databases are hundreds of documents that scholars, writers, and community leaders prepared about the Awaba Aborigines of the Lake Macquarie region,



housed at the University of Newcastle, including an 1837 translation of The Gospel of St. Mark in Awabakal. Other documents describe the genocide of Aborigines by Europeans and the forced assimilation of survivors, along with the struggles of present-day Aborigines to gain recognition of their claims to land, improve their economic conditions, and preserve their traditional culture.

Data uncovered by ethnohistorians and testimony of contemporary Aborigines led Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to issue a formal apology in 2008 for the treatment of Aborigines by Australian authorities. Of special note was the policy of forcibly removing Aboriginal and mixed-race children from their homes and taking them to residential facilities or placing them in foster care (see case study in Chapter 6). Estimates suggest that more than 50,000 Aboriginal children were removed. Prime Minister Rudd began his statement:

There is something terribly primal about the firsthand accounts [of victims]. The pain is searing; it screams from the pages. The hurt, the humiliation, the degradation and the sheer brutality of the act of physically separating a mother from her children is a deep assault on our senses and on our most elemental humanity. These stories cry out to be heard; they cry out for an apology. . . . That is what we are doing in this place today. (quoted in *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, 2008, 7)



Aboriginal land rights protest, Sydney, Australia.

Ethnohistorical Research

A field more concerned with causal relationships in culture change than with comparisons is **ethnohistory**, the reconstruction and interpretation of the history of indigenous peoples from their point of view as well as the points of view of outside observers. Thus, some anthropological work takes place in libraries and archives containing historical records that help researchers learn about past conditions and events relevant to understanding the present lives of the people they are studying. A survey of ethnohistory usually is part of the preparation for conducting fieldwork. Ethnohistorians analyze the processes stemming from historical events and their consequences for changes in indigenous culture. A common focus is the impact of colonialism and conquest on the cultures of colonized peoples.

ethnohistory

Field of study for reconstructing and interpreting the history of indigenous peoples from their point of view as well as the points of view of ethnohistorians.

Ethnographic Fieldwork

Much of the work of anthropology consists of collecting and analyzing information about culture—that is, people's activities, beliefs, and attitudes. As you read in Chapter 1, the reports that result from doing cultural anthropology are called *ethnography* (from the Greek word *ethnos*, meaning “people” or “a division of people”). The methods used in ethnographic work obviously depend on the kind of data required. Because cultural anthropology is concerned with the complex study of living cultures, anthropologists need to obtain many different kinds of information in many different settings. Anthropologists' initial fieldwork experiences often set the framework in which their research interests develop and continue throughout their careers. Anthropologists traditionally have chosen research problems and sites in foreign countries. This is still a common approach, but today many anthropologists work in their own countries, even in their own communities.

Globalization

Imagine that your e-mails or blogs are among the records on which an ethnohistory of Internet culture is based. What kinds of information would your records provide? How could your records be interpreted to explain changes in Internet culture? How could your records help to document the changes we call globalization?

Doing Fieldwork

Fieldwork involves a complex process of observing and participating in another culture. As you read in Chapter 1, participant observation is at the core of the fieldwork experience. Anthropologists both observe the activities taking place in the community and participate in them as much as possible and as appropriate. Anthropologists usually live in the community that they are studying, sometimes renting a house or a room in someone else's dwelling. Fieldwork, then, is an ongoing, multifaceted research experience.

CHOOSING A PROBLEM AND SITE Anthropologists begin by choosing a research problem and then the site in which to conduct their study. Most anthropologists do their first research project when they are graduate students. Their interest in a particular subject may develop from an especially exciting course or from an especially stimulating teacher. Some anthropologists have long-standing interests in a particular country or community. Others choose a research site that best suits their theoretical or topical interests. Most graduate students embarking on their first field trip are advised to plan to be on site for about one year. This allows observations during a full annual cycle of economic, social, and ritual activities. Longer field stays are always beneficial but may not be possible due to lack of funding.

DOING PRELIMINARY RESEARCH Before fieldwork trips, researchers gather as much information about their subject of study as they can. They read what other anthropologists have written about the topic, attempting to understand the data and the theoretical approaches that others have used in analyzing the problem. To prepare themselves for entering a foreign country or community, they will want to learn as much as they can about the culture, the history, the conditions, and significant current events of that region, as well as the rules for entering and residing in the country. If possible, anthropologists also study the language of the country so that they can communicate directly with the residents. Before setting out for the site, anthropologists often make contact with local people to make sure that their presence in the community will be acceptable.

Have you ever experienced culture shock? What was the situation? How did you respond to it?



Anthropologist Elisha Renne (right) confers with professors Dr. Babatunde Agbaje-Williams and Dr. Aderonke Adesanya in Nigeria. Much anthropological fieldwork today takes place in large-scale societies rather than small indigenous communities.

culture shock

Feeling an anthropologist may have at the start of fieldwork of being out of place in unfamiliar surroundings.

Globalization

The communities in which anthropologists conduct fieldwork are linked to other communities, the nation, and other nations through local, regional, national, and transnational systems of exchange and the global market economy. A farm family in India, for example, might sell produce and handicrafts in regional markets that link ultimately to international export and import markets. Anthropologists must trace these kinds of connections and understand their impacts on people's daily lives.

qualitative data

Information obtained through personal interviews, life histories, observation, and interaction with community members.

