ETHNOGRAPHER'S TOOLKIT

book 1

second edition

DESIGNING & CONDUCTING *ethnographic* RESEARCH

An Introduction

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Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research

The Ethnographer's Toolkit

Second Edition

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Purpose of The Ethnographer's Toolkit

The second edition of the **The Ethnographer's Toolkit** is designed with the novice field researcher in mind. In this revised and updated version, the authors of the **Toolkit** take the reader through a series of seven books that spell out the steps involved in doing ethnographic research in community and institutional settings. Using simple, reader-friendly language, the *Toolkit* includes case studies, examples, illustrations, checklists, key points and additional resources, all designed to help the reader fully understand each and every step of the ethnographic process. Eschewing a formulaic approach, the authors explain how to develop research questions, create research designs and models, decide which data collection methods to use and how to analyze and interpret data. Two new books take readers through ethical decision-making and protocols specific for protection of individual and group participants in qualitative research, and ways of applying qualitative and ethnographic research to practical program development, evaluation and systems change efforts. The **Toolkit** is the perfect starting point for students and faculty in the social sciences, public health, education, environmental studies, allied health, and nursing, who may be new to ethnographic research. It also introduces professionals from diverse fields to the use of observation, assessment, and evaluation for practical ways to improve programs and achieve better service outcomes.

1. *Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research: An Introduction*, by Margaret D. LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul

2. *Initiating Ethnographic Research: Models, Methods, and Measurement*, by Stephen L. Schensul, Jean J. Schensul, and Margaret D. LeCompte

3. *Essential Ethnographic Data Collection Methods: Observations, Interviews, and Ethnographic Surveys*, by Jean J. Schensul and Margaret D. LeCompte

4. *Specialized Ethnographic Methods: Cultural Artifacts, Secondary Data, Mapping Culture, Spatial Data, Hidden Populations, Multimedia, Photovoice, and Digital Data*, edited by Jean J. Schensul and Margaret D. LeCompte

5. *Analysis and Interpretation of Ethnographic Data*, by Margaret D. LeCompte and Jean

J. Schensul

6. *Ethics in Ethnography: Fieldwork, Researcher Roles, and Institutional Relationships,* by Margaret D. LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul

7. *Ethnography in Practice: Using Collaborative Ethnography to Solve Social Problems,* by Jean J. Schensul and Margaret D. LeCompte

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Introduction to *The Ethnographer's Toolkit*

The Ethnographer's Toolkit is a series of texts on how to plan, design, carry out, and use the results of applied ethnographic research. Ethnography, as an approach to research, may be unfamiliar to people accustomed to more traditional forms of research, but we believe that ethnography will not only prove congenial but also essential to many researchers and practitioners. Many of the investigative or evaluative questions that arise in the course of answering basic questions about ongoing events in a community or school setting or in the

context of program planning and evaluation cannot be answered very well with other approaches to research, such as controlled experiments or collection of quantifiable data. Often there are no data available to quantify or programs whose effectiveness needs to be assessed! Sometimes the research problem to be addressed is not yet clearly identified and must be discovered. In such cases, ethnographic research provides a valid and important way to find out what IS happening and to help research-practice teams plan their activities.

New in the Second Edition of *The Ethnographer's Toolkit*

In this second edition of the **Toolkit**, we have updated many sections of the books and, based on feedback from our colleagues, we have clarified many of the concepts and techniques. Book 1 of *The Ethnographer's Toolkit* remains an introduction and primer, but it includes new material on data collection, definition, and analysis as well as new chapters on research partnerships and using ethnography for a variety of applied purposes. In Book 1 we define what ethnographic research is, when it should be used, and how it can be used to identify and solve complex social problems, especially those not readily amenable to traditional quantitative or experimental research methods alone. Book 2 now is devoted to the process of developing a conceptual basis for research studies and to more detailed questions of research design and sampling. Books 1 through 4 emphasize the fact that ethnography is a peculiarly human endeavor; many of its practitioners have commented that, unlike other approaches to research, the *researcher* is the primary tool for collecting primary data. As we demonstrate in these books, ethnography's principal database is amassed in the course of human interaction: direct observation, face-to-face interviewing and elicitation, audiovisual recording, and mapping the networks, times, and places in which human interactions occur. Further, the personal characteristics and activities of researchers as human beings and as scientists become salient in ethnography in ways not applicable in research that permits the investigator to maintain more distance from the persons and phenomena under study. Interpretation of ethnographic research results emerge only from the process of engaging researcher understanding with direct, face-to-face field experience.

Book 4, a collection of individually authored chapters, now includes new chapters on cutting-edge approaches to ethnography. Books 6 and 7 also are entirely new to the **Toolkit**. The former provides extensive detail on the burgeoning field of research ethics and the latter approaches the dissemination and application of ethnographic research in new ways.

We have designed the **Toolkit** for educators, service professionals, professors of applied students in the fields of teaching, social and health services, communications, engineering and business, and students working in applied field settings. The examples we include throughout the books are drawn from these fields as well as our own research projects and those of our colleagues.

Introduction to Book 1

This book, *Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research*, defines what ethnographic research is and discusses the predominant viewpoints or paradigms that guide ethnography and serve as an introduction to some of the critical concepts underlying **The Ethnographer's Toolkit—**namely, "ethnography," "culture," "context," "ethnographic research methods," "research roles and partnerships," "ethnographic data analysis," and "dissemination and use of research results." It is organized into ten chapters, following the major themes addressed in the book series.

Chapter 1, "What Is Ethnography?," defines ethnography as a scientific endeavor, presents its major characteristics, and explains how it is affected by relationships of power involving differences of culture, gender, race, ethnicity, position, and situation. Chapter 2 answers the question, "When, Where, and By Whom Should Ethnography Be Used?" by considering the circumstances under which it is both appropriate and necessary to conduct ethnographic research. Here we identify the kinds of questions that can best be answered using ethnographic rather than quantitative methods and the settings in which ethnography is likely to be welcomed. We also discuss the type of researcher who is best suited to conduct an ethnography. In chapter 3, titled "Paradigms for Framing the Conduct of Ethnographic Research," we outline five major conceptual paradigms, or ways of thinking, in ethnographic research. These paradigms—positivism, critical theory, interpretivism or constructivism, ecological frameworks or functionalism, and social network research—are variously chosen by researchers who seek particular ways to explore and understand the human world and to frame both research topics and research questions.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of research design. It discusses the variety of research designs used in the social and human sciences and explores how to define research questions and choose data collection techniques. At the same time, chapter 4 also shows how both qualitative and quantitative research methods and designs can be "mixed" in the same study to improve the quality of research and why theoretical modeling, a recursive process, is important to the process.

In chapter 5, we discuss how researchers figure out what and who to study, and we give examples of how complex ethnographic research questions are broken down for inclusion in a research design. We review issues to consider in choosing and designing an ethnographic approach, including procedures for identifying a population, selecting an appropriate sample, and defining units of analysis.

Chapter 6 defines what data in general, and ethnographic data in particular, are, and provides a brief overview of the kinds of data that are usually collected by ethnographers in the field. It compares a wide range of data and data collection strategies and reviews the circumstances under which these data collection techniques are recommended for use.

In chapter 7, we discuss the specific procedures ethnographers use to organize, synthesize, and analyze their data and how they integrate different data sources to create a comprehensive picture or story of a community, a school, or any culturally defined group. In particular, we

show how the operational or data aspects of research are informed and organized by its conceptual or theoretical aspects, such that what is collected actually can produce meaningful descriptions explained by theories that make sense. We show how using theories helps to frame and interpret the results of research. Because ethnography depends so extensively on interpersonal relations, we devote chapter 8 to a discussion of the characteristics of good field researchers and how to choose them, as well as how to identify and build the research teams and partnerships upon which most ethnographic work depends. Chapter 9 is an entirely new chapter that examines the application of ethnographic research to dissemination of research results to the public. We also discuss the formation, improvement and evaluation of approaches that enhance community and organizational capacity to build on local knowledge, policy and advocacy work, and at the same time, to contribute to the improvement of science.

Book 1 concludes with a discussion of research ethics. In chapter 10, we pay special attention to the unique nature of ethical relationships in ethnographic research. Ethnography creates new challenges for the ethics of field research practice. The intimacy of relationships established between researchers and their partners and the demands that flow from it, the continuous interaction with participants, the repeated interviewing typical of ethnographic research, and the long-term contact with research participants offer new potential for revealing confidential information and create new demands on researchers for responding to respondent and community needs, including considerations of how to make research results available to research partners without revealing confidential information. In chapter 10, we discuss the principles guiding, and the history of concern for, the protection of research participants as well as a discussion of both institutional and individual requisites to which researchers must adhere in the conduct of their investigations.

Jean J. Schensul and Margaret D. LeCompte

Series Editors

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What Is Ethnography?

Ethnography as Science
The Historical Evolution of Ethnographic Methods
Ethnography for Problem Identification and Solving
Characteristics of Ethnography
What Is Culture? Differentiating the Individual from the Cultural
A Note on Ethnicity, Culture, and Race
Power, Situatedness, and Positionality
The Impact of Cultural Politics on Identity and Research

Ethnography as Science

Ethnography is a systematic approach to learning about the social and cultural life of communities, institutions, and other settings that:

- Is scientific
- Is investigative
- Uses the researcher as the primary tool of data collection
- Uses rigorous research methods and data collection techniques to avoid bias and ensure accuracy of data
- Emphasizes and builds on the perspectives of the people in the research setting
- Uses both inductive and deductive approaches, so as to build more effective and socially and culturally valid local theories for testing and adapting them for use both locally and elsewhere

Ethnography takes the position that human behavior and the ways in which people construct and make meaning of their worlds and their lives are highly variable and **locally specific**.

Definition:

Locally specific meanings and behavior are those that originate in and are found in one specific location

One primary difference between *ethnography as science* and other social and behavioral science methods of investigation is that ethnography assumes that researchers must first discover *what* people actually do and the reasons they give for doing it before trying to interpret their actions through filters from their own personal experience or theories derived from professional or academic disciplines. That is why the tools of ethnography are designed for discovery prior to "testing."

The basic tools of ethnography use the researcher's eyes and ears as the primary modes for data collection. Much like naturalists, ethnographic researchers learn through systematic observation in the "field" by interviewing and carefully recording what they see, hear, and observe people doing while also learning the meanings that people attribute to what they do and the things they make. The idea that the researcher is the primary tool for data collection may not be comfortable for those who believe that science is "objective" and that the presence and interaction of the researcher in the field may bias the results. For this reason, in this book and subsequent volumes of **The Ethnographer's Toolkit**, we rigorously define the approaches to data collection that ethnographers use and the ways that they address and manage potential biases stemming from their own experiences and beliefs as well as the specifics of their associations and their identities in the field. These definitions—the codification of ethnographic research methods—represent an effort to ensure that researchers gather data carefully, thoroughly, and in ways that are understandable to others, and that they use procedures that can be replicated by other researchers, even though the field situation may change and the researchers may differ in demographic, theoretical, or other characteristics. This rigor is what helps to produce scientifically valid and reliable data.

A second primary difference between ethnography and other social and behavioral sciences is that ethnographic researchers cannot control what happens in their "field" situation of choice. Scientific ethnographic research is conducted in field settings where the researcher enters as an "invited guest" or partner to learn what is going on. Thus, the ethnographic field situation is unlike clinical or laboratory-based experimental research where most aspects of the environment are controlled and where multiple researchers can use the same **instruments** and can expect to get the same results if the study is repeated. Even when ethnographers use the same instruments, changing circumstances beyond the ethnographers' control may generate different results that they must be able to explain. In addition, ethnographers may find that a community has changed so much over time that using the same instruments as in a previous study now is inappropriate. For example, if population shifts transform a community from one that is primarily Mexican and Spanish-speaking to one that is primarily Russian and Russian-speaking, or if the same researcher returns to the field twenty years later, the instruments might

not only have to be translated but also to be adapted to suit the different cultures involved or the cultural transformations that have taken place.

Definition:

Instruments are the tools, including lists of interview questions, observational checklists, pilesort cards, and survey questionnaires, that researchers use to collect their data

Lack of control over the field setting is another problem that affects ethnographers. An important situation illustrating an important cultural pattern—for example, a community-wide religious ceremony or an environmental crisis—may occur only once in many years. Ethnographers may enter the field situation expecting one set of circumstances and find another—the program they intended to study may have been defunded. Or they may encounter rapid changes while in the field, such as a policy change (e.g., a policy prohibiting the use of tobacco products when the study is about cigarette smoking), civil strife or violence, a national election or strike with policy or other immediate consequences, decisions to change school curricula, or a natural disaster. These circumstances require flexibility, the ingenuity to take advantage of ongoing changes in the situation for comparative purposes, and the ability to obtain information from different sources to verify and illustrate their explanation of a specific cultural pattern. In addition, what is important to ethnographers as social scientists is their ability to adapt or create locally appropriate aids to data collection or instruments that are effective in building a picture, narrative, story, or theory of local culture that is predictive of future events, at least in the short run. At the same time, ethnography produces hunches, guesses, and hypotheses that can be applied to the same situation or to other similar situations using the same research methods and data collection techniques.

Ethnographers do not shy away from surveys and other instruments that are used to test concepts and theories derived from other fields or from "outsider" observations. But ethnographers will take the position, consistent with their belief in the integrity of local cultures, that such instruments and the theories that usually direct their use should not be used arbitrarily without testing them locally for both practical applicability (i.e., do local people understand the language and ideas used by the ethnographer?) and theoretical applicability (i.e., are the theories that guide these instruments meaningful in the local setting in the same way as they were in previous settings?). Increasingly, this position is coming to be shared by members of other disciplines who historically have believed strongly in the generalizability and universality of human behaviors, motivations, and beliefs. Over the past two decades, growing understanding of the importance of local culture as the context for research and intervention has helped to increase the visibility and perceived value of ethnography as an alternative scientific approach to research (see Pelto and Pelto 1978; Bernard 1998; Trotter and Schensul 1998; Singer 2001) and as an important basis for the development of quantitative tools and instruments that have internal and social validity.

Ethnography is often mistaken for qualitative research. Qualitative research is a term used to describe *any* research that uses the wide variety of qualitative data collection techniques available, many of which we will describe in detail in this book, as well as in Books 3 and 4

of this series.

Qualitative research can be descriptive, used as part of a quantitative research design, or used in the development of quantitative measures. By contrast, ethnography can be and do all of these things, but it is both more and less than qualitative research.

Cross Reference: Ethnographic methods are described in detail in Books 3 and 4

The Historical Evolution of Ethnographic Methods

Historically, ethnography has been thought of as both a product of research and a research process (LeCompte and Preissle 1993; Pelto and Pelto 1978). The product is an interpretive story, reconstruction, or narrative about a group of people (a community). It includes some historical material and paints a picture of people going about their daily lives over a relatively representative period of time. The content of an ethnography can address some or all of the following: beliefs, values, attitudes, perceptions, emotions; verbal and nonverbal means of communication; social networks; behaviors of a group of individuals with their friends, family, associates, fellow workers, clients, and colleagues; patterns of conflict and conflict resolution; use of tools, technology, and manufacture of materials and artifacts; structures of power and prestige; historical and environmental influences; and patterned use of space and time.

The ethnographic research process requires both face-to-face interaction with people in the research community and the use of tools of data collection such as those described in this book and in Books 3 and 4. It also is a longer-term process than many other kinds of research. Though duration of time required in the field is difficult to determine, earlier in the twentieth century it was customary for ethnographers to live in a community for one to three years, observing annual cycles of activity and learning as much as possible about many aspects of community life. This immersion approach stems from the experience of Bronislaw Malinowski, whose work in the Trobriand Islands marked the beginning of twentieth-century ethnographic methodology and has been endorsed by other methodologists, such as Harry Wolcott (Wolcott 1995). Others have argued that only long-term involvement can produce the kind of “thick description” and comprehensive understanding of relationships, processes, and life cycle that ensure full understanding and avoid premature conclusions (Woods 1994).

Most researchers, however, are not in a position to spend many months or years in a field site unless it is the location in which they have chosen to live and work on a regular basis, though many ethnographers make repeated shorter visits to their research sites. Thus ethnographers tend to work for shorter periods of time in communities of varying size and complexity as well as in institutions that may be local, regional, national, or global. Contemporary ethnographies generally are focused on a particular aspect or dimension of culture. They tend to be problem oriented, addressing specific issues or problems in a community context that serve to narrow and focus the research endeavor.

