

ORIENTATION TO ETHNOGRAPHY AND COGNITIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnography can be defined as a social science (Aberle, 1987) research strategy that combines systematic interview and observation to characterize the way of life of a people or group. Knowledge of this way of life is known as a culture, and every human group has a culture. Defining cognitive ethnography requires adding that the whole enterprise places special emphasis on *understanding and including the language of a people with whom the work is conducted*. In earlier anthropology, this approach was also referred to as “ethnoscience.” We identify with this term and refrain from using it only because it has experienced other semantic variation. This brief definition of ethnography carries with it important attributes that show how cognitive ethnography differs from other kinds of ethnography. For any ethnography, the first attribute is that it is *written*. There are indeed other media for communication of human knowledge. Examples such as motion pictures and videos come to mind. However, standing behind all these media is a written script of some sort. For most ethnography, this script is in a monograph, article, or book.

Scripts thus become the written rules, procedures, and other instructions for how individuals within a cultural group behave with and perceive one another. Ethnographers write down their own observations, their recollections, and what their consultants tell them. An ethnographer’s perceptions must, whatever the media in which they are recorded, be kept separate from what the consultant communicates. *Moreover, these records must be kept separate from the very beginning of the ethnography.* Only in this way can the consultant’s knowledge system be given the same opportunity for informing scientific or scholarly discourse as any other system of knowledge.

The second attribute of cognitive ethnography is that researchers rely on interview and observation but *primarily* on interview. This feature may appear counterintuitive. When a newly arrived researcher comes to a research site, the first activity he or she will undertake is observation. However, to understand the cultural knowledge of another people, both the researcher and the consultant need to develop a common communication base from which to proceed. This book favors interview over observation, particularly for beginning ethnographic research. The practical reasons are very simple. Observations, particularly of behavior in a strange place, are subject to misinterpretations over which the researchers have little or no control. Outside researchers have no control over them because they are interpreted based on the knowledge gained from their own experience. The experience often counts for very little when in a strange setting.

There are two theoretical reasons for using interviewing and language. The first reason is based on the work of the linguist Noam Chomsky (1968). He showed that all human languages share a grammatical deep structure, even though their surface grammars may differ. Based on a common deep structure, language grammars and learning follow universal patterns. Thus, all languages are, to a significant degree, intertranslatable.

The second reason revolves around the work of anthropologists Joseph Casagrande and Kenneth Hale (1967). They found that different human languages share certain semantic relationships. Through their study of the Tohono O'Odham folk definitions, they identified 13 different semantic relationships that appear to be shared among all languages. These fundamental relationships are the building blocks of cognitive anthropology's theory: *modification, taxonomy, and queuing*. Modification, or attribution, gives the listener discrete information about a term and its meaning. Taxonomy shows whether one term describes something that is a kind of something else; that is, "X is a kind of Y" or "X is a Y." Queuing, or sequence, states "X and then Y" or "X happens (or exists) and then Y." Queuing does not necessarily mean that X is a precondition of Y. A precondition denotes a more complex logical and semantic relationship, which will be discussed in Chapter 7. Taxonomy, attribution, and queuing can tie together many other, more complex semantic relationships. Together, these three relationships will be referred to in this book as MTQ schema.

Through the application of these semantic relationships in interview and analysis, ethnographers can structure written texts and discourse around the knowledge of a speaker. The result is a much deeper

and richer picture of what the speaker knows. This theory can free both the ethnographer and the native consultant from certain hidden biases that reside in observation.

How Observation Is Integrated With Interview

A cautionary note is necessary. While consultants can describe much of what they do, *it is not a substitute for observation*. Reconciling what people tell a researcher versus what a researcher may observe them do requires acknowledging that *both speech and observed behavior are kinds of knowledge*. The polymath Michael Polanyi (1966) describes what people can talk about as the *explicit dimension* of knowledge. He describes the second kind of knowledge as the *tacit dimension* of knowledge—that is, the knowledge of what people do but cannot entirely explain. Both of these kinds of knowledge interact with each other: We do things; we think through how we do things; we may change how we do things. Polanyi maintained that one dimension “destroys” the other. He uses the analogy of a person typing (nowadays using a keyboard), who then thinks consciously about keying. When that happens, the performance usually ceases to function. Another example is kinesics, better known as “body language.” In those cases, if people literally think about these things while they are doing them, their thinking will interfere with what they are doing. Thus, while there are certain aspects of knowledge that can be transmitted primarily through speech, demonstration, or practice, most knowledge is transmitted through a *combination* of these three. Roles such as apprenticeship exist in all societies and incorporate all these forms of instruction.