ARRIVAL AND CULTURE SHOCK In the field, researchers must immediately learn new customs, new faces, new foods, new languages, and new ways of communicating. This learning is intense because, unlike tourists, anthropologists are immersing themselves in a new way of life in which they will participate. Often, the unstated rules of decorum and etiquette are most easily, and unknowingly, violated. Anthropologists need to be keenly observant, not only of other people's activities but also of the way other people react. By being sensitive to people's reactions, anthropologists can learn much about attitudes, values, and norms. Their experiences also afford them new insights into their own culture, behavior, and beliefs. Nevertheless, doing fieldwork has emotional ups and downs. At the beginning, anthropologists may feel uncertain, fearful, and lonely as they seek acceptance and cooperation. They may also experience **culture shock**—the feeling of being out of place in unfamiliar surroundings, and the feeling of losing one's cultural bearings.

CHOOSING A PLACE TO LIVE Once on site, anthropologists obtain a place of residence, arranging to live in or near a household or renting a dwelling. Living in a household has the advantage of proximity to people through family networks and routine participation in household and community events. Of course, the anthropologists need to find someone willing to be a host, sometimes a difficult task. A disadvantage to staying with a family, however, is that members of a household may try to ally themselves with the anthropologists, against the interests of others in the community, or may try to persuade the anthropologists to participate in local social and political networks. In many field locations, anthropologists may have high status among the people they study. In poor and marginalized communities, they may be perceived as rich and powerful simply because of their presence and the assumed privilege of their lives, although anthropologists are rarely thought of as such in their own countries or communities. A challenge of fieldwork, then, is to establish good relations without allowing people to use a relationship to gain benefits or advantages over others in the community. Thus, although friendships may develop between an anthropologist and the people in the community, the researcher needs to remain as nonpartisan as possible in village conflicts, disputes, and controversies.

WORKING IN AN UNFAMILIAR LANGUAGE As fieldwork begins, anthropologists usually hire an interpreter unless they are fluent in the local language. Learning the field language is clearly desirable, and even necessary, if anthropologists truly want to learn the kinds of meanings people ascribe to their own behavior. Working through translators is very different from speaking directly to people. Many nuances of meaning and attitudes that are conveyed in language are lost in translation, regardless of the interpreter's skill.

GATHERING DATA Once they are established, anthropologists often survey the village or community or other field site. They may draw a map, situating the site within its local environment and the houses, other structures, farm fields, open spaces, or other areas where people congregate and socialize. A social survey, collecting **qualitative data**, may include information about the composition of households and the relationships between members of nearby houses. From these data, anthropologists learn about family ties and neighborhood networks. Anthropologists sometimes hire assistants to help with these tasks. If assistants come from the village, they can provide a personal connection to other people and help broaden the anthropologist's social network.

Gathering data includes interviewing members of the community. Traditional anthropological methodology includes collecting data concerning kinship, that is, how people trace relationships and descent from generation to generation and among members of the same generation. Combining genealogical information with residence histories that record how long people have resided in which houses allows anthropologists to learn about systems of relationships, people's geographic mobility, and

intercommunity relations. It is also traditional to gather data about the ways that people obtain their food, earn a living, and provide themselves and others with goods and services. Economic and social networks may link groups and societies through trade, intermarriage, and friendships.

Anthropologists may collect **quantitative data** such as population trends reflected in births, marriages, and mortality statistics; fluctuations in community size, sources of income; and other statistical measures relevant to their specific studies.

In addition to gathering qualitative and quantitative data, some anthropologists use photography and film as methods of recording the lives and voices of community members. These visual technologies provide dramatic and authentic reflections by the people themselves. However, their use may raise ethical problems, especially around the issue of anonymity. Someone whose image or voice is recorded can obviously be easily identified. In situations of conflict, the personal safety of participants may be jeopardized.

Researchers also gather data through formal interviews and by attending meetings, informal gatherings, religious activities, and other community events. Anthropologists try to participate as much as possible to the extent that their presence is acceptable to community members. Anthropologists need to be sensitive to villagers' attitudes about an outsider's participation in community life. Outsiders may be welcome in some settings but not in others, particularly in sacred or secret activities or in meetings where controversial issues are discussed. Female anthropologists might find their access to certain men's activities limited, and male anthropologists might likewise find their access to certain women's activities restricted. Anthropologists usually want to interview community political officials, religious functionaries, teachers, and doctors for certain kinds of information. It is important, however, not to become overly reliant on local authorities, in order to avoid interpretation of village life from the perspective of the local elite. Despite increasing involvement with villagers, researchers usually remain outsiders, except sometimes for those who are themselves indigenous or native to the group they are studying. Some of the best, most insightful ethnographic accounts are written by native anthropologists.

INTERPRETING AND REPORTING DATA During and after fieldwork, anthropologists reflect on their interactions and the data they have collected. New research questions may arise, new opportunities for observation and participation may present themselves, and new understandings of what has happened may be revealed. Field notes are rewritten as ethnographic accounts and papers, which are published and presented at professional meetings. Sharing the results of research is important in a community of scholars and often leads to new research questions to answer. Anthropological reports are framed within the analytic and theoretical perspectives of the researcher. Other anthropologists may undertake reanalysis of data, focusing on additional questions and employing different theoretical frameworks.

When anthropologists return home after living in the field for an extended period of time and becoming comfortable in a different culture, they often go through a period of culture shock, not unlike the culture shock they felt when they first arrived in the field. They may see the behavior of their friends and relatives with new eyes. For a while, they are outside observers of their own culture, once so familiar and taken for granted. Of course, in a short time, they are readily integrated into their own daily lives. The experience of living with other people in another society has profound and lasting meaning. For many, it gives them new insights into their own behavior and their own beliefs.