To accomplish high-quality ethnographic research despite relatively brief periods of research time and limited resources, researchers now restrict their studies to a topic or “lens”

through which to view the community they are studying. Thus, for example, an educator may choose to conduct ethnographic research with Puerto Rican families and educators in the schools their children attend but restrict the research focus to inquiring the context, reasons for, and consequences of an observed pattern in which Puerto Rican children are enrolling in school well after opening day. Or staff of a nonprofit organization serving pregnant young women may conduct an ethnographic study focusing on the range of variation in social, cultural, and economic supports available to these young women after they give birth, rather than considering the full scope of reproductive health concerns affecting them.

Shorter, more focused ethnographic studies require new methodology and research tools. Until the late 1960s, most ethnographers followed the "old rules"—long periods of time in distant field sites to gain exposure to and understanding of settings, cultures, and languages not their own. By the end of the 1960s, a number of ethnographers recognized the limitations of participant observation as the sole means of accumulating and conveying ethnographic knowledge and began to evolve new, more rigorous approaches to data collection. Among the first such efforts in anthropology were the publications of Pelto (Pelto 1970) and Pelto and Pelto (1978). Both volumes outlined a new "science of ethnography" by framing and setting forth a variety of systematic approaches to data collection and analysis and arguing for transparency, rigor, and reproduceability in ethnographic research. Pelto and Pelto (1978) adapted tools and approaches from sociology, psychology, and psychiatry, including narrative interviews, elicitation techniques, photography, and quantification to create perhaps the first "mixed methods" approach to ethnographic research. Their work paved the way for many other researchers. Among them is anthropologist H. Russell Bernard, who has produced a number of important mixed methods texts for ethnographers (1995, 1998, 2000, 2006). Educational anthropologists Harry Wolcott (1995), Frederick Erickson (1984), Karen Watson-Gegeo (1988), along with sociologists Corbin and Strauss (2008), Miles and Huberman (1994), Margaret LeCompte and Judith Goetz (1984), and Margaret LeCompte and Judith Preissle (1993) have focused their attention on the improvement of qualitative methods and data analysis, especially in the arena of educational research. Recognition of the power of these approaches came with the 2001 publication of the American Educational Research Foundation's *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, in which ethnography finally achieved parity of treatment with quantitative and experimental designs (Richardson 2001). In qualitative sociology, Denzin, Lincoln, and Guba (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Lincoln and Guba 1985), and more recently researchers such as Kip Jones (2006) have pushed the margins of qualitative research and shifted our attention to performative ethnography and the intersection of art and ethnographic research. At the same time, other, more quantitatively oriented sociologists such as Charles Ragin were inventing creative ways of interfacing qualitative and quantitative data with small samples to improve and verify identification of complex patterns in qualitative research (Ragin and Pennings 2005; Ragin, Shulman, Weinberg, and Gran 2003; Ragin and Strand 2008).

By 1987 (coincidentally the year in which the Institute for Community Research was founded and Fals-Borda made his first case for the role of empirical ethnographic research in

southern PAR [participatory action research]), the first National Science Foundation (NSF)–funded ethnographic methods "summer camp" was offered to those with PhDs in hand. The intent of the summer camp was to increase the capacity of new anthropology faculty to teach ethnographic research methods (Bernard 2006: xv). In 1996, the NSF summer institute for Research Design in Cultural Anthropology was initiated for graduate students planning their dissertations. Since that time a number of other similar short-term, discipline-specific methods training programs have been created and are offered at various universities and privately in the United States, Europe, and Australia for students, faculty, and other learners. Further, there has been a proliferation of small conferences dedicated to discussion and presentation of ethnographic research.

A new step in the evolution of ethnographic mixed methods research has been the creation of software packages that offer increasingly sophisticated ways of organizing, managing, and analyzing various forms of text and audiovisual and audio data. They support translation of qualitative codes into quantified data sets to facilitate qualitative exploration of multiple variable interactions (QDA 2010). Researchers may choose from among programs that support different types of data and offer different tools for analysis conducive to their own data. Now, with opportunities for exposure so widely available, any researcher can readily gain familiarity with and access to training in ethnographic/qualitative or mixed methods research design, methodology, data collection, and analysis. And indeed there is no reason for not doing so.

Ethnography for Problem Identification and Solving

Although this series can be used by anyone interested in learning how to conduct ethnographic research, we specifically emphasize the application of ethnographic research to the solution of human problems. Some researchers make a distinction between research applied to solving human problems—calling it **applied ethnographic research**—and research designed to answer important social questions without reference to planning or carrying out efforts to address the question or solve the problem it addresses—calling it basic ethnographic research.

Definition: Applied ethnographic research is concerned with understanding socio/cultural problems and using these understandings to bring about positive change in communities, institutions, or groups

This does not mean that basic ethnographic research cannot be used in solving problems; in fact, it usually is. However, applied research also specifically is directed toward and part of an effort to bring about a change in the circumstances of people involved in the research project. In **The Ethnographer's Toolkit**, we discuss how to design and carry out research projects, both basic and applied. We have tended to use the terms "applied ethnographic research" and "ethnographic research" synonymously, insofar as the same rules for systematic and rigorous work apply to both. That being said, we also want to make clear that the purposes of applied ethnographic research are always centered on two goals:

- Understanding socio/cultural problems in communities or institutions
- Using the research to develop and assess approaches to solving problems or helping to bring about positive change in institutions or communities

The problem to be investigated usually is identified in advance by researchers working with partners in the place where the study is to be carried out. Partners are critical to good ethnography since they not only help to identify and clarify the research problem but also are the gatekeepers, interpreters of local culture, potential members of the research team, and users of the study results. The problem guides the study even though the study may conclude with a complete redefinition of the problem. Both the problem and the study itself must be negotiated within a particular community or social context whose members control whether or not research will be done and how often and how the results will be used. If community members, community leaders, and **gatekeepers** view the problem identified by the ethnographer as important or if the problem is identified by the community or institution itself or together with the researcher, the researcher will find it easy to gain entry to the research setting. On the other hand, if the problem is viewed as unimportant, the study is perceived to be a threat to community unity, or its solution is not desired by powerful stakeholders in the community, the researcher will have difficulty gaining entry. The following examples illustrate these points.

Definition: Gatekeepers are individuals who control access to a community, organization, group of people, or source of information

Example 1.1

Defining problems in a Navajo community

Over a period of several years, Margaret LeCompte conducted a study of reform efforts in a school district in the Navajo Nation located in an extremely rural and isolated region of the southwestern United States. After considerable fieldwork, it became clear to her and several of the high school teachers that reforming curriculum and instruction was meaningless if high school graduates could find no jobs in the community. LeCompte thought that economic development of the area was as important to reducing high school dropout rates as the curriculum she was brought in to develop. She proposed doing a study of the job needs in the community and an inventory of community skills and potential businesses that might be generated by local people and to bring in a skilled community organizer to help build a development plan. However, neither the leaders of the school district nor active parent groups felt that such activities were the responsibility of the schools, and the project never began.

Example 1.2

Identifying depression as a problem for study and intervention in low-income senior housing

Through the Institute for Community Research, anthropologists Jean Schensul and Kim Radda

and sociologist Judith Levy were conducting a joint study of HIV exposure among older adults in senior housing in Hartford and Chicago. While working in the Hartford buildings, residents of several buildings involved in the study, along with tenant associations and building managers, mentioned their concern about residents who seemed isolated, sad, and depressed. Schensul and Radda then formed a consortium that included the Hartford Housing Authority and private buildings, a local inpatient institution focused on mental health of older adults, a consortium of mental health clinics serving families and older adults, and an advocacy organization for older low-income adults to put together a study of "practical benefit." A three-year study with a service referral component was funded by a local medical foundation that allowed Schensul, Radda, and colleagues to do research and make and follow up on service referrals in thirteen low-income buildings and with over 850 adults of multiple ethnic backgrounds. The study resulted in a program of mental health service provision in a number of the buildings that counseled residents directly onsite (J. Schensul et al. 2006) as well as a number of published papers.1

Key point ***The most important characteristics of applied ethnographic research, then, are the following:***

- Applied ethnographic research focuses on problems that are identified as important by both the researcher and key people in the setting where the research is to take place.
- Its results are intended to be useful to members of the community or the institutional setting in solving the problem.
- The results are used to develop programs and other intervention strategies that address the problem.
- Ethnographic methods are used to document and/or evaluate the approaches that evolve from the prior research and problem solving strategies.2

Ethnography as a Way to Create Theories of Culture

Unlike qualitative research in general, the principal and most important characteristic of ethnography is that it is rooted in the concept of culture. The end product of ethnography, the story or narrative, constitutes a theoretically informed interpretation of the culture of the community, group, or setting.

Key point ***Ethnography generates or builds theories of cultures—or explanations of how people think, believe, and behave—that are situated in local time and space.*** These theories, or interpretations specific to a particular context, can be tested by attempting to replicate the study in the same setting, although exact replication of ethnographies rarely is possible because subsequent studies necessarily take place at a different time, and the people, spaces, and context of the original study cannot easily be reassembled. Nevertheless, cultural theories generated by one ethnography provide the basis for hypotheses, hunches, observed patterns, or interpretations to be explored and developed in other, similar settings or even in the same setting over time.

Characteristics of Ethnography

The seven characteristics that mark a study as ethnographic are as follows:

- It is carried out in a natural setting, not in a laboratory.
- It involves intimate, face-to-face interaction with participants.
- It presents an accurate reflection of participant perspectives and behaviors.
- It uses inductive, interactive, and recursive data collection and analytic strategies to build local cultural theories.
- It uses multiple data sources, including both quantitative and qualitative data.
- It frames all human behavior and belief within a sociopolitical and historical context.
- It uses the concept of culture as a lens through which to interpret results.

Ethnographic Studies Are Conducted in Natural Settings

Critical to the production of an ethnographic report or story is the ethnographic process, or how the research is conducted. The first defining characteristic of ethnography as scientific inquiry is its commitment to producing a story about events *as they occur in their natural settings*. Examples of natural settings where people interact with one another are playgrounds, classrooms, meetings, street corners, people's homes, classrooms, clinic waiting rooms, courtrooms, shopping malls, after-school programs for young people in community-based organizations, clubs and voluntary associations, workplaces, basketball courts, and shooting galleries for drug users.

Unlike experimenters, interventionists, or community development specialists, whose work we describe in the design section of this book, ethnographers doing basic field research simply document what is happening; they generally do not manipulate or create settings or situations in which ethnographer-created interventions stimulate specific participant responses that can be observed or measured. Some exceptions to this rule do exist. For example, ethnographers often use group elicitation techniques such as social mapping, pilesorting, or focused group interviews that ask respondents to participate in the data collection process or call for bringing respondents to a single location where the research will be conducted with them. In these cases, while the activity is not "natural," the information sought addresses natural occurrences in the local setting. In applied ethnography, researchers also exert control when they incorporate research results into community-based interventions or comparative designs that test solutions to social problems. However, even in these situations, ethnographers prefer to create interventions that may be standardized but are created and/or conducted in natural field settings, such as residential buildings, community organizations, community clinics or health centers, concerts and performances, or with naturally occurring networks or groups of people.

Cross Reference:
See Book 3, chapter 4 for information on social mapping and Book 4, chapter 3 for

information on pilesorting and consensus modeling. See Book 3, chapter 8 on informal and formal focused group interviews

Ethnography Involves Intimate and Reciprocal Involvement with Community Members

Key point A second hallmark of ethnography is that ***ethnographers must become intimately involved with members of the community or participants in the natural settings where they do research.*** Intimate involvement means building trust between the researcher and the participants over time, and it often calls for a special kind of friendship. In ethnographic research, gaining trust is sometimes referred to as **building rapport**.

Definition: Building rapport requires the researcher to gain the trust of people involved in the research community

The process of building rapport differs depending on whether the researcher is an insider or group member (a person with an already established role and relationships in the study site); an outsider (initially unknown or unfamiliar to the group and not from the study site); or a partner (insider/outsider collaborator in the process of research and/or change). Trust is not built overnight; it takes time and considerable effort. It takes even more time and effort when researchers are perceived to be or perceive themselves to be different from the research community in such distinguishing features as gender, social class, culture, ethnicity, race, language, age, religion, caste or role, sexual identity, etc.

The degree to which difference is perceived and shapes entry and data collection will vary depending on the target community, how much importance is given to any one of these features in the local setting, and the attitudes and behavior of the researcher.

Cross Reference:
See Book 6, chapter 3 for a discussion of how these personal characteristics affect the ethnographer's work

Researchers, even insiders who have become researchers, may delude themselves into thinking that trust is easily achieved. They may be unaware of just how privileged or superior their status is relative to the people whom they study or how, as researchers, they are situated in a setting and perceived by participants. Even the existence of long-term relationships cannot assure that research participants will not withhold or distort information, behave in ways that are different from their normal behavior when in the presence of the researcher, or give socially acceptable responses to questions—thus biasing the data they provide to researchers. The techniques that ethnographers have developed for addressing and overcoming these barriers are summed up in the continuous process of building and maintaining rapport in the

field, a process that does not end until the ethnographer leaves the research site for the final time.

The intimate relationships we have been describing call for ethnographers to take on a number of responsibilities that are not required to the same degree from researchers in other disciplines. As we shall describe, many kinds of research, including surveys and experiments, require a degree of detachment or impersonality on the part of the researcher. By contrast, the research methods and data collection techniques chosen by ethnographers should foster and enhance intimacy between the researcher and the community in question, rather than maintaining distance between them.

 **Key point** ***Ethnography also requires mutuality and reciprocity.*** Ethnographers develop close friendships in the research site that result in expectations of reciprocity, mutual aid, assistance, and participation in the social life of the community. If, as is sometimes the case, ethnographers live in the community where the research is being conducted, they cannot avoid either being "in the field" at all times or feeling as if they are "on call" whenever a research participant in the community of study needs something. To enhance intimacy as well as to learn about the community, doing ethnography requires a willingness to eat local food, accept invitations to social events, help people when possible with transportation or other needs, and be a sympathetic ear for personal narratives. Additionally, since ethnographers collect and analyze data on an ongoing basis, they are likely to be invited, and indeed are expected, to provide feedback to people in the field and participate in other development efforts, even in the early stages of the research process. Finally, for any researcher, but especially for those who live, work, and do research in their own community or who are committed to a particular direction for change, it is difficult to avoid meeting or working with people whose views stand in opposition to their own. These are issues described in greater detail in Book 6 on the ethics and role of the researcher.

Cross Reference:
See Books 6 and 7 for guidance in building and maintaining relationships in the field and in applying ethnographic research findings directly to interventions designed to solve community problems

Ethnography Emphasizes Participant Perspectives and Meanings

 **Key point** ***A third hallmark of ethnography is its commitment to accurate reflection of the views and perspectives of the participants in the research.*** Ethnographic stories are built around and told in the words, views, explanations, and interpretations of the participants in the study. One of the most important reasons for building trust with members of the community is to

ensure access to these views. When investigator and participant build a trusting relationship, they create together a safe and open environment in which the voices or opinions and views of the participants emerge in an authentic way.

Traditionally, ethnographers were required to synthesize observations, interviews, written texts, and other data into a single story—an interpretation or theory of the culture in question. This practice was congruent with the philosophical notion that truth was unitary, and a single correct story could be identified. However, as communities or cultures changed, and as the practices of ethnographers changed with them, researchers began to recognize that communities could not be represented by a single perspective. The existence of different perspectives and behaviors—often referred to as multiple voices, polyvocality, or intragroup diversity—began to be recognized in ethnographic texts. Current practice makes it the responsibility of the ethnographer to ensure that all voices in the study are included in the text of the ethnography, especially those of marginalized people who have, in the past, had little or no control over the ways in which they were represented in ethnographic accounts (Bernard 1995; LeCompte and McLaughlin 1994; LeCompte 1997; Marcus and Fischer 1986; McLaughlin and Tierney 1993; Pelto and Pelto 1978; Weis and Fine 1993; J. Schensul, Berg, and Williamson 2008).

During the 1970s and 1980s, social scientists across all the social science disciplines hotly debated whether or not researchers had the right to write up their ethnographic reports or stories as if they were members of the group they were studying. Controversy raged even when researchers themselves *were* members of the group under discussion and even if their writing conscientiously reflected diversity of behavior or perspective within the group. Many contemporary ethnographers now view their work to be a written interpretation of what multiple actors or spokespersons said and did in an ethnographic setting. These reports often leave the reader to arrive at his or her own interpretation of the culture.3 Others approach the issue by taking the data “back to the community” to assess its meaning and social validity, make data available, and obtain ethnographic feedback on ethnographic interpretations. Still others address this challenge through participatory research in which members of the study community share in the design, implementation, interpretation, and representation of the data.