Polanyi (1966) thus famously observed that “we know more than we can tell” (p. 4). While he was focusing on knowledge transfer and apprenticeship of scientists in universities, the same generality can be expanded to social interaction in the wider human society.

How Schoepfle Became a Lender and a Borrower in Navajo Society

I was newly arrived at the Navajo reservation and was asked by a tribal employee—herself a Navajo—if she could borrow some money. I loaned her the money. In a few weeks, I asked her if she would repay the loan, because *I* needed the money. While she readily produced the money, I was surprised by the apparent look of disgust she gave me. As I worked more in the tribal office, I noticed that Navajos would often

borrow money and then not repay it. Yet the lender would not refuse the request. I then changed my approach. I would never refuse a request to loan money. Whenever I needed it back, I would simply ask to borrow it. The result was more congenial. From this and similar incidents, I reasoned that borrowing or asking for a ride were expressions of support and generosity between people that was a fundamental of Navajo society and social organization. I had read about this value in books but had not experienced it. When I did not want to give somebody a ride (because I did not have the time or the gas), I would apologetically cite “car trouble.” I never said “no.” Non-Navajo employees, on the other hand, often made a point of collecting “debts” and felt disrespectful of Navajo borrowing practices.

Every human being is born into a group: the family of orientation. Whenever a new human group forms, members bring their past cultural knowledge with them. The family is the first of many groups that individuals join, in this case through birth, and leave behind during the course of their lives. New group members adapt to one another, define ways of life for the group, and begin to pursue goals. The new group develops knowledge that is specific to itself. This knowledge represents the beginning of a new group culture. Similar to Polanyi’s (1966) formulation, it contains (1) knowledge about how things are (*knowing that*, Ryle, 1946), (2) knowledge about how to get things done (*knowing how*, Ryle, 1946), and (3) the affect, lines of friendship, or our knowledge of likes and dislikes.

Participant Observation

Learning cultural knowledge, then, involves a membership in networks or social groupings. Within this group or network, cultural knowledge is as much a process of becoming as it is a finished product. As long as a group exists, it will elaborate its own cultural knowledge. Any ethnography is thus a snapshot. A dynamic process such as the knowledge of becoming is difficult to capture. The best ethnographers can usually hope for is to describe the cultural knowledge of a group at one moment in time, what is called the “ethnographic present.” Ethnographers can collect life histories or careers, and compose ethnographies through time. However, a life history is not a perfect record of the past. It *reflects how people see the past today, within the*

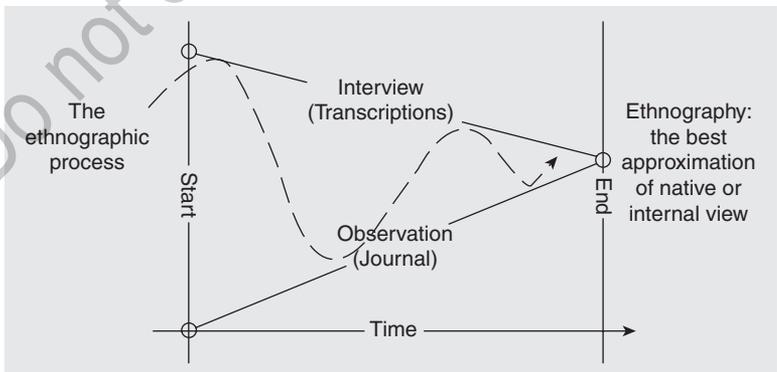
limits of their current cultural knowledge. Thus, this book stresses the “ethnographic present” (see Sanjek, 1991).

Following Polanyi’s (1966) scheme of tacit and explicit knowledge, the *formal education* of the classroom verbalizes explicit knowledge. At the other extreme is *apprenticeship*, where observed demonstration and tacit knowledge dominate. However, even in an apprenticeship, language is crucial. People ask questions; then they practice. The same is true for ethnographers, and this alternation between asking questions and observing/practicing something becomes the basis of what has been called *participant observation* in ethnography. In cognitive ethnography, participant observation becomes a form of homing process. Through this process, an individual tries to master as much of a system of knowledge as possible through alternation between observation and interview (Schoepfle, Topper, & Fisher, 1974). Then they test what they have heard and seen from their own practices as well as those of others (see Figure 1.1).