Anthropological Research in Urban Societies

When anthropologists conduct research in urban societies, they use many of the same data-collection techniques that they use in rural or isolated communities. Rarely, however, do they study a whole town or city. Instead, they investigate a specific topic within a defined subculture or group. For example, some researchers specialize in **urban anthropology**, a field that focuses on studying the lives of people living in cities or urban neighborhoods. Urban anthropologists may analyze a neighborhood

quantitative data

Statistical information about population, employment and income figures, census reports on births and mortality, and so on, that reflect trends and processes within a community.

How could you apply each of the steps described in this section in a fieldwork situation close to home?

urban anthropology

Field that focuses on studying the lives of people living in cities or urban neighborhoods.

survey research

Use of formal questionnaires, administered to a random sample of subjects, eliciting social data that can be analyzed statistically.

association, a particular occupational group, a school setting, a religious network, a health care delivery system, or a senior citizen center. The people in these groups may or may not reside near one another, but they interact frequently in particular areas of their lives.

In conducting this kind of research, anthropologists use data-gathering techniques similar to those sociologists and other researchers use, including survey research. **Survey research** involves the use of formal questionnaires, administered to a random sample of subjects, to elicit social data such as occupation, income, level of education, marital status, participation in clubs and associations, political and religious affiliations, household size, number of computers in the home, and so on. Questionnaires also elicit information about people's attitudes, values, and practices, which are then tallied and analyzed. Survey data provide information about features and trends in the community under study, including socioeconomic conditions, social participation, social norms, people's attitudes and opinions, and cultural practices. In survey research, data analysis can emphasize statistical correlations to answer a particular research question, or narrative descriptions to understand the life of the group or community as a whole.

In Their Own Voices

Fieldwork and the Phone

In this excerpt, anthropologist P. L. Sunderland reflects on her discovery of the value of a new research tool—the telephone—as an integral part of her fieldwork conducted among women participating in the mainstream jazz community centered in New York City.

In the United States and in many other parts of the world, day-to-day interaction with the telephone has changed significantly over the last fifteen to twenty years. On the whole, anthropologists have paid little scholarly attention to the telephone.

I began thinking about this issue in the early 1990s. At the time I was conducting fieldwork in New York City's mainstream jazz community. I had more or less stumbled onto this dissertation topic because of taking up employment during graduate school in Bradley's, at the time not only an important mainstream jazz club, but also the important jazz "hang." Then when I set about to begin the research, I conceived of my fieldwork as having two main components: 1) ethnographic observations and conversations carried out in jazz clubs and at other jazz events; and 2) face-to-face audiotaped interviews with women of the community, carried out in the women's homes. I did both of these things. But I also found myself spending a considerable amount of time on the phone. I soon realized that telephone conversations were not only crucial to the fieldwork, but in many senses constituted the fieldwork. Many of my telephone conversations were participant observation. I was equally interacting and participating with the women in a quotidian form of activity.

I was actually excited. It felt like I had discovered a very new thing—that a way in which urban research is carried out is via the phone. It makes sense. So much of our "other" life, that

is, our "not-fieldwork" life, is carried out via the phone. With the excitement of this realization, there was the simultaneous heightened awareness of anthropologists' lack of mention of the telephone.

As anthropologists we have not generally embraced the telephone as a fieldwork medium, even when we recognize it as "socially key" for ourselves as well as others. Without a doubt, telephone interaction was an extremely important aspect of everyday life for jazz community members. The telephone was also the primary medium that allowed the "everyday" boundaries of the community to extend beyond the geographical limits of the city.

As anthropologists we have recognized the need to dislodge cultural matters from spaces and places, and recognized the validity of arguments that stable, bounded "things" like societies and communities are the product of analytic imagination.

The double-barreled nature of telephone conversations—transmitters of meaning and social relationship glue—are why I say that in some ways my telephone conversations were the quintessential aspects of my fieldwork experience.

But as much as I was excited about these interactions as fieldwork interactions, I sometimes did not feel as good or comfortable about these interactions as fieldwork as I did when I was in jazz clubs or at other jazz events. It often did not feel quite right.

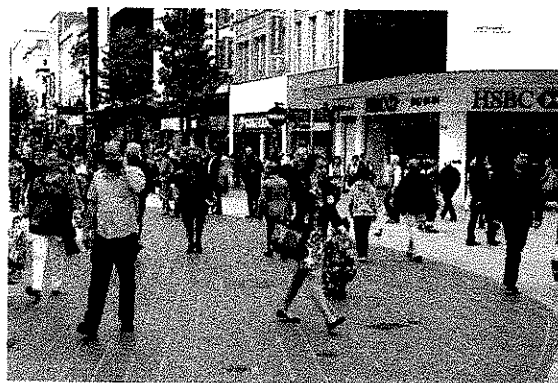
Participant observation can be a murky, personally messy business. A major source of the personal messiness of participant observation can come from the attempt to do what others do in a setting—and as a consequence, establish relations based on that activity—but with a different, outside-of-that-sphere goal in mind.

Field notes are considered a necessity for us after face-to-face encounters and also would probably be quickly understood by others. For friendly conversations on the telephone there was no such model—for any of us—and I believe this was also part of the discomfort.

An underlying sense that telephone interactions are not the “real” stuff of community or social life also undoubtedly influences our anthropological hesitation to utilize the telephone in fieldwork. As we fully recognize the telephone as an important medium of contemporary social life and as we incorporate the telephone into our ethnographic toolkit, we open the door for another kind of fieldwork.