In applied ethnographic work, ethnographers are not only interpreters of words and deeds but also are participants or stakeholders in the uses of the research for problem solving. **Stakeholders** are people who have a vested interest in ensuring that the results of the research are used to solve the problem the research is addressing. They become spokespersons and interpreters along with the ethnographers, working hand in hand with the ethnographer to construct the social and political context of a problem, to read and interpret ethnographic data together, and to define the best and most effective ways of using the results for community benefit. Some terms that have been used to refer to this general approach are action research (Miles and Huberman 1994; Stringer 1996; Schensul and Schensul 1978), collaborative research (Schensul and Stern 1985; Stull and Schensul 1987), or Participatory Action Research (Whyte 1989). Rapid Rural Appraisal is another the term for the same approach used by researchers involved in agricultural and economic development (Scrimshaw and Gleason 1992). Ways of constructing these research partnerships and the interventions or change

strategies that result from them will be addressed in Book 7.

Definition: Stakeholders are persons who have a vested interest in what the research results are and how they are used

Cross Reference: See Book 7 on building research partnerships

Example 1.3

Partnerships and collaboration in a project on AIDS risk and drug use in elder adults

Injection drug use is a major source of HIV infection in the cities of the northeastern United States. Ethnographers Jean Schensul and Kim Radda were interested in the potential for HIV infection among older adults. Working with a team that included health educators and staff and director of a regional area agency on aging, they pooled the ethnographic experience of AIDS educators working with older men, the concerns of older injection drug users and men addicted to cocaine, and the ethnographic data collected from older injection drug users and commercial sex workers. This resulted in a picture of risk behaviors and interactions among older men and women of diverse ethnic backgrounds in the Hartford area that all stakeholders could use in further research and health education efforts (Radda et al. 2003).4

Ethnography Uses Inductive, Interactive, and Recursive Processes

A fourth characteristic of ethnographic research is that it uses **inductive, interactive, and recursive processes to build theories to explain the behavior and beliefs under study**.

Inductive research identifies specific and concrete data bits and aggregates them into taxonomies and structures. These create more general and abstract ideas about the composition of cultural scenes, social and physical phenomena, as well as explanations for why events occur as they do; **deductive** research does the opposite, looking for concrete data bits that provide evidence for the validity of a given theory.

Key point with Definition:
Inductive research identifies specific and concrete data bits and aggregates them into taxonomies and structures, providing explanations for why events occur as they do; deductive research searches for concrete data bits that provide evidence for the validity of a given theory

In theory building, researchers start with both the research problem or question and a series of hunches, guesses, initial hypotheses, **models**, and concepts that they are interested in exploring because they relate to the research problem.

These hunches or guesses are explored in initial interviews and observations. They then

are elaborated and retested through continued collection of data using the same or different methods—or both. The process continues until new information confirms a stable pattern, and the model appears to be complete.

Definition: Models consist of hypothesized relationships among concepts

The term *recursivity* refers to the cyclical nature of this kind of analysis; it moves back and forth between inductive analysis—which uses specific items to build more general explanatory statements—and deductive analysis—which applies general explanatory statements to groups of specific items. The result is what LeCompte (1990) terms a successive process of identifying items, aggregating them into patterns, and then constituting them into larger structures. Thought of as stages, these are termed the item, pattern, and structural or constitutive levels of analysis. In Book 2 of the **Toolkit**, Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte integrate the model based on the language of domains, factors, variables and items with the interpretational language of items, patterns and structures. The following example illustrates the use of recursive analysis to build a grounded theory about AIDS risk among unmarried women industrial workers in Mauritius.

Example 1.4

Building a theory about AIDS risk in Mauritius

In conducting ethnographic research on AIDs risk among unmarried young people in Mauritius, Steve and Jean Schensul worked with the head of the national family planning program, Geeta Oodit, to develop a conceptual framework. Initial interviews were focused on exploring changes in Mauritian family structure, peer relationships, and workplace dynamics that offered young men and women new opportunities to meet and be alone together, thus exposing them to more opportunities for acquiring sexually transmitted diseases and HIV infection. After interviewing Mauritian experts in each of these areas, Schensul, Schensul, and Oodit developed a taxonomy of subareas to explore, including family work patterns, family supervision, health of family members, peer activities, types of peer relationships, workplace status, workplace social life, workplace informal settings where men and women interact, male/female relationships at work and in supervisory relationships. These subareas produced an initial set of concepts that formed the basis for semistructured interviews with a sample of ninety young women in three factories. The concepts then were reformulated and tested in a survey instrument used with another sample of 600 young women in factories. The final result was a conceptual model or theory of factors predicting HIV prevention knowledge and sex risk behaviors that could be tested out in a sexual health intervention program (Schensul, Schensul, and Oodit 1994).

Cross Reference: Modeling and hypothesis building are addressed in Book 2. Glaser and Strauss refer to this process as building grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1977).

Spradley (1979) refers to the same process as domain and structural analysis; LeCompte and Preissle (1993) and Merriam (1988) refer to it as recursive research, and philosophers of science term it *abductive reasoning* (Thagard and Cameron 1997).

Definition: Recursive research refers to the continuous interaction between data (induction) and hunches or hypotheses (deduction) until a stable cultural pattern appears. Thus, it is both inductive and deductive

Cross Reference: See Book 1, chapter 7 for an introduction to ethnographic analysis; Book 2, chapters 1–4 for recursive model construction; and Book 5 on recursive analysis of ethnographic data

Many novice researchers think that ethnographic theory building only uses inductive processes. As the above descriptions make clear, this is a misconception. The recursive or iterative analytical process typical of ethnography uses both inductive and deductive processes to generate theoretical explanations. Ethnographers engage in bottom-up inductive thinking. That is, they generalize from concrete data to more abstract or general principles by drawing from their data and experience in the site while simultaneously thinking deductively from the top down. This means that they apply more general or abstract ideas from theories that are relevant to their work or already known information from the study site to the concrete data they have collected. These theories often come from the work of other researchers, from the investigators' own discipline, or from knowledge about the study problem and study site drawn from primary or secondary sources, initial visits to the field, and local key informants. In Book 2 we demonstrate how these initial theoretical frameworks can be diagramed or modeled as starting points for unpacking conceptual domains that guide the study and add new domains and new links among domains as the study advances.

Cross Reference:
See Book 2 for a discussion of conceptual modeling

At the same time, ethnographers also formulate on-site hunches and working hypotheses that serve as initial explanations for their data collection plans as they proceed. In the iterative or interactive process of constructing each component of an explanatory theory, ethnographers can draw from theories of individual or group behavior; from theories of learning, development, social disorganization, perception, or self-efficacy; from structuralist, linguistic, postmodern, or feminist theories; from theories based on class, culture, social race, power, resistance, empowerment, or any other social science concept or theory available. Choice of theories depends on the personal preferences and disciplinary training of the research team and what appears to be appropriate to the problem or its solutions. A final model can be

constructed that summarizes the results of data analysis and interpretation linking conceptual domains and interprets the associations in light of applicable or useful theoretical frameworks.

Example 1.5

Building a theory about teacher burnout

Gary Dworkin, a sociologist, was dissatisfied with the theories that social scientists used to explain why teachers burned out and became alienated from their work. All the theories he found had been developed by psychologists. They located the source of burnout in individuals and posed as solutions either self-help schemes that advocated trying harder to adjust to difficult conditions or stress-reduction programs.

From the perspective of someone such as Dworkin, who is very familiar with the rigidities of public schools in the United States, these theories and the solutions they led to were not very satisfactory. Dworkin chose instead a sociological explanation (Seeman 1975) for burnout based on "*structural strain*," or the idea that when societies and the institutions within them change too rapidly, individuals within the institutions find it impossible to cope. Dworkin found that teachers enter the profession as novices with expectations for how they should act and what behaviors yield success, and these expectations are in turn based on what they were trained for and experienced as students themselves. However, on the job in contemporary schools, these old strategies do not work. Teachers feel that students are disrespectful and lazy and cannot be punished. That sense that "the rules have all changed, and I cannot do anything about it," Dworkin says, causes teachers to lose faith in their abilities and in the institutions themselves. Instead of urging individual teachers to try harder to reduce their stress, Dworkin argues for structural changes in the reward systems and organization of schools that would help schools to better reflect the realities of current social conditions and therefore reduce teacher burnout (1985, 1987).

Ethnography Uses Multiple Types of Data

Another characteristic of good ethnography is its *inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative data* (Pelto and Pelto 1978; Bernard 1995). Ethnographers are data collection "omnivores" (Spindler and Spindler 1992); that is, they make use of any and all types of data that could possibly help shed light on the answer to research questions. An ethnographic study always involves qualitative investigation. However, it may also include quantitative methods. Generally, ethnographers first conduct initial qualitative or exploratory research to find out what actually is happening in a particular scene. Only then do they decide what key variables and domains should be investigated quantitatively. These initial qualitative investigations provide data for the development of context-specific and relevant quantitative measures. Once this is done, quantitative measures can be used to verify qualitative findings and to improve generalizability of initial findings to the whole community.

Alternatively, ethnographers can choose relevant measures used by other researchers investigating the same economic, psychosocial, or cultural domains and adapt them for use in their own research site. For ethnographers, however, the aim is less to use standardized or nationally normed and validated measures (i.e., to favor reliability and generalizability) than it is to select or create measures that best match how research subjects understand the cultural domain in question (i.e., to favor validity).

Cross Reference:
See Book 3, chapter 9 on building ethnographically informed surveys

Cross Reference:
See Book 3, chapter 11 for a more complete discussion of research quality in ethnographic research

Ethnography Examines Behavior and Belief in Context

The sixth hallmark of ethnography is that it views all elements under study as existing in a **context.** The term **context** is used to refer to the diverse elements—for example, persons, groups, institutions, history, economic and political factors, features of the physical environment—that influence the behavior and beliefs of individuals or groups. Context also refers to the cultural, historical, political, and social ties that connect individuals, organizations, or institutions. What individuals, groups, or organizations say, do, or believe can never be understood completely without understanding the social, political, cultural, environmental, economic, kinship, and even personal matrices in which they are embedded, as Example 1.6 illustrates:

Example 1.6

Navajo and European American differences in defining a school district's problems

Westerners studying American Indian cultures often find that the explanations they give for events are quite different from, and often no less useful than, those given by local people. During a particularly bad year in the school district in which she studied on the Navajo Nation, LeCompte was told about two deaths among faculty, a student suicide, the leaking roof in the new gymnasium, and a computer glitch that irrevocably erased two whole—and just finished—grant proposals so that they could not be submitted in time. Navajo educators said these events were all indicators that someone in the community had violated taboos and thereby created disharmony. LeCompte had more "rational" explanations: heart attacks, alcoholism, an incompetent contractor, and the failure of staff to plug computers into surge protectors during a thunderstorm. But none of LeCompte's explanations had the power to make things better. Navajo teachers suggested organizing a Blessing Way Ceremony to bring the school and its

staff back into harmony with nature and the community. The Superintendent of Schools, a Navajo, volunteered to be the "patient" to be cured, thus representing the district itself. Following the ceremony, LeCompte noticed improved morale among the staff and a genuine hiatus in calamities (LeCompte and McLaughlin 1994).

Definition:
Context refers to elements in a setting that influence the behaviors of individuals and groups.

Another very different example shows how interpretation of research results is enriched by contextual/historical framing and how the use of the research can be influenced by organizational and community responses.

Example 1.7

Using context and community cues to interpret Puerto Rican reproductive health practices

In 1981, ethnographic survey research conducted by the Hispanic Health Council in Hartford on health and mental health seeking behavior in the Puerto Rican community included questions on reproductive health and contraceptive use. These questions were an organizational response to the then prevailing stereotype that Puerto Rican families included many children. When asked about their contraceptive of choice, over 50 percent of the sample of women interviewed responded "l'opéracion" (sterilization). Many of the women who responded in this way were under the age of forty, still in their childbearing years, with only two or three children. Clearly women were using sterilization as a form of contraception. Further ethnographic investigation revealed that Catholics and Protestants alike viewed sterilization as more acceptable than other forms of contraception in the eyes of the church. Other advantages for women were permanence, the low cost relative to other methods, and convenience.

However, sterilization—often forced—has a long and controversial history in Puerto Rico, and in light of this history, some members of the research team raised questions about the degree to which women were informed about the nature of the procedure and its permanence. Most of the local sterilizations were done at one hospital in close proximity to the community. When efforts were made to disseminate the results through a press conference, the press tried to convince researchers and community leaders to blame the local hospital directly instead of describing the more complicated situation portrayed by the research results.

At the same time, a group of community activists who were familiar with the fertility control measures imposed upon Puerto Rican women in Puerto Rico in the 1950s decided independently to criticize the hospital for its lack of attention to informed consent, using public tools of confrontation that included picketing. Careful and responsible research in combination with community activism resulted in improved informed consent procedures, better

reproductive health care at the hospital, and closer working relationships between the hospital and the community (Gonzalez, Schensul, Garcia, and Caro 1982; Schensul and Borrero 1982).

Ethnography Is Informed by the Concept of Culture

The seventh hallmark of ethnography is that its interpretation of what people say, do, and believe is guided by the concept of ***culture***. Without an emphasis on culture, a study can have all of the six attributes listed above and still not be an ethnography (Wolcott 1987).

Definition:
Culture consists of the beliefs, behaviors, norms, attitudes, social arrangements, and forms of expression and production that form a describable pattern in the life of members of a community or institution

What Is Culture? Differentiating the Individual from the Cultural

Ethnography quite literally means "writing about groups of people." More specifically, it means writing about the *culture* of groups of people. All humans and many animals are defined by the fact that they make, transmit, share, modify, reject, and recreate cultural patterns and traits within their group. Ethnographers begin—and end—their work with a focus on these patterns and traits that, lumped together, constitute a people's culture. The result of such a focus is the document we call an ethnography.

Culture is not an individual trait. If what we observe is unique to an individual and is not repeated by others in similar settings, it is not cultural. While individuals *can* create cultural patterns by inventing them and communicating them to others, a cultural feature or element only exists when it is shared by more than one person. By definition, culture consists of group patterns of behavior and beliefs that persist over time. Therefore, a group (even a small subgroup) must adopt a behavior or belief and practice it over time if it is to be defined as cultural rather than individual or personal. For example, the insertion by a handful of adolescents of safety pins in their earlobes could be viewed as a form of *personal* mutilation. But when the use of safety pins and other hardware as jewelry becomes commonplace, as it did in the teenaged punk subcultures of North America and Europe, it becomes a cultural practice.

Culture also can be treated as a mental phenomenon; that is, as consisting in what people know, believe, think, understand, feel, or mean about what they do. Goodenough's definition of culture as "what we need to know [not do] to function as a member of a society . . ." (Goodenough 1956) is illustrated in the following example:

Example 1.8

Using cultural information to select appropriate research instruments

R. Rhoades's research team found that questionnaires were not a good way to obtain data from Nepalese farmers about their use of potato varieties. The farmers found the questionnaires intimidating and uninteresting. Rhoades then created an innovative, informal group-interview technique for collecting quantitative data on potato production in Nepal without using questionnaires. Members of the research team went to the market, and they bought every available type of potato they could find. Local farmers added to the pool of potatoes. Researchers then proceeded through the potato area, stopping at each village and demonstrating their collection of potatoes. Farmers gathered around and began to share information and discuss characteristics of each variety. They arranged them in local categories of appreciation, zone production, disease resistance, culinary quality, and place in the meal. Researchers were able to use these dimensions of discussion to obtain quantitative data for each variety of potato, noting that "the quality of these data was much higher than with a questionnaire using categories that were outside a farmer's reality" (Rhoades 1992: 67).

Cross Reference:
Rhoades's potato-sorting activity is similar to the pilesort elicitation technique described by Borgatti in Book 4, chapter 3

Culture also can be treated behaviorally in terms of what people *actually* do (as observed) as opposed to what they *say* they do (as reported), or as "norms" (the expected) versus "practices" (the actual). Evelyn Jacob (1987) summarizes the differences between these two approaches with the terms "patterns *for* behavior" and "patterns *of* behavior." Patterns *of* behavior represent behavioral variations or choices in the group; patterns *for* behavior represent cultural expectations for behavior.

Example 1.9

Distinguishing patterns *of* from patterns *for* behavior

Ways of greeting people are strongly patterned by culture. Cultural patterns *for* behavior dictate that in North American society, individuals meeting one another must extend their right hands to shake hands firmly in greeting. This pattern is so firmly ingrained as denoting cordiality that people feel impelled to apologize if their right hand is injured so that they must shake with their left hand or not shake at all. Patterns *of* behavior—based on observation—indicate that in practice, North Americans employ many kinds of greeting patterns. While professional women usually always shake hands, in informal settings, women often do not shake hands at all, or do so rather limply. They may hug or kiss someone in greeting instead. Children almost never shake hands unless prompted by adults, and many foreigners, immigrants, and indigenous American Indians do so only uneasily, since their own cultures

either mandate other forms of greeting or have mandates about NOT touching strangers.