Cognitive ethnographic theory is also preferable because the fact remains that one cannot learn a culture by observing alone, any more than one can learn how to play baseball by simply watching. The experience of Oswald Werner’s (1993, p. 16) first baseball game is particularly pertinent here:

I was invited to my first baseball game and watched with interest the strangely dull game. There was a man with the

Figure 1.1 Diagram of the Participant Observation Homing Process



Source: Werner and Schoepfle, 1987, vol 1.

stick who tried to hit a ball that another guy threw at him. He was not very good at hitting the ball, but when he did he ran from one pillow in the grass to the next and tried to get there before the other player caught him with the ball.

Then another player hit the ball and it disappeared in the bushes behind the field. Before, the guys who hit the ball ran fast, but this player was so upset about the loss of the ball that he walked dejectedly around the square formed by the four pillows. As he came around the last bend his comrades ran up to him, shook his hand and consoled him by saying something like “don’t worry about the ball, we’ll pitch in and buy a new one.” Soon they somehow did get a new ball and the strange game continued.

Everybody must ask, listen, observe, and try out what has been seen and heard. Observation is necessary but not sufficient. Everyone must talk to people and ask questions.

In the days of Bronislaw Malinowski, at the turn of the 20th century, participant observation was a radical departure from armchair scholarship. Armchair anthropology drew conveniently from whatever missionary, military, or traveler tales supported the argument of an author. Participant observation required ethnographers to see for themselves what was going on and conduct themselves as systematically as possible. They could no longer depend on the tales of others without verifying for themselves what was going on. Malinowski’s achievement was all the more dramatic because he acquired fluency in Kilivila, the language of the Trobriand Islanders, with whom he worked, and did so within a matter of months (Senft, 1997). On his arrival on the Trobriands in July 1915, Malinowski stayed with Dr. Raynor Bellamy, who taught him some basics of Kilivila, the Austronesian language of the islanders (Senft, 1987). After a month, Malinowski decided to move to Omarakana, the village of the paramount chief To’uluwa, as the place to set up his tent. By September 1915, he had mastered the language so well that he did not need the help of an interpreter any more.

It is also important to remember that his successful acquisition was aided by his unusual length of stay in the field, due to the duration of World War I. Lengths of stay in terms of years rather than weeks and months have become the hallmark of anthropology and ethnography, albeit possibly less prevalent today.

Participant Observation and Perspective

Malinowski's participant observation introduced new challenges to this novel ethnographic research. First, when ethnographers both observe and ask questions, they will become more active participants, becoming *a part of what they are studying*. They are often there, on site, day in and day out. They get involved in what is going on. Similarly, the consultants and other people in the group change, to some extent, to accommodate the ethnographer. Ethnographers, in other words, become to some extent a part of the group and part of what they are studying.

Just how far does the ethnographer become a part of the group? There are a number of both professional and popular accounts of ethnographers "going native" (O'Reilly, 2009). When ethnographers "go native," readers often assume that the ethnographers *think* or *believe* that they have become native. "Going native" does not usually mean that they actually have acquired the natives' cultural knowledge and background (Wagner, 1975). Rather, the natives accommodate the ethnographers into their interpersonal and political lives.

The native may well tell the researcher, "You really understand us." These compliments often reflect the natives' appreciation that somebody from outside their own society respects them for who they are. They appreciate that the researcher does not try to make them change their way of life according to what some outsider wants them to be. In more recent times, anthropologists and other social scientists often arrive at sites at the behest of governmental and nongovernmental agencies. They are thus often expected to be teachers, health care practitioners, as well as ethnographers. These expectations, in turn, reflect on how the ethnographer needs to accommodate to the native ways of life. It does not mean, however, that the researcher has acquired the native mind-set.