Anthropologists’ commitment to long-term intensive involvement with people continues to distinguish our scholarship. This merit should not be lost. [But] we must be sure that we do not wear methodological blinders. Anthropological methodology was developed in social situations where the telephone was virtually nonexistent. When we find ourselves using the telephone in our fieldwork, it is important that we do not have to hide from that use. We know that telephones are in homes, offices, pockets, purses, and public places. We also know we participate in telephone interactions with other scholars, friends, family, and so on. It is also time that we included them, and admitted to including them, as integral parts of our fieldwork.

From P. L. Sunderland. 1999. “Fieldwork and the Phone.” *Anthropological Quarterly* 72(3): 105–17. Used with Permission.



Critical Thinking Questions

Think about how you would go about writing an ethnography of your own use of telephones. What questions might you investigate? Here are some possibilities: For what purposes do you use telephones? Do you always answer the phone when it rings? What do you think you accomplish through phone use? Could you accomplish these goals by some other means? What's the difference?

Anthropologists also use participant observation in urban settings. Urban anthropologist Judith Freidenberg (2000) studied elderly Puerto Ricans in New York City's El Barrio, a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Freidenberg consulted archival and historical records on immigration from Puerto Rico, neighborhood residency, and age and gender distribution of the Puerto Rican community in New York in order to situate her field community within its larger geographic, social, and historical contexts. She gathered statistics on income, occupation, and education to obtain a social and economic profile of the community. Then, before entering the field, she made a survey of neighborhood associations, church groups, after-school programs, and clinics and hospitals to understand the extent of Puerto Rican involvement in community services and networks.

After obtaining enough background information, Freidenberg attended community functions and visited senior centers and health care clinics so that she could get to know the people who used these services and they could get to know her. She then talked with individuals whom she thought would be interested in working with her and began conducting in-depth interviews with them. She also accompanied her consultants in their daily activities, such as shopping, attending church, going to the doctor, and visiting with friends.

Over time, Freidenberg gained firsthand knowledge about the people's activities, attitudes, and opinions on a wide range of subjects. By collecting extended

life histories

A research methodology focusing on collecting narratives of the life experiences of research participants, including their places of residence, work, family composition, social interactions, and roles within their communities.



As an urban anthropologist, how might you go about studying this Puerto Rican community in New York City? What aspects of the culture of this community would you want to try to understand through your study?

life histories, she got a fairly complete picture of people's experiences throughout their lives. She was able to understand their perspective on what it means to grow older as immigrants in a large city and to need health care and social services. As years passed, Freidenberg became part of their lives, and they became part of hers. She used the knowledge she had gained to make policy recommendations about the delivery of medical and social services to the elderly in New York City.

Just as Freidenberg studied elderly Puerto Ricans in New York City, Scott Youngstedt (2004) focused his research on how Hausa migrants to Niamey, the capital of Niger in western Africa, build social networks in their new settings to create or re-create

a sense of community and familiarity as they adjust to living far from "home." When new arrivals come to the city, they immediately attempt to locate other people from their hometowns, re-creating the kinds of social support familiar to them from traditional ethics of reciprocity and mutual aid.

In 1960, at the time of Niger's independence, the city had a population of 30,000, approximately 3,600 (or 12 percent) of whom were Hausa. By 2003, slightly more than half of the city's 800,000 residents were Hausa (Youngstedt 2004, 96). Most Hausa migrants to Niamey hope to return to their home villages once they achieve comparative economic success. However, few are able to do so. Few jobs provide steady employment or sufficient salaries to enable workers to save money. Instead, life becomes a struggle to pay for the basic necessities of food and housing. That Hausa and members of other groups continue to be drawn to Niamey indicates the degree of poverty in rural com-

munities. Indeed, a report by the United Nations Human Development Programme in 2002 ranked Niger 173rd out of 174 nations studied (Youngstedt 2004, 94).

Hausa men meet daily in coffee shops and public squares, where they exchange information about jobs or housing, get news from their hometowns, and debate issues. Youngstedt's interactions with Hausa consultants in these "conversation groups" revealed that the men developed and transmitted their understandings of how the position of their nation in the global economy contributes to creating their own conditions of poverty and disadvantage. Urban studies unveil the complex layers of activities and meanings that connect individuals to one another and to the global contexts in which their lives are situated.

Another topic of research in cities is analysis of occupational groups in their urban and national environments. Florence Babb's research on market women in the city of Huarez in northwestern Peru centered on both the activities of individual traders and the government policies aimed at restricting their work (Babb 1989). Babb's study uncovered the precarious but essential role that tradeswomen render to settled urban populations. For the women, trading provided one of the few income-generating occupations available for people with few or no formal work skills. Marketing is one of the two most common occupations for women in Peru, second only to domestic service. Women make up a large majority of the traders throughout the country (Babb 1989, 3). Trading enables women to keep the flexible hours that allow them to fulfill other family responsibilities. Despite the hard work and long hours, most traders make little money. They are increasingly overshadowed by more formal commercial establishments. In addition, men have many more job options because of better education and training.

Peruvian government policies contribute to marginalizing traders, most of whom are members of indigenous communities, in part because their activities are difficult

to regulate and their income is difficult to tax. They are also seen as symptoms of economic backwardness. But studies of tradespeople in urban centers, not only in Peru but also throughout Latin America and Africa, demonstrate that they provide a wide range of products, including raw and cooked foods, meat, and clothing.