Both the behavioral and cognitive/emotive aspects of culture occur within social, economic, environmental, and political contexts that are marked by distinctive social arrangements, or ways people relate to one another in institutions. Thus, culture also includes the social arrangements and institutions within which people interact or that are designed to meet their instrumental or emotional needs.

Although we have defined culture as shared patterns of meaning and behavior, we do not want to imply that everyone in a cultural or social group believes the same things or behaves in the same way. Substantial variation will exist in every group and in any domain of culture we could imagine. People's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors will vary depending on their ethnicity, racial identity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, birth order, social class and status, educational level, age, place of residence, time of immigration, and other factors considered relevant in the social and political rhetoric and composition of contemporary life. Unique historical events, environments, spaces, and places also can induce variation in the behavior or beliefs of individuals or subgroups. It is critical to consider these variations when engaging in ethnographic research in order to avoid cultural stereotypes and ensure that all of the many voices contending in a setting are heard.

A Note on Ethnicity, Culture, and Race

Ethnicity, national identity, culture, and race are concepts that often are conflated and confused. Researchers and lay people alike often confuse culture with ethnicity or race and ethnicity with national census categories. Similarly, race and ethnicity can be equated inappropriately. All of these concepts affect the power and position that individuals possess and occupy within a given society.

Definition:

Ethnicity refers to self-designated membership in a group working to maintain its cultural and political presence in a national system

The concept of ***ethnicity*** is usually applied to those groups working to maintain their cultural and political identity and to ensure protection, advancement, and access to resources for their members in a national system. Members of an ethnic group usually, although not always, consist of people of the same national origin. For example, Haitians, Irish Americans, and Italian Americans each come from a single, identifiable country. West Indians may refer to themselves as West Indian, West Indian/Caribbean (regional designations), or as from their island nations of origin (for example, Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad). One's ethnicity usually involves self-identification in a sociopolitical grouping that has both a recognized public identity and a conservationist/activist orientation toward the preservation and promotion of

that identity. Ethnic affiliation is a choice that often brings with it responsibility for behaving in particular ways. That choice must be recognized as legitimate by the other members of the ethnic group to which an individual wishes to belong.

. For example, not all people of Mexican origin in the United States define themselves as Chicanos—a term that denotes a particular kind of political activism—nor may they choose to define themselves as Mexican American. Similarly, people of African origin living in the United States might choose refer to themselves as African, rather than African American.

Key point ***Thus, not all people of similar national origin will identify themselves as members of the same ethnic group***

People often mistake ethnicity for those categories used to define sociopolitically important groups in national censuses. For example, the U.S. census includes five contrived ethnic groupings: Hispanics, Asian Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, blacks, and whites. These designations create many problems. They combine and confuse social definitions of race (white, black) with national origin (Anglo, African American, or Arab American). The terms lump together people and groups that have nothing in common except a label. For example, the term *Latin American* can include U.S. citizens of Spanish, Cuban, Mexican, and Chilean origin, and it can also include Central Americans from the same origins. Since they are not based in social, historical, biological, or cultural realities, these contrived terms have no social meaning to people clustered under them. Notwithstanding these problems, such broad designations of ethnicity may be useful conventions in quantitative and survey research if care is taken to use them as predictors or correlates of sociodemographic characteristics such as income, education, and occupation, all of which are indicators of socioeconomic status rather than other variables measuring health status or educational achievement. These broad designations also can be useful in ethnographic research when:

- They hold meaning for research participants.
- They affect research participants directly through policies, programs, or attitudes.
- They affect the relationship between the researcher and the research community.

A further problem with the census and other such broad designations is that they cannot accommodate “mixed” ethnic heritage. Increasing numbers of individuals self-identify as being of mixed heritage. Some originally were forcibly identified as members of one group when their parents and/or grandparents were members of two or more racial/ethnic groups. Among these groups are African Americans in the United States, who once were defined historically as “black” if one of their great-great-grandparents were black—regardless of the individual’s skin color or facial features. American Indians still are recognized as Indian by the federal government and by many tribal governments if one great grandparent was recognized to be Indian, even if the contemporary individual has never been involved in American Indian cultural practices. Many of these people now are agitating to become recognized as “mixed” and want to have their multiple origins specified. Because ethnicity is created in response to particular situations, but does not always involve shared culture, individual members of an ethnic group may vary in how they think or act. We refer to this as **Intrinsic Diversity**.

Definition:
Intraethnic variation refers to differences in beliefs and behaviors of members of a specific ethnic group

Key point There may be considerable **intraethnic variation** even within a self-defined ethnic group. ***It is very important to identify and explore such variation in order to avoid stereotyping and also to make sure that programs and policies geared toward enhancing the position of designated ethnic groups respond to the multiplicity of identities, voices, needs, and interests in the group.***

The concept of *race*, in contrast to ethnicity, has a biological, not a cultural referent. However, there is little real biological validity to the concept of race; skin color, hair texture, eye shape, propensity to inherit certain ailments, and other so-called racial characteristics most often are adaptations to environmental conditions in the distant past. They do not distinguish groups of people one from another genetically. Race is a social construct that conveniently allows groups that do not possess stigmatized phenotypical characteristics to discriminate against those who do. Many theorists of race have described race as an unearned privilege or disadvantage (McIntosh 1998), a construct that facilitates construction of invidious distinctions among groups of people, and a way of organizing social, political, and economic power (Feagin 2006; Ladson-Billings 2005; Omi and Winant 2008, 2009).

Power, Situatedness, and Positionality

Positionality and **situatedness** are measures of privilege or disadvantage; people tend to position themselves so as to maximize the amount of power they can exercise over others. However, both position and situatedness are dynamic and changing aspects of identity. An individual may simultaneously occupy different and contradictory positions, depending on the power and status attributed to his or her race, social class, ethnicity or culture, gender, sexual orientation, age, skin color, educational level, religion, or many other characteristics. Thus, high status in gender or educational level can be trumped by low status in race, ethnicity, or age.

Definition:
Positionality refers to the power position in which a person or group is situated socially. It is related to ascribed or achieved characteristics, such that individuals are partly defined by the situation and partly by the engagement—or agentic interaction—with the structural constrains of the situation

Definition:
Situatedness involves the specific privileges and disadvantages inherent in an individual's social role or status

For example, well-educated adults with high-paying jobs still may be treated like children by their parents when they return home for holidays. The bilingualism of a white European American who speaks both Spanish and English is highly regarded in the United States, but because fluency in the Spanish language in the United States is associated with poor people of color, Latinos who speak both Spanish and English will not be so respected. A female Saudi surgeon may be the powerful chief of staff at her hospital, but upon leaving her place of work, she is subject to all the constraints imposed on women in Saudi Arabia and cannot drive herself home, appear on the streets without wearing a burkah, or vote. Similarly, an elderly American Indian medicine man may be highly respected in his own community by virtue of his age, training, insight, and knowledge but characterized as just another uneducated and dirty Indian by whites in the nearby town (Braroe 1974). Positionality is reciprocal, both ascribed by others and manipulated by individuals. Individuals can act on the structural constraints of identities imposed on them by others both to redefine their limits and put their own stamp on how the roles will be enacted. Similarly, they can manipulate with whom they associate and how they present themselves to others so as to increase their social, political, or cultural power over others (Goffman 1959, 1960).

While it is important for ethnographers to identify the multiple positions of power and disadvantage occupied by research participants, it is even more important for them to identify their own positionality and the characteristics that situate them both inside and outside their research site. Becoming aware of one's own positionality and its impact on others requires more than simply acknowledging that researchers usually have the "last word" on the story to be told. Sandra Harding's notion of "standpoint" theory is useful here in considering the significance of gender and other factors as important in scientific inquiry and interpretation (Harding 2002). It includes systematic reflection on what Nielsen (1990) referred to as "standpoint," or the relative and unearned privileges of class, race, gender, and other ascribed characteristics one possesses relative to the people being studied. In the case of participatory research or ethnographic dissemination, reflection can be facilitated by integrating community members into the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data as well as the construction of the ethnographic description.

The Impact of Cultural Politics on Identity and Research

Ethnography has been both criticized for creating portrayals of marginalized people that freeze them into an essentialized past and celebrated for telling the story of a group from its own particular perspective. That ethnographers have been heavily criticized for speaking for and as if they were members of groups they studied has provoked lively controversy both within and outside of the field had a profound effect not only on how researchers define who they are and how they—and others—should behave, but also on how research should be carried out and data should be interpreted. Colonized people and subordinated minority groups have become acutely aware of how they have been portrayed in research studies, especially ethnographies. As members of these groups entered the Academy and became ethnographers themselves, they

contested the findings of white researchers and raised new questions about social and power relationships. They also published studies of their own people and the researchers who studied them (LeCompte 1997, 2002; Medicine 2001). Non-European researchers such as Edward Said (1979, 1994), Trinh Minh-ha (1989), C. Mohanty (1988), Gyatri Spivak (1988), and others challenged the romanticized depictions of so-called primitive or exotic peoples and the tendency of European and North American researchers to interpret non-Western cultures in terms of Western European concepts. As consciousness of past and contemporary oppression grew among marginalized or subordinated groups and the scholars who are their spokespersons, they created a powerful critique of traditional labels, power relationships, and ways of thinking, knowing, and interacting.

Postmodern, feminist, critical, and critical race theorists, as well as theorists contesting any canonical justification for asymmetries of power and influence, have helped to clarify the existence of Eurocentric presentations. Feminist theory has exposed the dichotomous (male versus female) nature of traditional scientific theory, research methods, and interpretations and demonstrated how it tends always to privilege male perspectives. African American and Latino/a feminists (note mixed designations) have argued that traditional feminism developed from middle-class, white female experience and ignored the ways of thinking and knowing of women who are nonwhite or poor. Critical race theorists and gender-other theories have contested hegemonic notions of white privilege and heteronormativity, arguing that these have been normalized, or turned into common-sense ways of knowing enforced by those in power (Foucault 1977) and imposed on people who are different.

 ***Key point One of the strengths of ethnography is that the methods used can produce a picture of cultures and social groups from the perspective of their members.*** Scholars of color and difference have used ethnography and qualitative approaches to research to accommodate notions of class, race, gender, religion, and culture as well as power. They have grounded their research in critical, interpretive, and constructivist theories that both facilitate social criticism and elicit negotiated meanings. Where intractable differences exist, qualitative and ethnographic approaches permit display of all sides of a controversy, since they do not require the construction of a single story that represents the only "truth." Rather, the story becomes a presentation of multiple voices from diverse communities, all participating in a dialogue through which meanings are shared and debated, conflicts are identified and resolved, and new ways of addressing change in policy and practice can occur.

In chapter 2, we address the circumstances under which ethnographic research is the best choice of research approach in problem-oriented settings.

Cross Reference:
See chapter 3 in this volume for an explanation of these theories

Notes

1. Donaghue Medical Research Foundation Practical Benefit Grant, 2002–2005.

2. For more information on ethnographically informed interventions in field settings, readers are referred to Book 7 in this series, titled *Ethnography in Practice*, the *NAPA Bulletin*, a journal of applied and practicing ethnography published by the American Anthropological Association, *Practicing Anthropology*, a journal of the Society for Applied Anthropology, *Collaborative Anthropologies*, a journal published by Nebraska University Press, and *Anthropological Design of Public Health Interventions*, Part II of Anthropology and Public Health (Hahn and Inhorn 2009).

3. The noted anthropologist Clifford Geertz's book, *Works and Lives* (1989–1990), discusses the pitfalls of this approach, as does LeCompte's 1997 chapter in the *International Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Education*, "Trends in Qualitative Research," and Singer's article in *Current Anthropology* (Singer 1990).

4. NIA Grant AG16564-04 (Schensul 1999–2004, "AIDS Risk in Older Adult Senior Housing Residents").

2

When, Where, and By Whom Should Ethnography Be Used?

Situations Requiring Ethnographic Research
Settings Appropriate for Ethnographic Research
Who Should Do Ethnographic Research?
Important Personality and Stylistic Requisites for Ethnographers

Ethnographic research methods are appropriate for some, but not all, investigations. The conditions we have described in chapter 1 provide some clues as to when ethnographic approaches are likely to be most useful. In this chapter, we spell out details of appropriate problems for and times to do ethnographic research and what personality and stylistic characteristics improve the probability of conducting successful ethnography in the field.

Cross Reference:
Book 1, chapter 1

Situations Requiring Ethnographic Research

Ethnography should be used to

- Define a problem when the problem is not yet clear
- Define a problem when it is complex and embedded in multiple systems or sectors
- Identify participants when the participants, population sectors, or stakeholders or the boundaries of the study population are not yet known or identified
- Clarify the range of settings where a problem or situation currently occurs when not all of the possible settings are fully identified, known, or understood
- Explore the factors associated with a problem in order to identify, understand, and address them either through research or intervention studies, when they are not known
- Document a process
- Identify and describe unexpected or unanticipated outcomes
- Design measures that match the characteristics of the target population, clients, or community participants when existing measures are not a good fit or need to be adapted

- Answer questions that cannot be addressed with other methods or approaches
- Ease the access of clients to the research process and its products

Clearly, the decision to use ethnographic design is strongly influenced by the characteristics of the research population, the conditions of the research setting, what the researchers need to know, and who the research partners are. Below we list some examples of issues that could be best studied using an ethnographic approach to research. The following story demonstrates the value of using ethnography when the problem is not clear.

Example 2.1

Using ethnography to identify the origin of problems when those origins are not clear: Conflict in urban community gardens

A park system in a large urban area has provided land for a community gardening program. In some parks, the program has functioned without provoking or producing disagreements among users or complaints from other park users or neighbors. In other parks, the opposite is true. The conflictual situations vary from one park to another: users of gardens and parks differ; locations differ; the communities surrounding the park are different; and in some instances, newly arriving ethnic groups are displacing long-term residents—and garden users—in a community. Finally, the kinds of situations that provoke conflict appear to vary. The community garden administrator does not know why conflict exists in some of the gardening sites and not others or how to organize an infrastructure to oversee the transition of management to local users. She would like to reduce conflict, ensure continued use of the gardens, and transfer management of the gardens to local community groups.

The next example illustrates the uses of ethnography when the problem is clear but its causes are not well understood.

Example 2.2

Using ethnography when the origin of the problem is not well understood: Pneumonia and child mortality in China

Pneumonia is the most frequent cause of death in children under the age of three in China. National and provincial medical personnel would like to develop cost-effective programs to decrease the mortality rate. Some professionals attribute the high death rates to poor medical care; others to mothers' negligence; still others to an increasing income gap between rich and poor people and overall increasing levels of poverty. The Ministry of Health would like to introduce a national program to reduce the death toll from pneumonia. Until more is known about the circumstances in which pneumonia deaths occur, introducing such a program is likely to be less than efficacious. Ethnographic study would facilitate understanding just what factors are most salient in causing child deaths from pneumonia.

The next situation shows how ethnography can be useful in defining a problem. In this example, the problem appears to be late school enrollment, and research could be used to discover why this occurs. This is a problem for school administrators, but not necessarily for parents. Here, multiple perspectives on the problem and finding out what the real problem is are the challenges for ethnographic research.

Example 2.3

Using ethnography to define a problem: Puerto Rican school enrollment in the USA

Administrators in an urban northeastern school system of the United States discover that in some schools in the district, over 70 percent of all the children who were eligible for enrollment at the end of June have failed to enroll for the following year. Over 60 percent of elementary-age school children in this district are Puerto Rican. Some educators blame the enrollment problems on Puerto Rican parents, attributing the very low rate of reenrollment to the fact that many Puerto Rican families leave early in the summer for visits to Puerto Rico before the enrollment period begins. They assert that it would be helpful to launch a campaign to "educate" Puerto Rican parents about the importance of early enrollment and why they must ensure their children's timely entrance to the fall school program. Other educators argue that the reasons for late enrollment or return are not known, nor is it clear as to exactly which students are failing to enroll at the end of the school year. They say that these questions must be addressed before any program of improvement begins.

In each of these situations, debate exists over what the actual problem is and its potential causes. The debates raise questions about power, gender, race, culture and ethnicity, context and personal need, and other factors influencing equitable access to information and resources. These debates cannot be resolved without additional information, but prior research has not yet been carried out in the sites to shed light on the context and likely causes of the problems and their potential solutions. The service providers or practitioners who identified the problems in the first place recognize that more information would be helpful. But they also see that the survey methods ubiquitous in applied social science research are not likely to help them very much because neither researchers nor community members know enough yet to develop a valid survey instrument. They cannot say with certainty what should be included in a survey instrument, who should be asked to fill it out, and what sample size would be appropriate.