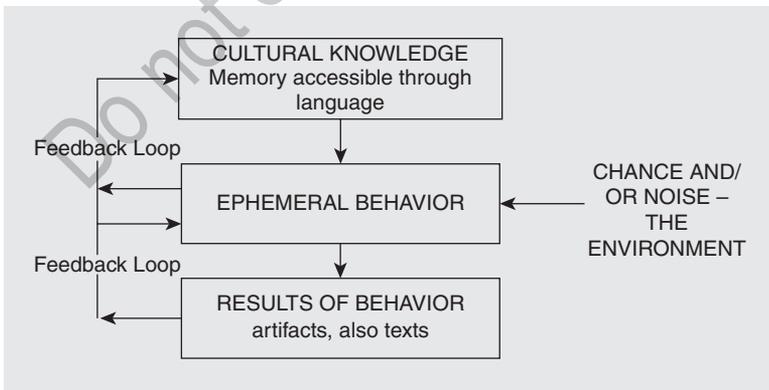
One special case of "going native" stands out: language fluency. We outlined above, with Malinowski, how anthropologists have attained native language fluency. This fact too is well respected by the natives, and by an ethnographer's colleagues. Language fluency, however, has a special meaning: Knowledge of the language's grammar, phonology, and vocabulary is *sufficient to generate and understand meaningful utterances*. Those considered fluent in a language, however, are usually sensible enough to observe that they—as well as any nonnative in any society—will function much better when working actively with a competent bilingual/native coresearcher.

MATERIAL CULTURE AND CULTURAL DURABILITY

A related question arises regarding material culture and how it relates to the definition of ethnography and culture. I address this question by asking, “How do you use the right tool for the right job?” Answering that question without asking the users can create problems particularly in archaeology, where the people who may have used the tools or implements in a site are no longer available for interviewing. Archaeologists thus have no recent knowledgeable source for conducting ethnography. They have to depend on historical reconstruction by natives, maybe comparing with other sites or inferring from elsewhere, where such information is available.

Ethnography needs to ask how durable is culture. Behavior is ephemeral. One possibility is for it simply to reside in memory, where it can later be recalled. However, this solution raises issues of the *systematic distortion hypothesis* (Shweder and D’Andrade 1980). More useful for the preservation of behavior are texts, photographs, strips of film, or various kinds of digital recordings. All of these represent products of behavior, or artifacts. A text is a record of a native utterance. Figure 1.2 helps to show the interrelationships among cultural knowledge, ephemeral behavior, and texts.

Figure 1.2 Cultural Knowledge, Ephemeral Behavior, and Texts



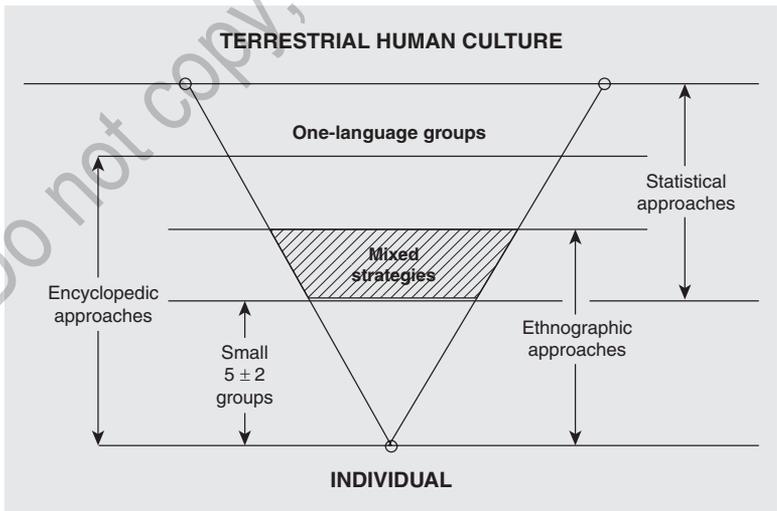
Source: Werner and Schoepfle (1987a).

The completeness of a cultural description also needs to be considered. Anthropologists such as Michael Agar have raised the question of what happens when anthropologists describe only parts of a people's way of life and culture. He termed this research "ethnographic," for describing some of the knowledge shared by a group of people. His question is important, and this book uses both "ethnographic" and "ethnography."

KINDS OF ETHNOGRAPHY

A distantly related question is "Is all culture describable?" This book has noted that culture can be seen as a group of people's knowledge of learned behavior, artifacts, social relationships, politics, religion, and the economy. Anthropologists have described culture as pertaining to all of humanity, to groups, and to parts of an individual's psychological makeup. This issue was summarized by the oft-quoted phrase attributed to anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn and psychologist Henry Murray (1953): "Every man is in certain respects like all other men, like some other men, like no other man." The inverted pyramid in Figure 1.3 illustrates the variability of groups and how they can be studied.

Figure 1.3 Range of Cultures and Methods of Describing Them



Source: Werner and Schoepfle (1987a).

Starting at the bottom, the first kind of ethnography describes small groups with memberships ranging from three to seven people. These groups are the subject of ethnography *par excellence*.