Research in cities often raises significant questions about the ways that anthropologists have traditionally conceptualized "the field site." While it used to be the case that anthropologists most often did their work or at least thought of doing their work in distinct "places," as we have seen in the work of Freidenberg, Youngstedt, and Babb cited above, the "place" of the field site is much more unbounded. As Joanne Passaro (1997) argues in her discussion of participant-observation research focusing on homeless people in New York City the field "site" consists of many different venues and many different populations: "I decided to choose sites that would afford me positionalities at varying points along a participant-observation continuum" (1997:156). These included volunteering at a family emergency shelter for women and children, talking to and participating in activities with homeless men in a self-help group, working with lawyers at a welfare rights clinic and soup kitchen, writing articles for a magazine specializing in city and state government actions, interviewing panhandlers, and being present and talking to homeless people in parks (p. 156–157). All of these "places" are linked, not by their physical space but rather by their position as "spaces" that provide for interaction with homeless people and their advocates. For many people living in cities today, their identities and their localities are "deterritorialized" (1997:161) and it is therefore imperative that anthropologists develop theories and methodologies that afford them understandings of these new "field sites."

In addition to focusing on particular groups, occupations, and neighborhoods, urban anthropologists may analyze the cultural and structural linkages among diverse populations within a city. They may also focus on structural linkages between communities, larger urban contexts, and national social and political entities. This focus guided the research of Jagna Sharff (1998), who led a team of three urban anthropologists in a long-term (fifteen-year) research project in a poor, predominantly Hispanic neighborhood on the Lower East Side of New York City.

Case Study

Life in Riverfront: A Middle-Western Town Seen through Japanese Eyes

In their book, *Life in Riverfront: A Middle-Western Town Seen Through Japanese Eyes* (2001), two Japanese anthropologists, Mariko Fujita Sano and Toshiyuki Sano, write about the process of doing ethnography of a foreign culture in a complex, heterogeneous society made up of people of different social classes and ethnic and religious groups. They tell about their expectations before embarking on fieldwork and about their gradual immersion as both observers and participants in community life. The town, located in central Wisconsin, has about 22,000 residents, nearly all of European American ancestry. Both anthropologists were born and raised in Japan and received PhDs in anthropology from Stanford University in California. They had absorbed stereotypes about "Middle America" that they feared might affect their observations, and were concerned that they might not be readily accepted or trusted in Riverfront, which had few Asian residents: As "foreigners... everything that we do would stand out."

The couple also worried about finding a place to live, especially after the owner of the first apartment they looked at asked, "Which church do you go to?" They were afraid that people might be hostile to them because Japan was an enemy of the United States in



World War II. Mariko Sano was concerned that "conservative Middle Americans" would think of her as a housewife accompanying her husband, rather than as a well-educated professional. Another preconception that the Sanos brought to Riverfront was that the town would be ethnically uniform. "Although we had known that American society is ethnically diverse, we tended to associate ethnicity with racial minorities such as African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians and tended to see European-American people as a uniform ethnicity" (2001, 1). Yet Europeans proved equally diverse.

The Sanos imagined Riverfront as a rural community in the midst of farms and open country. They thought that life would be simpler than in a large city, although they hadn't really thought about what "simpler" might mean. They found, of course, that "Middle America" is much more complex than they had anticipated based on their preconceived notions and stereotypes. They also found that Riverfront is embedded not only in a geographic context but also in an economic and political context of competing interests and identities.

The Sanos combined several research methodologies. They delved into archival material to understand the town's development since its incorporation in 1856. They traced the geographic spread and economic growth of the town and its relationship to a campus in the University of Wisconsin system. They also collected life histories from older residents and used them to "sketch a picture" of life in Riverfront as early as the 1920s and 1930s. They were careful to obtain life histories representative of the various ethnic groups there to ascertain similarities and differences in the immigrant experience. In addition, the Sanos analyzed quantitative statistical data from official census lists dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, detailing

population, ethnic and national origin, and residential mobility within the town. The Sanos also volunteered at a senior citizen center, helping to serve meals for elderly townspeople. This activity enabled the Sanos to meet people, establish friendly relations, and contribute to the community. It also gave them opportunities for informal conversations and interviews.

After a year in Riverfront, life changed for the Sanos and their relations with people when Mariko gave birth to their first child. As they point out, "Anthropologists in the field often reach a turning point at which the nature of the relationship with their interviewees changes dramatically. For us, the turning point was the birth of our son." Even before the baby was born, people began to give advice about how to take care of the child, in effect beginning the process of integrating the child into the culture of Riverfront. From being outsiders and strangers, the Sanos became friends and community members, especially to regulars at the senior citizens center. People commented that the child, because of its birth in Riverfront, would be an American.

The Sanos left Riverfront after nearly two years of fieldwork. They returned some twelve years later to see many economic changes, as old industries disappeared and new shopping malls were constructed. Immigrants continued to arrive in town, some from Europe and others from urban and rural American communities. The Sanos realized that these immigrants were much like themselves, arriving in a new place and adapting to its culture. As they conclude, "We have carried on cultural dialogues between 'them' and 'us' and among 'ourselves.'" And they note that these are the same "cultural-dialogical experiences" that all newcomers have, whatever their origins and whatever their purposes.

Controversies

How Do Anthropologists Present Knowledge about the People They Study?

Since the 1960s, anthropologists have questioned their roles as agents of change, as they intentionally or unwittingly facilitate worldwide economic and political processes (Gough 1968). Some anthropologists also side with the people they study against oppressive policies that destroy the people's land and resources or pressure them to abandon their way of life.