The questions posed by the problems just described are asked in order to stimulate programmatic or policy changes. But because the problems addressed are complex, they do not lend themselves to single explanations or solutions. Fixing them—finding a way to do something about them—requires a variety of different approaches, perspectives, and methods. They are not appropriate for experimental designs because they do not yet involve tests or

evaluations of alternative programs or interventions. They could involve comparison with other situations where the designated problem does not occur. While in-depth interviews as a form of qualitative inquiry could provide personal accounts or testimony that would reveal the multiple perspectives needed to elucidate the problems and identify their complexities, participation of the various parties or stakeholders in the identification of any remediation is necessary for it to be successful and sustainable over time. Building stakeholder involvement or participation requires that researchers understand the culture of various stakeholder groups —i.e., that researchers become familiar with participant beliefs, perceptions, values, philosophies, communication style, and behaviors and how to negotiate with them. These processes are embedded in the conduct of ethnographic research in any sociocultural or political systems.

Cross Reference:

See Book 7 for a discussion of building research partnerships.

Yet another reason why the previously described situations lend themselves to ethnographic research rather than survey or other research approaches is that ethnography emphasizes discovery. It does not assume answers. Ethnography uses open-ended methods that allow investigators and others to gather information identifying the source of the problem, rather than simply assuming that it is known from the start. The fact that ethnography is interactive—it must include conversations with actors in the situation—also facilitates investigation as well as collaboration in situations such as those illustrated above. The ethnographer's unique relationship with key individuals in the study site—such as service providers, teachers, and community leaders—brings all of these individuals into the research process and calls upon them to offer important insights that help to clarify the situation, constitute data for the ethnographer, and provide directions for action.

Ethnography also helps people learn what they need to know to develop either survey research instruments or plans of action as precursors for educational programs, intervention strategies, or recommendations for policy change. Participants in the examples we have described know too little about the research site, the population, or the problem for them to initiate their research efforts with surveys or other quantitative or numerical methods of data collection. For example, all the possible participants who might be affected by the particular problem have not yet been fully identified, nor have the ways in which they might be affected been defined. The causes of conflict, gaps in communication, or problems accessing educational and other resources have not yet been well clarified. Although the practitioners might have sought traditional explanations by going through ordinary channels to solicit opinions of experts and professionals, in the examples above, past efforts to use such experts did not always prove useful. Finally, since cultural practices, beliefs, attitudes, and histories of constituent groups in the setting can affect each situation differently, each of these must be documented and their intersections and mutual influences explored before solutions can be created. For all of these reasons, we believe that ethnography is the best approach in the above examples.

Our next example describes a situation in which ethnographers actually have instruments to "measure" individual behavior quantitatively, based on self-reports from research participants. However, exactly what happens in the field may be more complicated than what can be determined by responses on those instruments.

Example 2.4

Using ethnography when standard instruments cannot access the whole story: Why AIDS prevention strategies sometimes fail

HIV infection often is transmitted through the exchange of infected blood via injection drug use. The AIDS virus enters the body when drugs are injected with dirty or infected needles and syringes. The infection can be passed from person to person when needles are shared without sterilizing or bleaching them first. Bleach kills the AIDS virus. Thus, injection drug users who avoid sharing their needles or clean their "works" with bleach prevent infection in both themselves and others. Two ways to help prevent the spread of AIDS are to make sure that injection drug users have clean supplies of needles so they do not have to share them and to make sure they have plenty of bleach to clean their needles, their syringes, and the other paraphernalia they use to heat and dissolve their drugs before injecting. Injection drug users report that they obtain clean needles regularly from the local Needle Exchange Program and that they also get and use bleach "most of the time" to clean their works.

However, while conducting an ethnography of drug users, Philippe Bourgois observed them to do these things only some of the time. When they were in a rush and did not have a clean needle handy, they would reach for a used needle (Bourgois 1998). Furthermore, not every member of a group of drug users used the bleach kit. Sometimes drug users used the same bleach a number of times, assuming that this was safe. Thus, in this instance, observations from the field qualify or even disconfirm what people report in survey responses.

Data such as these can only be obtained through ethnographic field research and are of central importance in designing culturally framed interventions that actually work. Such data provide critical information about the people, the circumstances in which they live and interact, the constraints of the setting, and the resources needed to make a positive difference in people's behavior.

Settings Appropriate for Ethnographic Research

Ethnographic research can be conducted in almost any setting, depending on the question and the preferences of the researcher and the agreement of the people who populate and "own" or use the setting. Most ethnographic researchers are concerned with social issues and problems. Many of these issues and problems have to do with tensions in the relationships community residents, families, or "clients" have with the educational, health, cultural, or political

institutions that are supposed to serve them. Thus, ethnographers have maintained a strong tradition of ethnographic research in local communities and on the interaction between these communities and service agencies, housing programs, educational institutions, hospitals and clinics, and other service sites. Such research has been used to identify cultural, political, and structural factors that:

- Impede community development
- Make the implementation of appropriate educational, health, or other services more difficult
- Create obstacles to the prevention of known risk factors for various diseases or social problems, and
- Limit public artistic, linguistic, or cultural expression

Example 2.5

Using ethnography to identify obstacles to diabetes control among Puerto Ricans

Diabetes is known to be a significant problem among Latinos in general. In Hartford, Connecticut, preliminary research showed that Type II diabetes is much more common among Puerto Rican adults than among adults of other ethnic groups. Research has shown that exercise and diet in childhood can influence the onset of diabetes and cardiovascular disease in adults. For this reason, a team of ethnographers and epidemiologists responded by conducting a study of activities and energy outputs in Puerto Rican children. This pilot study took place in Hartford and New Haven and resulted in a set of assessment tools that can be used to measure children's activity outputs. The researchers were surprised to find out that boys were expending four times more energy than were girls within comparable time periods. These results, combined with ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews with mothers, showed how different cultural expectations for behavior of boys and girls, coupled with structural barriers to sports and other activities in school and in the community, resulted in reduced activity levels for girls (Schensul, Diaz, and Woolley 1996).

The results of ethnographic work such as that described above can be helpful in shaping community-based programs and educational strategies that can bring about changes in personal, family, and community structures and behaviors.

Ethnographic researchers also work with staffs of schools and higher education institutions, health clinics and hospitals, arts and environmental organizations, and programs serving children and youth. The following example illustrates how one professional used ethnography to define her role in a state arts agency.

Example 2.6

Using ethnography for community arts programming

Most states in the United States have an official State Folk Arts Program initiated with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and linked to NEA guidelines for folk arts

and public programming. Anthropologist Winnie Lambrecht has had many years of experience in heritage/folk arts and filmmaking. For several decades she worked in a variety of capacities with the Rhode Island Arts Council, conducting and presenting field research on the heritage and folk arts of area cultural groups. This research undergirded exhibits and other public programs that she mounted within the state and in New England. In addition, as a filmmaker, she used film as a medium for communicating information about community culture to the public.

Federal bureaucracies also have recognized the value of ethnographic research and researchers. Anthropologists and other social scientists have been hired to initiate intramural ethnographic research and fieldwork in organizations as diverse as fisheries, agencies dedicated to cultural preservation, schools setting up multiethnic curricula and reform initiatives in the teaching of reading, math, and science, and community-based environmental protection and planning efforts.

Example 2.7

Using ethnography in environmental planning, protection, and development

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) bureau of Community Based Environmental Planning (CBEP) is dedicated to comprehensive community involvement in environmental planning and development. This process requires facilitators who understand community dynamics and have backgrounds in environmental sciences and social sciences. Recognizing the value of applied ethnography in this process, the CBEP inquired as to whether the Society for Applied Anthropology, an international professional association of applied social scientists, wished to develop a cooperative agreement with the EPA. An important component of this agreement was that qualified ethnographers with group facilitation and community development experience would be recruited and involved in technical assistance and training for community-based environmental planning in communities around the country. The Society for Applied Anthropology submitted an application for a five-year cooperative agreement that included production of position/review papers and public education symposia, establishment of regional and national internships, and field support for local projects (Society for Applied Anthropology Cooperative Agreement with the EPA 1996-01).

In previous sections we have emphasized that ethnographic research is scientific—it is rigorous, systematic, repeatable, and logical. At the same time, the ethnographic approach to research offers researchers the opportunity and the tools necessary to enter into new field situations and to investigate newly identified social issues or behaviors without the constraints of preexisting instruments or assumptions about the situation. Furthermore, ethnography requires an understanding of what research participants' behaviors mean to *them* rather than

what meaning might be imposed upon them by outsiders regarding those behaviors, which might be irrelevant and incorrect as well as unhelpful. Below we reviewed some of the circumstances under which ethnography is the most useful approach to research, answering questions about the nature, origin, and consequences of a social problem, the setting, context, and system in which it takes place, the policies that shape it, and the stakeholders that have perspectives on the question and its possible answers and solutions.

Summary of the Uses of Ethnography

- To better understand a problem
- To document a process
- To illustrate what is happening in a program
- To complement quantitative data on program process or outcomes
- To complement and better explain survey data
- To identify new trends

Ethnography has many different and important uses. It can be used to arrive at a better understanding of a situation or a problem and to better develop a formative research model. It can also be used once a program is in place to document and understand better what is happening in that program and to provide information on program staff and participants that can complement other, quantitative data collected on the program. Ethnography can be used throughout the life of a program to provide formative feedback; it also can complement a survey or explain quantitative results or outcomes, especially when those outcomes are unanticipated. Finally, ethnography is very useful in the identification of new trends (for example, changes in drug use patterns or changes in the attitudes of parents toward the use of new curriculum materials in schools), new ideas for action, and potential problems in the implementation of new policies such as those involving social welfare payments, educational testing programs, services to immigrants, or social service reform on communities. Because these questions are generic—that is, they apply across many different settings, agencies, and types of problems—ethnography has appeal for a broad range of users.

Cross Reference:
See Book 7 for a more in-depth discussion of the ways in which ethnography is applied to programmatic, intervention, policy, evaluation, and cultural development questions

Cross Reference:
See Book 2 for a discussion of the development and refinement of research models

Who Should Do Ethnographic Research?

Even if all signs indicate that ethnography would be the best choice of research design,

researchers need to ask, "Am I the *right* person to do an ethnography?" The answer may be yes, but it also may be no. Researchers have affinities for different research designs, given their particular personality, preferences, and skills. As a consequence, some researchers are not best suited to do ethnographic research. We believe that researchers should not simply assess research needs at the site and decide that ethnographic research is an appropriate design. While many well-trained researchers can be hired to conduct a survey or experiment for a given research project, finding good ethnographers for hire is more difficult. For one thing, doing ethnography is a lifestyle, not a nine-to-five job. Conducting ethnographic research depends on the rhythms and behaviors of people residing and working in the communities under study, not on the schedule of the researcher.

 **Key point** ***Ethnographic research calls for long-time residence in a field setting and can require observations or interviews at times that may not be convenient for those researchers who require a nine-to-five work schedule.*** More critical is the fact that good ethnographers must understand and believe in the project and be prepared to enter into the special social relations and kinds of settings required to conduct ethnography research. Relationships may take a long time to develop and may involve new kinds of stresses; field situations may be lonely or uncomfortable (Kovats-Bernat 2002). Even with a research team, a researcher's ability to conduct an ethnographic study depends on whether or not he or she can maintain regular and intensive involvement in the field situation. Regardless of the setting or specific personality characteristics, ethnographers must interact with people to do their job and do so as often as possible in the settings in which people normally live and engage in their daily transactions. Without such interaction, ethnographers cannot understand deeply (i.e., embody or internalize) the meaning of events and activities in the field.

Important Personality and Stylistic Requisites for Ethnographers

A researcher's personal style is of critical importance to his or her success as an ethnographer. Ethnographers must *enjoy* interacting—often intensively—with large numbers of people. They also must be able to participate in the reciprocal and mutual relationships that develop in the ethnographic field site. Ethnographic researchers must be somewhat gregarious; shy and retiring people may feel neither able to socialize freely nor comfortable devoting the necessary —and significant—amounts of personal time required for building relationships in a research site. This does not mean, of course, that a shy, introspective, or introverted person cannot function in the field. For such researchers, entry and building trust and friendships may simply take longer to develop. In fact, some field situations may call for the long-term presence of a quiet person; being somewhat retiring can be an advantage where the prime behaviors required of ethnographers are to listen, ask questions, and only as time goes on to take on appropriate and more obtrusive roles.

Being able to handle reciprocity also is an important trait for ethnographers. Often research participants will ask researchers for personal favors. Failing to respond not only

harms relationships but also may even jeopardize the project. Thus, ethnographers should be individuals who enjoy helping people out in difficult situations and who are resourceful in responding to and fielding requests that may seem inappropriate or even bizarre, rather than viewing them as an instrumental obligation encountered primarily as a means to facilitate the process of obtaining data.

Ethnographic research requires investigators to be both curious and inquisitive and to demonstrate these qualities by asking research participants an endless stream of questions in both formal and informal interviewing situations. If the potential ethnographer comes from a cultural background where many topics are personal and personal questions are never asked—especially of strangers or in public—he or she may have to practice asking such questions before being able to do good ethnography. Further, ethnographers may have to learn how to be wide-eyed learners. Burnett (1974) argues that ethnographers should approach learning in the field as a young child approaches learning about the world—without preconceptions, and with open curiosity about everything. Such studied naivete is not an easy stance for all researchers to adopt, yet it is critical to good ethnographic work.

 **Key point** ***If researchers act as if they already know what is important in the field, then research participants will be less likely to try to teach them what they need to know—and the cultural picture the researchers are trying to construct will be correspondingly less complete.*** Researchers who are studying topics in their own communities face the unique challenge of defining themselves as researchers of topics they may be expected to know about already. They must find ways of communicating that what they know may not be representative of what others in the community know; they must assure community participants that they are trying to discover, respect, and represent perspectives other than their own.

Flexibility, lack of dogmatism, and an ability to live with ambiguity also are requisites for conducting ethnographic research. Ethnographers often find themselves in situations where the cultural rules for behavior or ways of thinking are very different from their own. They must be able to figure out how to learn and how to apply new rules for appropriate behavior in what may seem at first to be unusual or even bizarre circumstances (see Campbell-Galman 2007). It is also useful to be at least somewhat self-sufficient because doing ethnography can be a lonely process. Ethnographers sometimes go for long periods of time at the beginnings of fieldwork without having anyone—friends, family, colleagues, or even acquaintances—with whom to share personal thoughts and ideas.

Aside from unfamiliar social situations, ethnographers also must be able to cope with lack of structure and ambiguity in the actual practice of their work. Unlike experiments and surveys, ethnographic research designs are “emergent” rather than firmly established templates that guide a study from start to finish. That is, at the beginning of the study, the researchers may not know all of the salient research questions to be asked, and the data collection strategies anticipated initially may need to evolve and change in response to unexpected events or questions encountered during the study. The data collection and analytic tools of ethnography, especially those we describe in Books 2, 3, 4, and 5 are highly intuitive. Unlike survey and experimental approaches to research, ethnographic data collection and analysis use “multiple

intelligences"; that is to say, they use a variety of different means of engaging with the world, through which they learn and record information. In doing so they accumulate different types of data for use in sorting out patterns and meanings (Gardner 1983) and build on and formalize everyday logical/linear and informal cognitive skills as well as the intuitive problem-solving, informal problem-solving, and information-gathering strategies we use in our everyday lives (LeCompte and Preissle 1993).

This apparent similarity between ethnographic processes and everyday life has led some investigators to argue that "anyone can do ethnography" in most situations. However, we disagree heartily with this position. We already have argued that some researchers are poorly suited temperamentally to do ethnography. There is, however, a more fundamental difference. While everyday thinking and problem solving are informal and largely unconscious processes, ethnographic "theorizing"1 and analysis involve highly disciplined, fully conscious, logical, and systematic forms of thought and information processing. Though the term may seem oxymoronic, the methods of observation, interviewing, and elicitation and the forms of intuition used so successfully by ethnographers are *disciplined ones*, informed by concrete strategies for "playing with ideas" (LeCompte and Preissle 1993) and conducted with the confidence that comes from a great deal of practice. This does not mean that ordinary people cannot be trained to be ethnographic fieldworkers or that one has to be born with ethnographic insights. Certainly, with training, anyone can develop and improve ethnographic data collection and analytic skills.