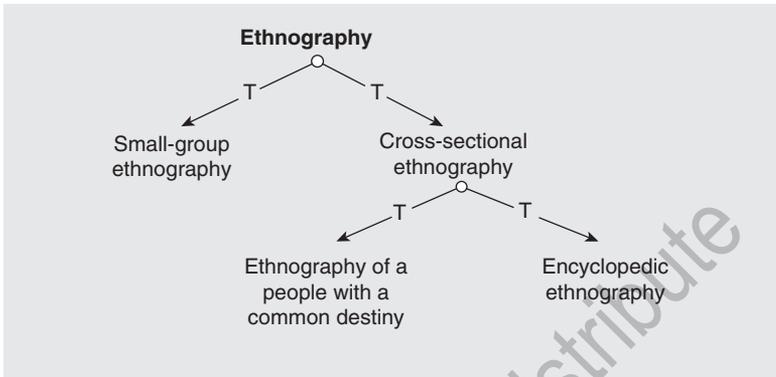
The second kind of ethnography is *cross-sectional ethnography*, of which there are two types. One describes a cross-section of *people*, the other a cross section of *knowledge*. In describing a cross section of people, ethnographers look at human beings who share a common history or destiny. James Spradley wrote *You Owe Yourself a Drunk* (1970), which describes the lifeways of the Skid Row homeless in Seattle, Washington. However, Spradley did not study them as an interacting human group or groups but rather as a cross section of homeless people. Assumed here is that all these people face similar problems and could be seen as having a common destiny. See Agar's book *Ripping and Running* (1974) for a similar description of drug addicts.

The third kind of cross-sectional ethnography is the encyclopedic. It is intended to study and describe as completely as possible the cultural knowledge base of a domain such as agriculture, child rearing, or warfare. Examples include the encyclopedias of Western civilization, the *Encyclopedia Bororo* (Albisetti & Venturelli, 1962), and the Navajo ethnologic dictionary (Franciscan Fathers, 2015). Others concentrate on selected domains, such as the Navajo knowledge of health and medicine in the *Navajo Ethnomedical Encyclopedia* (Werner et al., 1976) and Harold Conklin's (1983) *Ethnographic Atlas of Ifugao*.

Most ethnographies are mixtures of all three—group, cross-sectional, and encyclopedic. Encyclopedic ethnography can actually be seen as a kind of cross-sectional ethnography. It is encyclopedic because most ethnographers study less the information about the distribution of knowledge in the group and concentrate more on presenting *all available knowledge on some topic*. The taxonomic diagram in Figure 1.4 illustrates this.

This kind of diagram is a taxonomic tree and will be appearing throughout this book. In this diagram, "X is a kind of Y," or $Y \circ \text{---} T \text{---} \rightarrow \circ X$. In this diagram, a "small-group ethnography" is a kind of ethnography. Similarly, a "cross-sectional ethnography" is a kind of ethnography. Small-group ethnography and the cross-sectional ethnography contrast with each other. There are, in turn, two kinds of cross-sectional ethnographies that contrast with each other: (1) the ethnography that describes a people with a common destiny (e.g., Spradley's 1970 description of the homeless in *You Owe Yourself a Drunk*) and (2) one that describes a particular domain of folk knowledge (e.g., the *Navajo Ethnomedical Encyclopedia*, Werner et al., 1976). In the basic description of ethnography discussed so far, this book does not

Figure 1.4 Kinds of Ethnography



Source: Werner and Schoepfle (1987a).

specify the size or the complexity of the group. Instead, it selects the term “group” rather than relying on terms such as “tribe,” “band,” or “ethnic group” because ethnography does not limit itself by how large or small the so-called group should be.

ABDUCTIVE REASONING IN COGNITIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

Cognitive ethnography is indeed a social science research strategy, but a special one. It is not *deductive*: Researchers in ethnography do not formulate broad theory about the human condition and test specific hypotheses through experimentation. It is also not *inductive*: Ethnographers do not derive broad generalizations about observed patterns from a limited number of observations and test them on a broader sample. Instead, it is what Agar (2006, 2010) called *abductive*. That is, ethnography encounters contradictions in incomplete data and generates explanations to resolve them. Agar refers to these contradictions as “breakdowns.” These breakdowns are a form of “epistemological window” (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987b). They are opportunities to learn something new and unexpected. For example, it is very healthy for ethnographers to ask themselves, “Why do two consultants contradict each other?” In crediting the 19th-century philosopher of science Charles Sanders Peirce, Michael Agar (2010)

summarized that this abductive reasoning “calls for taking surprises seriously and creating new concepts to account for them. No more tossing the problem into error variance. No more testing the goodness of fit of new data against available concepts, as in inductive statistics” (p. 289). To resolve the contradiction, the researcher needs to gather more information.