Anthropologists interested in the impacts of the researcher's ideologies on other peoples look at the ways groups represent themselves and others, and structure people's ideas about these groups. As people involved in the processes of "writing culture," anthropologists influence the representation of the peoples they study. In the past, anthropologists often wrote about and presented another culture by constructing the "other" as alien, unusual, different, and exotic. To counteract this tendency, some anthropologists today present their findings as a dialogue between themselves and members of the society among whom they have lived. The production of any text, including an ethnography, can be seen as a "dialogic" process with multiple voices and meanings (Bakhtin 1981). In the past, ethnographies tended to

present a unified voice in their description of a people's lifeways. Very likely, they contributed to cultural stereotypes and depicted greater conformity, uniformity of opinion, and idealized behavior than actually existed in the society. Deeply contested issues were often glossed over. Because ethnographies focused on a view of culture from the perspective of people with greater prestige and privilege, the voices of marginalized members of communities were muted or unheard.

In addition, because most anthropologists in the past were men, and because they worked primarily with male consultants, ethnographies tended to be told from a male perspective. Women's concerns, lives, and voices were relatively unknown and unheard. Examples of gender bias in ethnological interpretation are common. Writing about the Nuer of southern Sudan, for example, the British social anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard concluded that Nuer family life was "remarkably harmonious on the surface" (1955, 133). Yet his research, based entirely on the testimony of men, disclosed culturally sanctioned wife abuse and the wishes of both husbands and wives (reported by the

husbands) for their spouse's death! Not a harmonious picture, even on the surface. More recently, the writings of Napoleon Chagnon (1997) among the Yanomami of Brazil and Venezuela downplay the significance of the violence men inflict on women. And many anthropologists overemphasize the male role of hunting in comparison to the female role of gathering.

The male bias in anthropology extends to theories about human evolution and cultural origins. For example, since the earliest known tools were found in association with animal bones (dating from about 2 million years ago), and since hunting is assumed to have been primarily a male role, researchers have proposed theories of human development that privilege male inventiveness and initiative while portraying women as passive onlookers to cultural evolution. These conclusions are controversial for many reasons, not the least because there may have been earlier tools made of fiber for use in containers for carrying gathered plant resources, presumably the work of women (Ehrenberg 1989). The point is that although we know quite a bit about physical evolution, we know little about the lives of our earliest ancestors. And as Linda Fedigan (1986) suggests, models of human origins are "symbolic statements about and prescriptions for human nature." They tell us more about the people making the theories than they do about early human populations.

Because of these problems with the ethnographer's voice, some anthropologists are producing "polyphonous" ethnographies with a multitude of voices. Rather than relying on a single dominant perspective, they give multiple interpretations of activities and opinions from the points of view of people with different roles in the community. The voices of men and women,

of the elites and the marginalized, contribute to a diversity of representations. By focusing on dialogue and polyphony, anthropologists locate culture not only in behavior but also in conversation about behavior, ideas, attitudes, and emotions. Ethnographers also focus on their own issues of power, their relations with communities in their own societies, and their relations with people in the communities they study. And they pay more attention to looking past their own subjectivity to more fully represent others.

Controversies within the discipline about the role of the anthropologist and the focus of ethnography do not weaken the field, but rather invigorate it, bringing out issues for thought and dialogue. Anthropology plays a vital role in today's world. It has the tools with which people can understand and analyze complex issues of power that structure and confront our world. The theories and methods that anthropologists use provide the knowledge and techniques for understanding people's behavior and how they organize, transmit, evaluate, and express their experiences. Anthropologists can contribute to debates about public policy in national and international arenas. They can help inform people about the value of all cultures.

Critical Thinking Questions

How do you think your roles and status as a member of your society might affect your observations of other people? How might they color what you say to an anthropologist interviewing you about your people's way of life?

If you were writing an ethnography of your community, whose voices might you want to represent or include? Why?

The Sharff team collected economic data on income and employment, household composition and residence, and social indicators such as health, education, and friendship networks. They opened an office in the neighborhood as headquarters and space for their team to meet together and with community residents. The researchers interacted with people daily, but they framed their research and interpretation of data in terms of a larger picture: the city's economy and national policies affecting poor people. The researchers were attempting to untangle the web of economic and political relationships that impacted the daily lives of low-income Hispanics. That web included deindustrialization, leading to loss of employment, and interrelated problems stemming from lack of educational opportunity, cuts in social service spending, neighborhood deterioration, and increased crime and drug use. According to Sharff and her colleagues, the violence in the community resulted from the "violence of poverty" inflicted on poor people by national and local forces beyond their control.

As you can imagine, doing fieldwork in one's own society poses special problems of objectivity. Many anthropologists believe that being completely objective when studying any culture is impossible because all observers bring with them their own learned values, attitudes, and expectations. At the same time, anthropologists need to "know" something about their subjects of study. The challenge, then, is to "learn" about them in a different way, taking account of what the researchers think they already know but looking afresh from an anthropological perspective.

"Virtual" Anthropology

Like many other disciplines in the social sciences, anthropology in the twenty-first century has entered a new frontier of online or "virtual" fieldwork that raises methodological and ethical issues. Working in the virtual world, anthropologists may not even leave their own societies and may not even ever meet face-to-face with all of the people inhabiting the virtual community that they are investigating. A virtual community can consist of a handful of people who all know each other's identities and who may interact face-to-face in a number of different contexts. In contrast, a virtual community might also consist of thousands and sometimes even millions of people who interact only in the virtual world and who probably don't know each other's personal names or identities. One of the methodological issues raised therefore concerns the ways that the anthropologist makes initial contact with this world and develops research questions and theories to understand and explain the behavior that takes place. Even the identity of a "field site" becomes problematic and quite different than the traditional notions of ethnography.