Lack of advanced training, however, can make conducting ethnographic research much more difficult. We argue that data collectors and analysts must be well trained and practiced, regardless of whether or not the ethnographic study is an individual or team effort. Otherwise, research activities can lose focus, get out of hand, degenerate into mere collection of anecdotes, and confirm only what observers already know or expect rather than identifying new knowledge. The result is few, if any, useful outcomes. This can happen when researchers do not know enough about the local community to choose research partners who can make good ethnographers or when they make incorrect assumptions about the supposed capabilities of those whom they do hire. For example, research partners may be hired from among willing and enthusiastic community residents or practicing service professionals who have little or no formal training in ethnographic research methods. The same problem can arise when members of a research team are students who have insufficient field training. Further, community members who initially may seem appropriate research partners or even co-directors of a project and who often are excellent field researchers can also turn out to be uncooperative, lacking in real understanding of the goals of ethnography or in disagreement with the results of the study (Gibson 1988).

Example 2.8

When a research partner does not understand the ethnographic design or the research purpose

In her study of a Punjabi community in California, Margaret Gibson hired as her co-director a

member of the Punjabi community who also had a doctorate in the social sciences. She felt that having such a partner would be a good way to build rapport with the community and to ensure that community perspectives were included in the research results. Unfortunately, the codirector was trained in psychology and his research perspectives were considerably different from Gibson's. He also came from a region of the Punjab different from that of the people who were to be studied, and he was neither liked nor trusted by some of them.

In addition, his allegiances were to constituencies in the community committed to ensuring that the research supported particular courses of action—even if the data gathered actually contradicted such an approach. The differences between Gibson and her codirector were irreconcilable. They resulted in the production of two reports: One was submitted by Gibson herself; the codirector created his own "minority report" (Gibson 1988; Gibson personal communication 1998).

A second circumstance occurs when research partners have quantitative research backgrounds and do not believe that ethnography is important or rigorous and thus do not pay sufficient attention to proper data collection.

Example 2.9

When quantitatively trained fieldworkers do not see the importance of collecting ethnographic data

Staff of the Institute for Community Research (ICR) were asked by a national consulting firm to conduct a door-to-door service satisfaction survey of Medicaid clients who had made the shift from state Medicaid funding to private Medicaid managed-care services. The door-to-door survey was to be conducted only with those clients without telephones. The results were to be matched with those obtained from telephone surveys using the same instrument among those clients who had telephones. ICR staff noted that the survey questions were superficial and, because of the way they were asked, would not obtain valid data regarding clients' "real" views of the new service delivery arrangements. The consulting firm agreed to allow staff of the project to add a qualitative component to the survey instrument to see if they could collect better data on service delivery quality and accessibility. Interviewers were trained by ICR staff to conduct the survey, complete it, and then return to certain questions and probe the responses. All field interviewers who remained with the project were able to conduct the quantitative interviews without a problem. However, eleven of the twelve field interviewers did not conduct systematic qualitative interviews well, despite prior practice. When asked why, they claimed that since the questions had already been answered quantitatively, there was no point in asking them again.

Because of situations such as that described in Example 2.9, we believe ethnographic

interviews should not be done by the same team members who collect survey data (and vice versa) because each will transpose their specialized set of interviewing skills into the other's, muddying the methodological waters.

Finally, it is difficult—although not impossible—for service providers who see themselves as holding positions of authority over "clients," or who are primarily interested in obtaining information related to the services or other resources they can provide, to become the open-eyed learners called for by ethnographic research. Researchers whose backgrounds involve training in service provision require special training and role-play to make sure that they can conduct open-ended interviews that involve exploratory questions.

Ethnography requires ethnographers to build good working and personal relationships with and among groups of people with diverse and often conflicting opinions, lifestyles, and sociopolitical situations—while at the same time managing inevitable inter- and intragroup conflict sufficiently to produce good research results. This places special demands on the social, personal, and professional skills researchers must bring to the field site with them.

If researchers can answer the following questions affirmatively, then ethnography definitely is an approach to research they will find congenial.

- Do I feel at least relatively comfortable in new situations where the rules for behaving are not clear?
- Am I someone who is generally interested in learning new things?
- Can I live without many or most of the comforts and conveniences (relatively speaking) of home?
- Do I find it relatively easy to build new relationships?
- Do I mind being alone much of the time?
- Do I mind asking questions if I do not understand how things work or what is going on?
- Can I work for extended periods of time in situations that are ambiguous and unstructured?
- Can I begin projects without having to know exactly what I am going to do and in which direction the project is headed?

In the next chapter, we move beyond questions about where and when ethnography is best used and who is best suited to carry it out in order to look at different ways of framing the process of ethnographic research. This involves looking at paradigms, or approaches for thinking about ethnography.

Note

1. See LeCompte and Preissle (1993), chapter 5, and Erickson (1984) for an extensive discussion of the differences between everyday thinking and thinking like a researcher.

3

Paradigms for Framing the Conduct of Ethnographic Research

In chapter 1, we noted that culture provides explanations for how people think, believe, and behave that are situated in local time and space and persist over time. Culture is built up from the patterns of meaning that participants in groups create while interacting with each other, with other groups, and with the physical environment where they are located. Culture inheres in groups, not individuals, though it creates rules or schema for how the world operates in the minds of individual group members; consequently, it may be inferred from their behavior and conversations. In the pages that follow, we present a number of ways to frame the study of the culture of living beings and the varied approaches to investigation that devolve from them. These provide a point of reference from which the investigation departs; they guide the priorities of participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of data.

Multiple Perspectives: A Cultural Way of Doing Research

One way of looking at culture is to examine the contexts in which it might be evidenced. Historical perspectives, for example, posit that the way to determine who people *are* is to investigate who they *have been* in the past. Such a perspective privileges the creation of historical accounts and argues that people are ineluctably shaped in the present by forces from the past that predetermine current events. A second perspective suggests that people are what

they produce and focuses on the material products of a group—its technology and modes of production as well as its artifacts, artworks, homes, tools, and strategies for coping with its physical environment. A third perspective is social, examining the types and functions of groups formed within a particular community, the patterns of communication used within the community, the roles and relationships that characterize interaction, and the lines of power and influence among and between individual members and larger aggregations. The social perspective is what Jacob (1987) termed "patterns *of* behavior"; it also includes attitudes, values, and beliefs that shape behavior and affect relationships within the group. A final perspective might be described as cognitive; it focuses on how members of the group classify the items within their world and create rules or scripts for dealing with each other and their environment. Jacob (1987) terms these "patterns *for* behavior," arguing that what people do is predicated upon what they have been patterned to think based on their past history, experiences, and socialization. For example, people from cultures that do not touch each other upon greeting may never feel entirely comfortable shaking hands with strangers, though they may learn to endure doing so as a matter of courtesy. While it is true that all four of these perspectives—the historical, material, social, and cognitive—address important components of a cultural analysis, using them tends to disaggregate artificially what in reality is a well-integrated whole. Rather than address parts of the whole, we prefer to look at the whole through different lenses, or research paradigms.

What Are Research Paradigms?

All research is informed by particular worldviews or perspectives held by the researcher and scholars within his or her discipline. These perspectives are called **paradigms**. A paradigm constitutes a way of looking at the world, interpreting what is seen, and deciding which of the things seen by researchers are real, valid, and important to document. In the world of scientific thinking the word *paradigm* came into popular usage in 1962, when Thomas Kuhn published his classic book titled *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. In this publication, he argued that scientific advances do not occur incrementally (or evolutionarily). Instead they result from dramatic changes or "intellectually violent revolutions" in which extant scientific or conceptual worldviews no longer adequately frame or explain current realities, and consequently they are replaced by another worldview. Kuhn (1970) referred to this process as a **paradigm shift**.

Definition: A paradigm is a framework for interpretation or a way of viewing the world

Definition: A paradigm shift is a dramatic change in which one scientific/conceptual worldview is replaced by another

Definition: An epistemology is a way of studying so as to "know" the world. Epistemologies define the kinds of evidence needed to substantiate the validity of facts and the interpretive frames for interpreting truth

Research paradigms are sometimes equated with **epistemologies**, or ways of knowing. Like epistemologies, research paradigms are constituted of particular concepts and privilege certain kinds of questions. They guide researchers in seeking and defining credible evidence, interpreting that evidence, and apprehending truth. The most common paradigms in social science research and evaluation are positivism (the oldest); critical theory; interpretive, phenomenological, or constructivist theory; ecological theory; and social network theory. There is considerable and continuing debate, tension, intellectual conflict, and competition among researchers as to which of these paradigms is most significant in driving social science research. Though some researchers view them as mutually exclusive, many use each of these approaches, depending on their research questions, their own personal preferences, and the constraints and needs of the research setting. Sometimes an ethnographer's perspective on culture—how he or she thinks and writes about culture and with whom—is situated in a synthesis of all five paradigms. In the pages that follow, we will review the way in which people understand culture in the context of each of these approaches. We also will consider the position likely to be taken by researchers as they consider:

- The types of questions they wish to ask
- The cultural and social domains important in the research
- The communities they plan to study
- How and with whom the process of interpretation of data is likely to occur
- How and with whom the research results are likely to be shared
- The negotiations needed to determine the conditions under which research results will be shared

The Positivistic Paradigm

Positivistic research represents an effort to apply the rules and assumptions of the natural sciences to the social sciences. It was a radical departure from earlier eras where religious faith or political fiat established the nature of reality and what could be known. Positivism substituted what we now call scientific inquiry for the authority of church dogma and governmental power, arguing that truth could only be established by rigorous and objective sensory, or empirical, measurement (Krathwohl 1997). What could not be measured could not be truly known because its existence could not be verified empirically or demonstrated consistently over time. Historically, positivism transformed inquiry and facilitated development of the natural and social sciences; contemporarily it has been an especially important influence in experimental psychology, medicine, mental health, education, clinical studies, and the growing domain of prevention research. The positivist approach argues that reality is observable and understandable and that if research is conducted with adequate procedural rigor and proper controls for researcher and other forms of bias, results can be obtained that will closely predict what would happen if the research were replicated. Postivists argue that these results would hold true for everyone in a study site.

The aim of positivistic research is to create accurate descriptions of phenomena, devise valid explanations for observed processes, and increase the predictability of human life by

identifying generalizable causal relationships among phenomena. The gold standard for research design among positivistic researchers is a controlled experiment or a randomized clinical trial (RCT) using experimental and control groups; for example, researchers interested in whether or not medical interventions or innovative educational programs are effective would set up an experiment to test the relationship between the intervention and what the experimenters think (or hope) its outcome will be.

Positivism, however, is not limited to experimental research. Following the lead of a celebrated design text written by methodologists Campbell and Stanley (1963), a number of researchers have identified other designs that come close to meeting the positivist criteria for experimental design and survey research that include quasi-experimental designs (matched but not randomly assigned control groups), time series designs (trend analysis with multiple observations over time in a single case), cross-sectional case comparisons (surveys comparing several distinctly different groups within a single community) (Cook and Campbell, 1979). All of these designs use methods and data collection techniques that attempt to "control" or hold constant factors in the setting so as to focus on the primary predictive factors that account for the problem, use instruments and measures and means of administration that are standardized, and enable generalization of the results to other similar settings and situations.

 **Definition: Objectivity in research involves establishing control over researcher bias and outside influences by creating a conceptual separation between the researcher and the persons or events under study, as well as between the researcher and the results of the study**

Positivistic research methods can be both qualitative and quantitative. In both cases, the hallmark of positivistic research is the distinct conceptual and social separation assumed between the researcher and the object or events being studied. This is what is meant by the term **objectivity** in positivist research. In practice, objectivity means that researchers must control their own biases and prejudices about the events and people involved and avoid interfering with the study community, participants, and setting until the study is complete. Objectivity requires researchers to avoid influencing or "manipulating" the setting and the people within it as much as possible, even when the data are generated through face-to-face interaction in the field site. In chapter 4 of this book you will find a more extended discussion of experimentation, which, along with the use of standardized survey instruments and some kinds of field observations, is informed by positivistic principles that enforce control of internal and external forms of bias and of the detachment required between the researcher and the study outcomes.

Positivists believe that the research methods they use can and should be neutral and value free, although they understand that the researchers' own values play a role in the selection of research questions. They also realize that politics, values, and priorities influence how and if research results are used. But positivist researchers feel that they should affect disinterest in or at least withhold judgment and expectations about the actual conduct and outcomes of the research for the duration of the project so that their own strong interests or passionate

commitments cannot become a source of bias in the conduct of the study or the interpretation of the results. They also are committed to using research methods and techniques that maintain this objectivity. In recent years, however, ethical considerations and responsibilities to study participants have shifted views of positivist researchers who may feel that it is important to provide feedback on research results prior to the end of a study when the results may have immediate and serious negative implications for their well-being. Thus "hard core" positivist stances are being modified by consumer advocacy and more stringent ethical review boards.

Positivists believe that control of researcher bias is, for the most part, a matter of technical expertise, finesse, rigor, and researcher self-discipline. Thus, if procedures and measuring devices can be made sufficiently accurate and sophisticated, and the situations in which they are administered can be held constant, bias can be eliminated. No external factors, including class, social race, ethnicity, gender, age, individual and group history, as well as other characteristics of the researcher, should influence the hypothetical causal models that drive or initiate a research project, unless there is some specific and legitimate theoretical justification for doing otherwise. This does not mean that there cannot be a match between the views and priorities of the researcher and the researched or that these variables should not be included in the development of research models. It does require that the priorities and personal interests of the researcher alone must not influence the actual execution of the study and/or the analysis and interpretation of research results.

Positivists believe that their task is to discover and document events and processes and not to change them while conducting research unless, of course, the study is an experiment in which a planned or intentional change is measured against a comparison/control. Once a basic research project is complete, however, positivists may become quite active as advocates for or with the people or problems they study. However, they are not likely to be involved in discussing research results with participants or introducing or conducting any non-research-related programs or interventions in the research site while the actual research is underway—especially if they believed that such activity would influence the outcome of the research. Engaging in such interventions would violate positivist requirements that researchers maintain an affectively neutral stance with regard to study outcomes and minimize their influence on conduct of investigations.

An important exception to this position is experimental research design, where the whole point of the research is to evaluate the impact of an intervention or experimental program. Experimental research looks for causal relationships between an intervention and an outcome. It requires that the investigator/researcher set up an intervention and guide its conduct so that it can be evaluated rigorously—and free from outside influences (or contaminating or confounding variables) that might be mistaken for the effect of the intervention. To the extent that they do collaborate with nonresearchers in a project, positivists discuss the conduct of their studies with research partners—those nonresearcher/collaborators who have joined in the design and execution of a research project. Such partners, who can include institutional administrators, heads of community organizations and institutions, and directors of funding agencies, can play a variety of roles in the research and can even modify or change the

selection of research methods and techniques. These partners may participate in interpreting the results, often offering new and interesting perspectives on the data that the researchers might not have considered. They can also contribute in important ways to interpretations of unexpected or unpredicted results. In sum, positivist research can also involve collaborations with organized partners representing the study community.

Elicitation of insights from research partners is a form of **member-checking** that assures the validity, authenticity, and credibility of research results. Positivists as well as others engage in member-checking. However, a distinction must be drawn between member-checking and strategies for disseminating research results to research participants. Member-checking is generally viewed as a form of results validation that takes place before the study results are finalized. It is not the way that positivists **disseminate** or share research results with participants.

 **Definition: Member-checking involves corroborating information elicited from one research participant with information from other members of the same group**

 **Cross Reference: See Book 3, chapter 10 for a discussion of validity and reliability in ethnographic research**

 **Definition: Dissemination refers to the process of active distribution of study results to audiences that may include the study population itself**

This is because the first audience for the positivist's research results usually is the scientific community. Positivists have a deep commitment to furthering science, and they consider it to be unprofessional, if not unethical, *not* to share important results with the scientific community. Sharing of results with other audiences—including the participants of the research—certainly is important but is carried out in addition to scientific publications and conference presentations. By contrast, applied ethnographers are more likely to prioritize dissemination to the research participants first.

The Critical Paradigm

While positivists argue that empirical demonstration is the foundation of truth seeking, critical theorists suggest that truth resides in and is created through relationships of power (Foucault 1982; Popkewitz and Fendler 1999). What is accepted as known thus becomes what those in power in a field state or events disclose or declare. Critical theorists are interested in how the history and political economy of a nation, state, or other system exerts direct or indirect domination over the political, economic, social, and cultural expressions of citizens or residents, including ethnic minority groups and others who are marginalized or without power. Critical theory is particularly interested in which groups in society enjoy privileged access to knowledge and power; it guides investigation into sources and dimensions of inequality in such

systems. Critical theorists view their task as uncovering and describing relationships of power so as to change inequities inherent in them. In the critical paradigm, scientists are expected to function as intellectual advocates and activists for those who are disadvantaged by observed relationships of power and canonical authority. Researchers are expected to use the tools of research to discover how inequities are created and maintained and to find ways—whether through research, dialogue, intervention, political action, or policy change—to bring about change in inequitable distributions of power, cultural assets, and economic and other resources. These do not have to be economic inequities; they also can address issues such as what constitutes "good" art or architecture, which authors' books will be made available to school children, how seeds are marketed to farmers, and why decisions are made to plant one type of crop (for example, corn for biofuel) over another. All of these are controlled by "gatekeepers" or economic interests that limit access to alternative aesthetic standards (museums, galleries, and art curators), reading materials (publishers, community organizations, and librarians), and types of plant material (corporate seed farms).