Through abductive reasoning, then, inconsistency or contradiction is an opportunity to gain more relevant information. Inconsistency demands a view of something ethnographers would not see or notice. Even if the knowledge system proves to be inconsistent, *a cultural knowledge system can be assumed valid and internally consistent until proven otherwise*. Failure to promote this stance not only demeans the culture that the ethnographer studies but demeans the ethnographer’s culture as well.

When conducting research, an ethnographer needs to remember that it is a *social enterprise* that cannot be conducted by one person. At the least, the social cooperation includes the researcher and the people with whom the research is conducted. Those with whom the research is conducted are not “subjects.” The term “research subjects” pertains to isolated individuals who are supposed to be affected by the researcher only as part of an experiment (Sieber & Tolich, 2013). Ethnographic description is coproduced by the ethnographers and the people with whom they work. As a group, they are called “natives”; as individuals, we refer to them as “consultants.” Native people are the experts in their cultural lives. As experts, they can be considered as consultants. This term thus replaces terms such as “informant” that were used by earlier anthropologists.

Ethnography is thus an *alliance* between the ethnographers and the natives (Bohannan et al., 1974). As an alliance, ethnographers *must*

1. share their own backgrounds with their native hosts as much as they might expect to obtain information about them;
2. be honest with those with whom a researcher must work;
3. negotiate carefully, and honestly, the roles of researcher and participant through time;
4. maximize interview privacy, comfort, and safety for both the native and the interviewer and balance them with the opportunity to interview and observe; and
5. consider the natives with whom they work as consultants who are expert in their cultural knowledge.

HOW ETHNOGRAPHY DIFFERS FROM JOURNALISM

It is easy to confuse journalism and ethnography. Both may involve fieldwork and interviewing, and thus overlap in the way fieldwork is conducted. When not acting as a propaganda instrument or extreme advocacy organization, both adhere to high ethical standards of accuracy and treatment of those with whom journalists or ethnographers work. There are three important differences, however, that must be acknowledged. First, journalism tends to concentrate on the newsworthy and the special, what is often referred to as the unusual, or “man bites dog,” stories. Ethnography describes in detail the everyday, or “dog bites man,” stories. Stated yet another way, ethnography concentrates on what Malinowski (1922) referred to as “the *imponderabilia* of everyday life.”

Second, journalism tends to highlight the activities and achievements of individuals and the changes they bring to life around them. Those interviewed by a journalist are often aware of this fact. While ethnographers may carefully note these events and the individuals involved in them, the differences in emphasis are important.

Third, journalists tend to depend far more than ethnographers on observation (see Lubet, 2018). In journalism, such a stance may be reasonable because, first, there is often very little time to prepare a feature article or report. For journalism, lengthy interviewing and analysis might therefore be considered overly time-consuming, in light of the information they feel they are receiving and must transmit to the public. The result may be the inadvertent blending of dramatic fiction for information (see Cooke, 1980; Lubet, 2018) critique.

More important is that journalists are going to depend more on observation because they often share more of the culture of the people with whom they are researching. Ethnographers, however, acknowledge that doing research with groups with a similar culture and language to theirs can actually be more treacherous. This is because they may not notice where they have misjudged a situation. Ironically, some of the best examples of thoroughness in such investigations come from journalists. For good examples of care and precision in reporting, see Jon Krakauer’s coverage of Christopher McCandless’s fatal travails in *Into the Wild* (1996), his portrayal of the experiences of Mount Everest climbers in *Into Thin Air* (1999), and his description of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in his book *Under the Banner of Heaven* (2003). All involved considerable written response to peer review and debate with the families and official organizations involved.

EVERYONE IS BIASED AND MUST COPE WITH THE FACT

Ethnographers in the past have used a number of devices for controlling their biases. The late Robert Redfield (1930) recommended that all ethnographers should come clean and talk about their biases. He noted, for example, that he maintained a strong bias favoring the underdog. This is a common bias among ethnographers and perhaps one reason why they tend to study “down” rather than “up” (Nader, 1969).