Many types of questions can be applied to virtual fieldwork, including how members of virtual communities establish relations and interact with one another, how members come to form a group identity, and how they interact with members of other virtual communities. For example, questions of identity construction online have been researched by Turkle (1995) and Taylor (2008). Others have raised questions about how identities of gender, race, and ethnicity intersect with behavior within virtual worlds, such as the work of McRae (1997) and Nakamura (2002). The principles used to construct virtual worlds and to mediate or govern the behavior of people interacting in that world is another area of research interest, as seen in work by Burk (2010) and Malaby (2009). Because this is a new and growing field, it will be interesting to see the kinds of research questions and methods explored as it develops.

Ethical issues may also be raised about obtaining informed consent from people who may be otherwise unknown to the anthropologist. And of course issues of privacy become complicated in the virtual world. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method* (Boellstorff et al. 2012) is a useful guide to many of the methodological and ethical issues presented by this new and developing area of research.

REVIEW Boas, Malinowski, and other early twentieth-century anthropologists emphasized fieldwork. Ethnohistory and cross-cultural comparisons using databases such as the Human Relations Area Files are examples of anthropological approaches based on records and data rather than on direct observations. When anthropologists do fieldwork, they often write descriptive accounts called ethnographies. Conducting fieldwork involves many steps before even entering the field, at which time most first-time anthropologists experience culture shock. Fieldwork can focus on entire small-scale societies or on subcultures or subgroups within a larger society. Anthropologists also study groups, communities, and institutions within their own societies. Using methods such as interviews and survey research as well as participant observation, researchers in urban anthropology focus on segments of larger societies and their connections with other societies and the world.

The Anthropology of Anthropology

3.3 Summarize the ethical issues faced by cultural anthropologists.

The study of anthropology by anthropologists has been a growing interest for many over the past several decades. Anthropologists are concerned both about the role of the discipline of anthropology in relation to indigenous societies and about the

unspoken and largely invisible assumptions that anthropologists may use in developing theories, formulating analyses, and presenting data about other peoples. See the Controversies feature for discussion of these and other issues related to anthropological theory and methods.

Ethical Issues in Anthropology

Other issues concerning anthropology relate to the ethics of conducting research involving human subjects. Cultural anthropologists make their living and build their careers by studying other people. They live among them, learn from them, and write about them. As a result, the most important ethical issues they face involve their relationships with and obligations to those people.

The American Anthropological Association, the professional association to which most anthropologists belong, formulated a Code of Ethics, setting out a number of principles that it recommends to its members (American Anthropological Association 1998). The code mandates intellectual honesty and forbids any falsification or intentional biasing of data. Stage-directing ethnographic film footage would be regarded as unethical, for example. The code also advises that anthropologists' ethical obligations to the people they study are more important than the pursuit of knowledge or the completion of research projects. Ethical obligations include avoiding harm to or exploitation of the people, and fully disclosing the goals and uses of the research. Anthropologists also must consider the social and political implications of the material that they produce. Finally, the code notes that although some anthropologists use their research to advocate for the people they study, this is not an ethical responsibility but rather an individual choice. Anthropologists are also guided by federal legal requirements safeguarding the rights of human subjects in any type of research project. These include the right to **informed consent**, that is, full disclosure of research goals, research methods, types of analyses, and reporting procedures.

Anthropologists do not all agree on their proper roles in relation to the people they study. For some anthropologists, research is an end in itself. People in the community extend their hospitality voluntarily. And although anthropologists should certainly avoid doing anything that they feel may be harmful to the community (in the short or long term), some believe that they have no continuing obligation to the people. Other anthropologists believe that they have ongoing responsibilities to the community, and they lend their help in various ways depending upon their own abilities and the situations in the field. These researchers promote a kind of "engaged" anthropology, understanding and attempting to fulfill their obligations to the people studied. Anthropologists may be able to collect and analyze documents or testify in court proceedings regarding native territories and indigenous land claims cases. Others can use their training and knowledge to represent native interests in dealings with local and national governments. At the least, anthropologists can present information about the needs of indigenous communities to the public in their writings and in classes. As experts, they can talk to the media, countering negative stereotypes about poor and marginalized peoples. As discussed in Chapter 1, applied anthropologists focus on many of these goals.

informed consent

The full disclosure to research participants of the research goals, methods, types of analyses, and reporting procedures.

REVIEW Reflexive anthropology focuses on anthropology itself, the language it uses to describe people, and its impacts on both knowledge and people. Today, many ethnographies are written to reflect polyphony—the many voices of people from all the different segments and groups that make up a society. Concern about the impacts of anthropologists on study populations has led to a professional Code of Ethics for the conduct of anthropologists.

Anthropology Applied

Human Terrain System

In 2007, the United States Department of Defense inaugurated a program termed Human Terrain System (HTS), which had the goal of providing cultural sensitivity training to military officers and soldiers stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan. The training is carried out by cultural anthropologists and other social scientists. The term "human terrain" refers to the social, cultural, economic, and political features of the people in communities where military units operate. Cultural researchers are "embedded" in military units in the target countries. They are organized into "Human Terrain Teams" led by a military officer and staffed by four additional members: one cultural analyst, a regional studies analyst, and two staffers with a military intelligence background. Anthropologists (possibly working as both cultural analysts and regional studies analysts) provide background cultural data concerning such matters as local tribal organizations, leadership patterns, family and clan structures, and norms for conflict resolution. They also teach military personnel the local practices of interpersonal interaction (e.g., how to greet people, how to engage in conversation, and how to ask questions). Though it began as an experimental project, the Human Terrain System was awarded a fund of \$40 million by the Department of Defense to expand services to twenty-six U.S. combat brigades stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Dr. Montgomery McFate helped design the program beginning in 2003 and has since become its senior social science adviser (2004). She is also one of the co-authors of a military manual on counterinsurgency. McFate is an advocate of anthropologists working with the military in order to help achieve goals of community involvement and support for enhancing the role of local leaders, for developing an understanding of military personnel and objectives, strengthening security, and building resistance to Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan.