Critical theorists, like positivists, believe that researchers can capture reality accurately in the specific historical and geographical contexts they study. However, they also assume that interpretation of the cultural products (words and text, norms, behaviors, symbols, physical objects, etc.) they examine is influenced by the context in which they are produced and reproduced. Because critical theorists view cultural behavior and beliefs as situated within a specific historical era, they believe that these behaviors and beliefs can change over time. They also note that much of what may appear to be cultural practice among oppressed people is instead an adaptation to their subordinate status. In the United States, for example, many educators believe that the poor hygiene and unhealthful eating habits of many low-income children represent cultural preferences when, in fact, they are the result of inadequate plumbing or water supplies, insufficient family income to purchase nutritious meals, and strategic marketing by fast food companies.

For some critical theorists, capitalist institutions and their cultural products are targets for research that identifies contradictions between what they do and what they, or cultural myths, hold to be true. Such research promotes the abolition of contradictions or structural flaws. Other critical theorists define restrictive or inequitable structures and cultural institutions more broadly, arguing that research and transformation can be planned and carried out in any restrictive setting in incremental as well as in large-scale ways. In other words, they believe that institutions can be transformed, and they seek ways of using research to serve the transformation process. Action research, which brings participants into the research and reflection process, is one such approach to change, although it is not always informed by the critical paradigm.

Critical theory calls for a focus on the ways in which gender, sexual orientation, class, culture, religion, race, nationality, region of origin, ethnicity, and power intersect to shape inequities. Researchers themselves must be aware of how their own ascribed characteristics, as well as their status deriving from educational or occupational attainment and other power relationships vis-à-vis research participants, affect what and how phenomena are studied and

how data are interpreted.

Because the final aim of critical research is to call attention to the inequitable actions and policies of the dominant social paradigm or institution and to engage in selected theory-guided activities or actions in order to bring about change, the critical approach requires congruence among the aims, objectives, and values of the researcher and those of the group(s) involved in the study. To bring about such congruence, all participants, including researchers, should be involved in the research process because the research is intended to be empowering—i.e., to demonstrate how and in what ways participants are in positions of subordination or domination (or in some cases, both), and how they can act to change both their own situation and that of others.

In contrast to positivistic research, in which values might be identified so that their influences can be eliminated or controlled, the critical paradigm holds that values are an integral part of the human condition under study. Both researcher and participant values should be identified and shared early on in the negotiation of the research process so that their impact can be known and documented. Critical theory also asks researchers to assist in enhancing research participants' individual and group potential for accessing important social and economic resources, for entering the political arena, for engaging in self-expression, and for becoming activists in shaping their own futures. One of the best-known applied critical anthropologists is Fals-Borda, who worked with and argued for the welfare of peasants and workers' unions in Colombia (Fals-Borda 1987) as well as for the value of empirical research in doing so.

Example 3.1

Fals-Borda's critical PARticipatory action research approach

Fals-Borda, a critical applied anthropologist, spent his career conducting action research and doing regional fieldwork with peasant cadres in Colombia. Together with local workers, he implemented ethnographic research to better understand their lived experience, and then he translated the conditions of their lives into language, materials, and dissemination strategies that would motivate them to overthrow the exploitative conditions in which they lived. In an article on participatory action research in Latin America, he describes how political animateurs used facilitative techniques to motivate workers to identify on their own the conditions of their oppression, thus breaking traditional patterns of dependence. This enabled them to "undertake tasks for their own development with greater effectiveness and confidence" (Fals-Borda 1987: 333). Rather than rejecting or discounting the utility of empirical research, Fals-Borda understood that the tools of empirical research could be used in a critical manner "to ideologically and intellectually arm society's exploited classes in order that they may assume their conscious roles as actors in history" (Fals-Borda 1987).

Although critical theorists, like positivists or any other researchers, for that matter, are

bound by ethical considerations to minimize risks and harm to research participants, they may be caught in a dilemma when their commitments to the well-being of the oppressed conflict with the interests of the groups or persons acting as oppressors. Both may be participants in the research, but the latter may consider their interests to be in peril if the former act in ways designed to improve their situation or reduce the degree to which they are oppressed. The researcher's dilemma in such cases is to choose among the following:

- Decide which side to favor
- Attempt to promote a dialogue by means of the research project or during review of research results
- Strategize ways to do the most good—or the least harm—for all

Cross Reference: Book 6 provides a discussion of the ethics attendant to the researcher's role; Book 7 also addresses ways of conceptualizing and building partnerships and creating action, applied, and intervention strategies that include consideration of inequities, how to address them and with whom

Sometimes these decisions are easier to make than others. For example, G. A. Hess, a researcher with the Chicago Panel for School Policy and Finance, argued that he always "came down on the side of the kids" when his hard-hitting investigations of programs, reforms, and finance activities in the Chicago public schools disclosed malfeasance and nonfeasance on the part of school administrators and other personnel (Hess 1987, 1991). In particular, Hess argued that money wasted in corruption or excessive administrative activity was money that didn't get to children in classrooms. Since Hess worked for an independent research and evaluation organization, his stance was relatively easier to take than someone who uncovered the same problems but who worked for the school district itself. Donna Deyhle also made the same decision: to come down on the side of the Navajo families and children in the community where she studied rather than of the school district for which she initially was hired to conduct an evaluation. Her research demonstrated conclusively that the district had been violating court orders mandating the provision of equitable education and appropriate language support for Navajo and Ute children, and she ultimately decided to serve as a witness against the district in a federal court case (Deyhle 1998). Researchers Pelto and J. Schensul did the same when they found, in an evaluation of PL 94-142 requiring parental involvement in special education placement decisions, that a study school was violating the law by making decisions about children's placements independent of parents to maximize use of different types of federal funds (Yoshida, Pelto and Schensul, 1978).

Interpretive Paradigms: Meaning-Making in Interactional Contexts

A third paradigm looks at reality quite differently from positivists and critical theorists. Rather than locating reality in the empirically verifiable or defining it as a function of power relationships, interactionists (including interpretivists, symbolic interactionists, constructivists, and phenomenologists) believe that reality is a "social construction"; that is, what people

know and believe to be true about the world is *constructed or created and reinforced and supported* as people interact with one another over time in specific social settings. Interpretivists argue that reality differs, depending on whose reality is considered. Thus, different people have different versions of what is true; they even can have differing perspectives on the same events. What we "know," then, is a function of our interpretation of events and the meanings we create to explain those events to others. Reality is, in a sense, "in our heads." Similarly, culture is an abstract "construct" put together or "constructed" as people interact with each other and participate in shared activities. It is created as many individuals share or negotiate multiple and overlapping socially based interpretations of behavior in various settings. It is reflected in those shared meanings and expressed in common language, symbols, and other modes of communication.

Social construction creates an agreement between and among individuals on definitions of the situations (Goffman 1960) in which they find themselves, interpretations for what occurs in those situations, and the norms governing appropriate behavior for them. Social construction also involves an affective component; people will define situations and the people and interactions within them differently depending on feelings and meanings generated in past experiences and how they currently feel about the dynamics in which they are involved.

Another key component to the interactionist paradigm is that it always defines shared constructs and meanings as "situated"; that is, they are located in or affected by the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, age, gender, and other contextual characteristics of those who espouse them. These characteristics influence how individuals think, believe, and present themselves. An important element in the interpretive position, then, is to define the sociopolitical status of each speaker or participant before his or her place in the web of meaning is articulated by the researcher.

While the terms *interpretivism*, *symbolic interactionism*, *phenomenology*, and *constructivism* often are used interchangeably, and while they all draw on similar concepts and processes, they do have their origins in different disciplines. The term *phenomenology* originated in Germany with the work of William Wundt and other philosophers. It addressed the nature of reality, but in terms of meanings that people ascribe to their surroundings, whether those be physical, social, or behavioral. Phenomenologists consider the ideas that people have in their heads to be "real" in that it is those ideas upon which people act as if they *were* real. "Constructivism" comes from and is used most often by educational researchers, sociologists, and psychologists. It is concerned with schemas, cognitive maps or patterns in the minds of individuals and is similar to Jacob's (1987) notion of "patterns *for* behavior," which we cited earlier. These patterns are embedded in the agreed-upon practices people have evolved over time within their groups. Ethnomethodologists such as Harold Garfinkel made use of this idea in determining the usually unconscious rules that govern people's behavior in everything from dinner-table manners to ethics in government.

Sociologists and anthropologists are more concerned with dynamics systems of behavior. While constructivists focus on the individual level, interactionists and symbolic interactionists examine what Jacob (1987) called "patterns *of* behavior." They focus on the meanings

attributed to and feelings people have about socially patterned roles within larger social systems and how people negotiate individuality with their constraints. They are more likely to infer rules from behavior rather than to ask about "rules in the head" and then look for behavior determined by those rules. In this book, we will use the term *interpretive* to refer to all of these approaches.

A key distinction between interpretive and positivistic approaches is that the former are inherently relativistic, since they assume that all constructs are equally valid and important. Thus, interpretive theorists believe that the social constructions of individuals and groups are not more or less "true" in an absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Guba and Lincoln 1994). Further, interpretivists hold that constructs are not fixed or immutable; they can be altered through dialogue or over time and the alterations can lead to new constructions or views of reality and new ways of acting (Nastasi and DeZolt 1994). By contrast, positivists assume that reality has some tangible referent and that agreement can be achieved on its nature. Their research results are considered to be "true," at least insofar as they are empirically verifiable and probabilistically consistent.

Interpretive, interactionist, constructivist, and phenomenological approaches are inherently participatory, since meaning can be created only through human interaction. This means that researchers must participate in the life of research participants in order to observe social dialogue and interaction, or the process of creating constructs, ideas, and meanings as they occur. Furthermore, authentic or valid individual constructs or ideas can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among all researchers, participants, and partners in the project. In this sense, the data and findings of interpretivists are created and recreated as the research proceeds. Important to interpretive researchers is that the constructs or meaning systems of researchers, participants, and research partners all carry equal weight since negotiated meaning cannot occur unless the researcher is a full participant in the process. The nature of this interaction blurs the distinction between researcher and researched, subject and object, bringing all parties together as equal partners in the process of generating and interpreting data.

Interpretivists believe that cultural beliefs and meanings are

- Socially constructed
- Situated, and therefore relative to a specific context
- Not fixed
- Negotiated
- Multiple-voiced
- Participatory

Unlike critical theorists, interpretivists do not necessarily begin with, nor are they expected to produce, a commitment to action or social change. However, the consensus that results from interactions between researchers and participants in the research site can produce a deep sense of shared understanding of a particular social problem as well as a set of shared norms that mandate specific plans of action (Nastasi and DeZolt 1994). Further, many scholar activists/applied ethnographers can be drawn into action by the needs of participants; some

also do initiate their research dialogue with change-oriented positions. These then are negotiated with and modified by participants.

Example 3.2

Constructing shared norms about assessment and evaluation in an arts education program

During her work with a middle school arts program, Margaret LeCompte became interested in how the teachers used portfolios to assess the students' progress, especially since the portfolios produced by students in visual arts, literary arts, theater, and instrumental music differed considerably. However, because she knew that the teachers had had no time during the initial stages of the program to work on assessment procedures, LeCompte did not want to embarrass the teachers by asking them directly for their grading criteria—which she knew probably did not exist. Unbeknownst to LeCompte, however, the teachers were very concerned that they be consistent in their assessment procedures across the arts programs, but they did not know how to go about establishing common criteria for grading. During a staff meeting, this concern was aired by the Visual Arts teacher. When LeCompte and her assistants suggested to the teachers that they could use ethnographic interviews to elicit from teachers their respective criteria and then use data from the interviews to develop a set of preliminary criteria to use as the basis for discussion, the teachers were delighted. They did not have time to hold such a discussion themselves, and if LeCompte's interviews could generate a preliminary common rubric, they could then do the final polishing themselves. In this way, LeCompte was able to collect data on assessment procedures, and the teachers were able to do a better job of consistent grading.

The Ecological Paradigm

Sometimes called the functional paradigm, the ecological paradigm has a long history in ethnographic research stemming from the early sociologist Emile Durkheim and the early twentieth-century work of structural anthropologists such as A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski. It is based on an analogy with biological systems and theorizes that human life exists within systems made up of mutually reinforcing and sustaining components. Researchers working with the ecological paradigm

- View individuals as functioning in a social context that influences their behaviors.
- Define context as the multileveled human and physical environment in which events take place, including family groups, peer networks, school or work settings, community and the wider society, and institutional sectors, including the social, technical, and environmental.
- See these levels, institutions, or sectors within a community as systematically related to and affecting one another.
- Believe that if change in the system is induced, it will affect all levels or sectors simultaneously.
- Think that applied or action research guided by the ecological paradigm should identify those contextual elements with the greatest influence on individual or institutional behavior and use them as points of leverage.

Ecologically oriented research looks for continuous accommodation between individuals, institutions, and the **environment** (Kottack 1999; McElroy and Townsend 1996; Poggie et al. 1992). In both research and results, ecologists emphasize adaptation rather than conflict in an effort to understand how social systems persist and adapt to conflict as well as how they change. This perspective has led to a critique by critical theorists, who view it as supporting and even justifying a static equilibrium, rather than systems in which current relations always are contested and dynamic. The primary difference between critical theorists and ecologically oriented theorists, however, is that critical theorists enter the field focused on concepts of class, power, and equity as the most important leverage points within a system for inducing change. By contrast, ecologically oriented theorists are not guided by implicit initial assumptions about *how* the system works. Rather, such information emerges inductively from the research itself. Ecologists are guided by the results of locally specific research that explores interactions in local settings. The term "ecocritical" is now often used to capture the interaction of ecological theory with power analysis and identification of sources of inequity and their interaction.

Definition: Environment refers to any contextual feature: social, cultural, institutional, political, or geophysical

The Social Network Paradigm

Social network perspectives provide an important analytic framework for social science research. The approach is focused on the interconnectedness of people, institutions, and locations. Traditionally, network perspectives have been used to identify the members of social groups of all kinds so as to describe the interactions between and among those members. Sociologists have made important use of *social* networks, such as those based on friendship, work, peer relationships, recreational activities, and religion in their work for many years (Cochran et al. 1993). Anthropologists have found *kinship* networks and *genealogies* to be fundamental to their understanding of communities and cultures. In recent years, a new integration of social network research across disciplines has emerged, leading social scientists to redefine what had been a perspective addressing one component of research on human communities as a new paradigm in social science research—the network paradigm. Its principal focus is on the social context of individual life and the recognition that people almost never act in isolation; rather, they are influenced by people in the groups to which they belong and with whom they interact and communicate. Further, the structure of human groups is affected by and affects the flow of information between and within groups and individuals. The network paradigm is informed by the work of:

- theorists who are concerned with the diffusion of innovations through social systems;
- communications specialists who are concerned with the flow and exchange of information in communities, societies, and worldwide;

- resource specialists and community planners who are interested in the ways in which community organizations relate to one another to serve clients;
- epidemiologists who are concerned with the transmission of communicable diseases through interpersonal networks;
- prevention researchers and program specialists who want to intervene with natural groups so as to encourage more healthful behavior, or become more effective in disseminating information about disease prevention through social systems.

A network perspective offers a very different view of a community or other social setting from one that sees the community as composed of essentially unrelated individuals. The study of social networks allows social scientists to situate individuals within their families, among their peers, and in relation to representatives of other social or cultural institutions. Investigating social networks also provides social scientists with the opportunity to observe and document important exchanges between and among individuals, to explore the locations where these exchanges happen, and to determine what other factors might influence them. The concept of "social network" need not apply only to individuals. It can also apply to communities linked together through exchanges of persons, resources, and infrastructures or to organizations connected by users, boards of directors, or other factors. Understanding what the relationships and associations are among these institutions can provide important information about how communities or larger systems work.

The social network paradigm has evolved over the past forty years (Galaskiewicz and Wasserman 1993; Wasserman and Faust 1993; Johnson 1994). Historically, network theory has been used in studies of family systems and adaptation (Bott 1957; Cross 1990); in diffusion studies concerned with the flow of innovation, information, or infection in populations (Trotter et al. 1995); and in studies testing the efficacy of group interventions in natural groups or networks (Nastasi et al. 1999; Schensul, Berg, and Romero 1997; Schensul 1998; Trotter 1995). Social network researchers are interested in natural groupings defined ethnographically or descriptively through observations in the field. They are also concerned with personal or ego-centered networks, which are defined in terms of individuals who are related to a single respondent. Some researchers concentrate on personal or ego-centered networks; others are interested in broader community networks termed "full relational networks," where each individual is considered in relation to all the others in the group.