Relatively few anthropologists have worked with people whose status, income, or prestige is higher than their own. Until recently, the most common status for anthropologists or ethnographers has been that of the university professor. It is safe to assume that most American ethnographers are either in, or aspire to become part of, the upper-middle-class “intelligentsia.” Laura Nader (1969) wrote an article that has become almost a manifesto, calling for more ethnographic work on the upper classes, top executives, politicians, and other people who are “above” the ethnographers in U.S. society.

Recent fieldwork has responded, with studies such as those by Karen Ho (2009), who conducted an ethnographic study of Wall Street investment bankers’ institutional culture from February 1998 through June 1999. Her primary source for participant observation was on-the-job.

In any event, it is difficult for an ethnographer to be aware of these biases, and the difficulty becomes greater the more similar the culture of the native consultant is to that of the ethnographer. Ethnography has three principal defenses that reduce or mitigate bias. The first is through the systematic application of methodologies for interviews, observation, and documentary analysis. This book will show that interviews are structured around the knowledge of the consultant, not dependent on a preconceived set of questions. This form of interview structure will help the ethnographer to understand the knowledge of another culture in as nonjudgmental and unbiased a way as possible.

Subsequent chapters will explain in greater detail how a cognitive ethnography begins with an open-ended or “grand tour” question. The ethnographer has to negotiate this question carefully with the consultant, to make sure that both are addressing the same subject domain. The interview records the terms and phrases given by the consultant, and the ethnographer develops follow-up questions from them. These follow-up questions are based on the three theoretically universal semantic relationships mentioned earlier: modification, taxonomy, and

queuing. The process is thus highly structured. Answers to the interview questions can be generated and combined to denote elaborate relationships of causality or precondition. While the answers can be complex, both the interviewer and the consultant can better track what each other is thinking or wants to find out.

A second defense relies on multiple sources. That is, ethnographers try to work with more than one consultant from different backgrounds. They also compare what these different consultants tell them with what they observe and with the documentary sources they find. By using all these sources, ethnographers attempt to pull together a structured, consistent description of the culture.

A third defense is to plan and report thoroughly on one's research. As in other social sciences, cognitive ethnographers prepare for their research as thoroughly as possible before conducting interviews and observation. When they write a final report or description, they carefully note and outline the limitations of their studies by describing who they interviewed, where and what settings they observed, and the kinds of documentation they examined. In this fashion, future ethnographers can hopefully discover limitations and compensate for them.

Avoiding Bias Is a Methodological, Not a Moral or Ethical, Stance

Everyone has biases, and they must be dealt with. Refusal to deal with them renders one *ethnocentric*. This refusal can emerge through sloth or through ideological blinders. Either source is pernicious because it leads to an ill-informed judgment of a group's way of life. Ethnographers arrive at judgments only after they have exhausted all available means of further description. Avoiding bias is thus an *operational* or *methodological* stance (Bidney, 1967), not a moral or ethical one.

Cultural relativism's original intent was to establish that one should not judge any culture, or cultural knowledge system, as better than as or worse than any other (Benedict, 1959). This stance also does not mean that "anything goes" (c.f. Bruner, 1990). It is a methodological and epistemological stance, not a moral or ethical one. This stance, in turn, indicates how the ethnographic record should be kept. A researcher must ask how a cultural practice or belief works, rather than prejudging it. It also requires the researcher to maintain an egalitarian relationship with the consultants with whom they conduct research. They must treat all these people as having rights to the same quality, rigor, and intellectual honesty that ethnographers would pursue for social inquiry in their own society.

Ethnographers also need to describe the power relationships in a given society, as well as associated histories of colonialism, slavery, or warfare. Writings of this kind of knowledge may result in contested histories and may require acknowledgment that sometimes one has been telling the story from only one viewpoint. These power relationships must be dealt with descriptively and without taking sides, particularly during the conduct of the research.

Finally, the ethnographer accomplishes little by denigrating his or her culture. Such denigration is as pernicious as ethnocentrism. Western civilization and the United States, for example, have both served as exemplars of greed, duplicity, and brutality, to name a few well-deserved labels. It is possible also that these faults have bled over into the social theory of social scientists, philosophers, or historians. Overrepresenting these faults and doubts through overreliance on self-criticism succeeds in paralyzing fieldwork and research.