Military officials claim that the program has enabled them to reduce combat operations and instead focus on improving security by building relationships with people and understanding and addressing their concerns. However, the HTS project is not without its strong detractors among anthropologists. Indeed, shortly after the project's inauguration in 2007, the American Anthropological Association published a statement opposing HTS on the grounds that it could potentially lead to a violation of professional ethics and endanger research subjects. Two years later, the association released a report critical of HTS, stating,



"When ethnographic investigation is determined by military missions, where data collection occurs in the context of war, integrated into the goals of counterinsurgency in a potentially coercive environment . . . it can no longer be considered a legitimate professional exercise of anthropology." Furthermore, anthropologists embedded with combat troops may have their data unwittingly used to make decisions concerning military targets and attacks.

Anthropologist David Price points out that HTS is only the latest in a series of interconnections between anthropology, other social sciences, and military and intelligence agencies. In his opinion, anthropological research and findings have been misused in order to promote the government's political and social agendas both at home and abroad. In *Weaponizing Anthropology* (2011), Price examines what he calls the increasing "militarization of anthropology and education" since the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

Still, both supporters and opponents of HTS acknowledge the difficulty in assessing the program's effectiveness. To date, research is lacking concerning the success or failure of meeting the goals of enhancing cultural sensitivity among military personnel or of "winning the hearts and minds" of Iraqi or Afghan citizens. However, one documented outcome has been the deaths of at least three anthropologists serving as members of HTS teams in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Critical Thinking Questions

Do you think that anthropologists can remain objective and neutral if they are "embedded" in military combat units? Do you think that local residents are likely to perceive them as such?

Chapter Summary

Anthropology and the Explanation of Cultural Diversity

3.1 Compare the theoretical orientations of cultural anthropology that have developed over time.

- Although anthropology as an academic discipline is only slightly more than a century old, it has its origins in the colonial expansion of Europe that began in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when explorers, traders, and missionaries visited and commented on the peoples and cultures they encountered. During the eighteenth century, European social philosophers consulted the journals and writings of earlier observers. Their evolutionism—hypotheses about the progress of humankind from one cultural stage to the next—established a basis for anthropological theories.
- The anthropology that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United States and Europe focused on classifying and comparing peoples and cultures throughout the world, attempting to determine their evolutionary relationships to one another. Two important figures were Franz Boas, who championed attention to historical details, empiricism, and cultural relativism, and Bronislaw Malinowski, who contributed the perspective of functionalism. Their work, emphasizing fieldwork and direct interactions with and observations of other cultures, forms the core of anthropology.
- Anthropologists have developed a number of conceptual frameworks to explain human cultures. Materialist perspectives emphasize the centrality of environmental adaptation, technology, and methods of acquiring or producing food. Cultural ecology focuses on how the physical environment directly influences the satisfaction of basic human needs and how people's adaptive behaviors interact with other aspects of culture. Cultural materialists often distinguish between emic explanations of behavior, based on the reasons people themselves offer for what they do, and etic explanations, based on the analysts' observations of people's behavior and other objective criteria.
- Structuralist approaches look at the role of concepts in structuring experiences and relationships. Interpretive anthropologists focus on relationships among meanings in the development and transmission of culture. Conflict perspectives focus on social and cultural inequalities and power relations.

- Some anthropologists emphasize forms of social, economic, and political power in shaping culture. Some of their attention is directed toward anthropology itself, uncovering unstated biases in the field and in the analysis of culture. Today, anthropologists are rethinking notions about "traditional" society and focusing more on the complex ways in which traditional societies reshape themselves, and were reshaped by the impacts of European expansion and colonial control. Worldwide processes of modernization and globalization also raise issues about how people are enmeshed in economic institutions and political forces beyond their control.

Ethnography and Fieldwork

3.2 Describe the methods used in ethnographic, ethnohistorical, and cross-cultural research.

- The central tool of anthropological research is fieldwork, especially participant observation. Anthropologists live among the people they are studying for an extended time to gain an understanding of their culture from the subjects' point of view. As participant observers, anthropologists observe and record the communities' activities and participate in them as much as possible and appropriate. Earlier anthropologists focused on small, seemingly isolated indigenous societies. Today, however, many anthropologists work in larger societies, including their own, focusing on specific subcultures or communities.
- In addition to fieldwork, some anthropologists use ethnohistory, researching in libraries and archives to learn about past conditions and events relevant to understanding the lives of the people they are studying. Anthropologists also employ the comparative method in understanding cross-cultural similarities and differences in human cultures.

The Anthropology of Anthropology

3.3 Summarize the ethical issues faced by cultural anthropologists.

- Cultural anthropologists are concerned with ethical issues involving their relationships with the people they study. Some anthropologists become advocates for the communities they have studied, whereas others seek to disseminate information that counters negative stereotypes about poor and marginalized peoples.

Review Questions

1. How did anthropology become an academic discipline? What were the principal goals of early anthropologists?
2. How did Boas and Malinowski influence the development of anthropology?
3. What main theoretical perspectives do anthropologists use to describe and explain cultural differences and changes?
4. What are the differences between an emic and an etic perspective?
5. How might a cultural event be analyzed differently by a conflict theorist and an interpretivist?
6. How do anthropologists prepare for fieldwork? What are the key benchmarks in conducting fieldwork?
7. What are some pitfalls of living in a community and participating in family and community life while doing fieldwork?
8. What is the anthropology of anthropology? What are some issues about the roles of anthropologists and the writing of ethnographies?