PREPARATION FOR AN ETHNOGRAPHER'S CAREER: ETHNOGRAPHER AS EXPERT WITNESS

No matter the social science discipline, the ethnographer may have to report findings to governmental agencies or testify before the courts. That is, they may be asked to be *expert witnesses* (Rosen, 1977). Until 1993, the Frye General Acceptance standard prevailed (*Frye v. United States*, 1923). That is, an individual's admissibility of their expert witness testimony depended on its being "*sufficiently established to have gained general acceptance in the particular field in which it belongs*" (italics added). With *Daubert v. Merrell Dow Pharmaceuticals, Inc.* (1993), the U.S. Supreme Court superseded the Frye General Acceptance standard with the *Federal Rules of Evidence* (Pub. L. No. 93-595; National Court Rules Committee, 2021), which Congress subsequently passed as legislation on January 2, 1975. The *Federal Rules of Evidence* govern the introduction of evidence at civil and criminal trials in the U.S. federal trial courts. They are amended annually by the Supreme Court.

The *Federal Rules of Evidence* are recognized by the Supreme Court as the law. The changes to jurisprudence were substantial. First, the judges in a federal court now were "to *assume the obligation* as well as *exercise the discretion* to evaluate admission of expert witnesses." They were also to do so at the outset of the trial. The court thus becomes the

gatekeeper of the evidence. With *Daubert* (1993), the emphasis shifted *from* deciding how well received the theory or the individual testifying is *to* assessing the validity of the evidence in support of the testimony.

Section 702 of the *Federal Rules of Evidence* is the part most often cited. This rule states,

A witness who is qualified as an expert by knowledge, skill, experience, training, or education may testify in the form of an opinion or otherwise if:

- (a) the expert's scientific, technical or other specialized knowledge will help the trier of fact to understand the evidence or to determine a fact in issue;
- (b) the testimony is based on sufficient facts or data;
- (c) the testimony is the product of reliable principles and methods; and
- (d) the expert has reliably applied the principles and methods to the facts of the case (National Court Rules Committee, 2021)

These four criteria also form the basis of a so-called Daubert motion, a motion that is raised before or during a trial to exclude the presentation of unqualified evidence to the jury. The argument can exclude the testimony of an expert witness if the witness's testimony is found to be insufficient or the methods used to obtain data are questionable.

Section 705 of the *Federal Rules of Evidence* becomes important regarding dissemination of data:

Unless the court orders otherwise, an expert may state an opinion—and give the reasons for it—without first testifying to the underlying facts or data. *But the expert may be required to disclose these facts or data on cross-examination.* (National Court Rules Committee, 2021; italics added)

In other words, ethnographers may not have to produce all of their data at trial but may have to produce them when demanded on Discovery (“pretrial procedures providing for the exchange of information between the parties involved in the proceedings,” Britannica.com, n.d.) by the opposing side. Any aspiring ethnographer is urged to read Sections 703 (Bases of an Expert's Opinion Testimony), 704 (Opinion

on an Ultimate Issue), 705 (Disclosing the Facts or Data Underlying an Expert's Opinion), and 706 (Court-Appointed Expert Witnesses).

Ethnographers are also urged to sort out what they are being told by other sources about events. Achieving a full understanding of a consultant's knowledge does not always mean complete acceptance. To record accurate information, an ethnographer needs to take into consideration questions of who, what, where, when, antecedents, and consequents. In other words, they must answer these questions:

1. What exactly happened?
2. Who exactly was involved in this event?
3. Where did this event happen?
4. When did this event happen?
5. What were the antecedents and consequents of this event?

In addition to better data being included in their research, ethnographers will have either the opportunity or the obligation to serve as expert witnesses (Campbell et al., 2017). Because of *Daubert* (1993), an expert witness may need to have done research directly relevant to the trial. Leila Rodriguez (2014) recounted the methodological and ethical issues she faced when she did fieldwork and analysis for a defendant's defense team. She ultimately avoided a "battle of experts" because the defendant accepted a plea deal that amended his charges to a less serious offense. Nevertheless, the stakes were high considering that the individual charged would face possible prison time.

Finally, ethnographers must be prepared to understand what is expected of them for protecting the privacy of the consultants and fellow researchers. Considerable debate has gone on throughout the American Anthropological Association (AAA) on how to protect both privacy and anonymity. A definitive discussion on the subject is beyond the scope of this book. It is one of the reasons, however, why this book stresses the need to understand the laws of privacy and confidentiality applicable directly to the nations, communities, and people with whom we are to conduct the research. Laws obviously differ from place to place, and a good background acquired in one place may or may not transfer to another. It may, however, serve as a good basis for comparison. See Chapter 2 for more details.