Cross Reference: See Book 4, chapter 5 for more information on methods of social network research

Some researchers wish only to understand the way social networks work. Others are more interested in what might influence the development of particular types of social networks—for example, whether age or ethnicity or both are related to size and composition of drug-using networks. They may choose to investigate whether or not specific types of networks, defined by composition, size, density, or specific behaviors (e.g., drug use, bicycle racing, or vegetarianism), are associated with other behaviors or conditions, such as unprotected sex, cardiovascular conditioning, or organic gardening. Social network researchers conduct

research with social networks in several different ways:

- through ethnographic mapping or description (Trotter, Bowen, Baldwin, and Price 1996; Trotter, Bowen, and Potter 1995).
- through ego-centered network survey techniques in which a random sample of a particular individual's associates or respondents is asked to list their contacts or close associates and to indicate what these contacts do in relation to the research topic (Trotter, Bowen, and Potter 1995; Trotter and Schensul 1998).
- through "snowball" or network sampling, in which respondents first list their contacts and then all or a random sample of the contacts are interviewed to find out about their relationships with the respondents and with others. The researcher's goal is eventually to interview almost everyone in a community (Trotter, Bowen, Potter, and Jiron 1994; McGrady et al. 1995; Needle, Coyle, Genser, and Trotter 1995).

Network research can be an important component in an ecological or systems approach to research. It also can readily be incorporated into all of the other paradigms described in this chapter.

A Paradigmatic Synthesis

We believe that all these approaches to research are important. In our own work, we draw upon all of them in each research situation. The positivist approach is helpful in reminding us that concepts, instruments, and methods that have been developed, standardized, structured, and normed can be useful in any research setting. The methodological principles embodied in probabilistic survey research force us to identify and consider the importance of variation in study populations. The tenets of experimental design are helpful in responding to research partners' needs for demonstrating outcomes—or whether or not a program "works"—even when the limitations of these outcomes are apparent. Computer software for coding, managing, and analyzing qualitative or text data make it much simpler for researchers to establish and maintain inter-rater reliability and facilitate repeat analyses of data. Systematic data collection techniques based on prior ethnographic elicitation and data collection strategies can be quantified into categorical variables or matrices for quantitative analyses designed to demonstrate cultural consensus or patterning. These all are useful methods, regardless of which conceptual approach is favored by the ethnographic researcher.

Cross Reference: See Book 4, chapter 3, for research using pilesorts, taxonomies, and triad sorts

Critical approaches are consistent with our view that applied ethnographers should enter a study situation with the view that they will be expected to be instrumental in implementing change. At the same time, most social science research nowadays is expected to consider the important dimensions of difference and potential predictors of inequity such as socioeconomic status/class, age, gender, social race, ethnicity, and ability. In fact, researchers whose studies are funded by U.S. governmental agencies are required for reasons of equity to report research results disaggregated by race, class, and gender to assure that significant segments of the population are not excluded from research. In addition, researchers also are required to

include, to the greatest extent possible, all segments of the population in their research unless their research questions are focused on a problem located only in a specific population—such as prenatal care for women or the impact of consuming milk from hormone-treated cows on the development of teenaged boys.

The critical approach reminds us of the influence of global systems on local settings. Views of "difference," for example, may be influenced by international media, and local inequities may stem from international economic policies and practices that influence local markets and local employment. Most applied ethnographers discover these local responses to national or even international situations once they are in the field. Such responses generally involve difficulties local residents have with interethnic or intercultural communication or problems communities face when they lack access to valuable resources as a consequence of income, gender, social/racial, or other "differences."

Example 3.3

Oil prices, tourism, and local economies in the Guatemalan Highlands

As gasoline prices skyrocketed in the mid 2000s, the cost of tourist travel rose concurrently. High gas prices for commodity transport not only increased the cost of high-quality thread for local Mayan women weavers but also reduced the number of tourists coming to their markets to buy weavings and other handicrafts. As a consequence, some women were forced to remove their children from school because they could not afford the fees. Other women who had been able to sell goods from the privacy and safety of their homes were forced to set up shop in the public market, where, while there were more opportunities to find customers, they also were more likely to encounter harassment from officials for selling without a license (Ludwig 2006).

Like the critical approach, the ecological or functional paradigm reinforces the idea that individuals do not function alone. Instead, they are embedded in formal and informal institutions—the family, peer group, schools, community organizations—and are affected in many obvious and less obvious ways by community, state, national, and global dynamics. Power is only one of a number of important factors that influence individual and group behavior. One advantage of the systems approach of ecological research is that it directs attention to individual and group interaction with the natural environment and demands recognition of the effects of landscape, location, natural resources, climate, and environmental depletion on human behavior and interaction.

Finally, the social network paradigm demands that we recognize that people *are* who they know and that researchers consider the social entities (individuals, families, organizations, and communities) with which people interact to be engaged in important exchanges with one another. The network paradigm forces us to recognize that none of these social entities can be seen as functioning alone. Instead, they are linked to and affect one another in ways that have important consequences for human behavior and can be identified and studied by researchers.

This frame of reference also has implications for sampling and for data analysis. The implications are most significant for data analysis, since the quantitative or numerical units that are the building blocks of network research are connected. This fact invalidates the fundamental assumption of parametric statistics: that units are independent of one another and have an equally likely chance of being selected. Thus, neither the principles that underlie random sampling nor the principles of quantitative data analysis, both of which assume that units of analysis are independent, apply to network research. Both the worldview (everything is linked) and the procedures for identifying, selecting, and "counting" or analyzing units are distinct from conventional research, warranting the designation of the network paradigm as a separate paradigm.

As we noted in chapter 1, regardless of who they are, ethnographers are likely to be situated differently in relation to their research partners, collaborators, or clients. It is probable that they will have more education, income, status, prestige, and privilege than those with whom they work. To build trust between researchers and research participants, to ensure access to data and to field sites, and to increase the potential for obtaining good information, ethnographers must always remember who they are and where they come from. While trying to establish common ground with respondents, they must also be aware of difference and how their perceived identity may influence the flow of communication in the field setting. Doing so requires reflecting on personal values and beliefs about who one is as well as why, where, on what it is appropriate to conduct research, and how one plans to use research results. It is also necessary to be prepared to share personal plans and views without imposing them on others.

Applied ethnographic research also benefits greatly from an interpretive or constructivist viewpoint and its emphasis on the generation of shared meanings and its recognition of the importance of local context and cultures in human behavior and beliefs. Interpretivism provides a strong rationale for collaboration in research; establishing research partnerships assures generation of the best and most relevant questions, instruments, interpretations, and plans for use of results. To benefit from collaboration with the study community, researchers must negotiate with partners in each of these domains. It is especially important for researchers and their community partners to negotiate the interpretation and meaning of research results when the results of data analysis do not clearly point to directions for action or when they are counterintuitive or different from what was expected. In such cases, all partners must use both their knowledge of the setting and any new information to discuss and agree on results and how to best use them. Table 3.1 compares and summarizes the concerns, foci, procedures, processes, and goals of each of the five paradigms discussed above, as well as describes the differing roles each dictates for researchers and participants in research studies.

TABLE 3.1 A Comparison of Paradigms

Positivistic Approaches	**Critical Approaches**	**Interpretive Approaches**

Ecological
Approaches
Network Approaches
Nature of Self and Principal Concerns
Self as defined and determined by society/ form/external social structures, i.e., what's going on outside individuals
Self as defined by the historically determined structure of domination, i.e., what's going on within and between individuals as a consequence of their given material and historical conditions of life
Society/form/external social structure as defined by interactions between self and others, i.e., what's going on within and between individuals
Self as defined by components of the social structure representing various levels of influence and need: i.e., what's going on within individuals influenced by systems of family, peers, school, work, community, and society
Self as defined by interaction with significant others in specific cultural domains: i.e., what's going on within and between individuals as a consequence of social relationships in specific activities
Origins of Knowledge By definition, by deduction from laws or theoretical statements or from measurable and replicable experience From differential access to knowledge regarding historical context, political, economic, and social conditions, especially of power relationships.
From critical theories From shared human understandings and experiences, negotiated meanings, and from historical and social context From beliefs and behaviors of individuals regarding their knowledge of the structural factors influencing their own and others' behaviors From beliefs and behaviors of individuals regarding their knowledge about the social interactions they have with important others.
From observations of
links among people, sites, and institutions
Role of Researcher Dispassionate observer: Affectively neutral regarding the conduct and results of the study Eschews intervention in events of the study site unless planned as part of the study. Controls or brackets biases from researcher's personal experience Questions and critiques all canonical knowledge and assumptions
Looks for contradictions.
Activist, teacher, and change agent. Engages in educative, analytic, and transformative activities with participants
Empathic participant/observer. Understandings informed by researcher's personal experience in interaction with the study participants.
Develops shared understandings and meanings with participants Dispassionate observer. Affectively neutral regarding the conduct and results of the study. Eschews intervention in events of the study site unless planned.
Controls or brackets biases from researcher's personal experience Sufficiently participatory to gain access and trust.
Understanding informed by researcher's collection of data on individual or institutional interaction in interaction with the study participants
Role of Researched The object being studied. Engages with researcher by providing information about the "facts" as observed.
Receives results or consequences of results usually with no prior input The object being studied.
Participants identify and define the world as they see it.
May be engaged learner.
May engage in educative, analytic, and transformative activities with researcher
Source of information and understanding. Participants identify and define the world as they see it.
Negotiate shared understanding with researcher The object being studied.
Engages with researcher by providing information about the system workings as they understand them The object being studied.
Information conduit to researcher regarding identity, contacts, and activities of network members. Communicates information between and among other network members and groups in interventions
Focus Observable behavior. Measurement and quantification.Qualitative prior operationalization of variables driven by theory.
Controlling variance and bias.
Ruling out alternative explanations for events Structural asymmetries attributable to differential power relationships.
Identifying hidden meanings and assumptions, behavioral and structural patterns of oppression and contradictions.
Developing critical consciousness
Elicited meanings for observational behavior. Intersubjective understanding.
Explaining by comparing polyvocality, or alternative accounts of events Observable behavior and elicited meanings in relation to structures, policies, norms, behaviors typical of other levels in the system.
Changes in structures, norms, policies, characteristic of other systems levels
Interactions of individuals and groups with levels over time Observable and measured behavior, both qualitative and quantitative.

Elicited meanings in relation to explanations of behavior in relationships
Identification of network structural characteristics through quantification that may shape or influence informational flows
Procedures Controlling bias and variance
Privileging researcher perspectives
Defining terms Description of events Classification/ Codification (deductive) Enumeration Correlation Verification
Prediction Interrogating one's own bias
Contextualizing participant/researcher perspectives
Defining terms (researcher and subject)
Describing events (researcher and subject)
Classification/
Codification (by researcher subject to member/checks)
Enumeration
Correlation/association
Interpretation (researcher in conjunction with subject) Communication (by the researcher)
Action/transformation
(by the researcher and participant)
Disciplining bias and subjectivities
Privileging participant perspectives
Defining terms
Description of events Classification/ Codification (by research subject to member checks) Enumeration Correlation/association
Interpretation (by researcher in conjunction with subject) Communication of results to participants Definition (researcher)
Description (researcher)
Classification/
Codification (by researcher possibly subject to member/checks) Enumeration Correlation/association Interpretation (research in conjunction with subject) Communication (researcher)
Verification
Prediction
Definition (researcher) Description (researcher)
Classification/
Codification (by researcher possibly subject to member/checks) Enumeration Correlation/association Interpretation (research in conjunction with subject) Communication (researcher)
Verification
Prediction
Process Investigating the human universe by modeling its study after procedures used by scientists studying the physical universe Achieving change in structure and behavior by exposing hidden patterns of meaning, communication, and control
Achieving understanding of human behavior by analysis of social interaction, meaning, and communication Understanding the functioning of social structures and behavior by analyzing levels of function and their interaction
Using those understandings to achieve change in systems Achieving change in structure and behavior by identifying the mutual influences of interaction and information flows among members of a social group
Goals *Generalization* of results to subsequent similar events and phenomena
Testing and retesting results to demonstrate generalizability/ universality
Development of universal laws that govern human behavior in all settings Analysis of results to *unmask inequities* in processes and phenomena
Emancipatory stances toward disparities in structural and social determinants of human behavior *Identification of regularities* in human behavior
Discovery of the meanings of these regularities in specific settings
Comparison of results to similar and dissimilar processes and phenomena
Development of workable and shared understandings regarding the genesis of human behavior and belief
Development of tailored interventions that involve co-construction of norms, beliefs, behaviors (the creation of new cultural elements) Analysis of results to *identify relationships across levels* in a local situation
Development of local multilevel predictors influencing individual, group, and social behaviors
Inductive *development of regional and larger patterns and laws* Analysis of results to *identify social relationships among related individuals, institutions, and other structures*
Development of predictors of social influences on individual behavior
Development and interpretation of the ways that structural differences in networks affect information, disease, and

other resource- or risk-related flows

Summary

The specific frame of reference or paradigm underpinning the research process is important to the overall structure of the ethnographic study. It is especially important in determining the goals of the research and how—and by whom—data will be interpreted and put to use. Once the researcher is aware of these issues, it is time to begin the process of structuring the research itself. In chapter 4, we discuss the initial stages of structuring an investigation: planning the research design.

4

An Overview of Research Design

Research Design: A Blueprint for Action

Every systematic activity undertaken by human beings needs a plan of action. In research, the formal plan of action for a project is called a **research design**. Research designs are to researchers as road maps are to vacationers or blueprints are to architects and contractors—they provide guidelines for how to proceed. In addition, however, they include much more information than two-dimensional maps or blueprints. An improvement on the analogy might be the detailed schedules and lists sent to clients by a very good travel company in response to the clients' concept of the trip they wish to take and their questions about how to proceed. These materials do include maps, but in addition, they are based on a set of assumptions about what the travelers want to do, how much time they have, descriptions of desired destinations, where they will stay, what activities are planned, who they can expect to meet and what meals they can anticipate, the equipment they need to bring, the types of people who will be on the trip, and most important, what the trip will cost. Without such information, travelers are likely to end up in uncomfortable hotels, lacking proper clothing or equipment, without insect repellant, and taking photographs of wild animals at the local zoo instead of in the forest. They may have forgotten what they wanted to see, do, and learn in the first place. They may no longer have a sense of what the desired outcome of the trip was supposed to be, and they might even have run out of money.

Definition: A research design is a detailed set of questions, hunches, procedures, and a plan of action for the conduct of a research project

Cross Reference: Book 1, chapter 3

A good research design, like a good vacation plan, saves time, money, and headaches and permits the anticipated objectives of the trip to be achieved. The converse also is true. It is, therefore, wise to spend plenty of time at the beginning of a study planning and designing the project, even though initially the time might not seem worthwhile. If the researcher is working as part of a collaborative team or with partner organizations, planning both is more critical and more time-consuming than working alone. Planning with partners requires hammering out in advance shared ideas, responsibilities, and meanings as well as agreements regarding how to proceed. This includes deciding on the following:

- which paradigms inform the project, and in what ways they are to be used to frame it
- what the core research questions are
- which methodological alternatives and approaches to data collection will be best for the project
- what constitutes a reasonable timeline for the project
- who should be hired to do the work, with what training, and for what purposes

Regardless of the amiability of partnerships in the initial stages of research projects, the press of time and work inevitably uncovers unforeseen differences in perspective, work styles, and value systems as the project unfolds. Intercepting and preventing some of these at the beginning of the project can avoid unpleasant surprises later.

Research Design as a Decision-Making Process

Researchers can choose from among many alternative research designs. Initial decisions about the choice of design are guided by five main factors:

- The questions the investigator is trying to answer
- The resources (time, trained personnel, and money) available for the study
- The characteristics of the research site, population, and setting
- The requirements and demands of the funder
- The requirements and demands of the research partners representing the study community or communities

Creation of a research design or plan of action involves the following:

- Identifying and establishing relationships with relevant gatekeeper and research partners
- Framing the initial research question and study aims and/or objectives
- Building a conceptual starting point, preliminary theory, study model, and hypotheses or hunches
- Identifying characteristics of an appropriate population for the study and locating that population in sociogeographic space and time.
- Finding and obtaining access to an appropriate research site

These issues constitute the initial areas of concern in developing a research design. Once

they have been addressed, researchers can then proceed to more technical considerations, such as how to:

- Design appropriate data collection methods
- Develop a data collection timeline
- Create guidelines for data transcription, entry, management, and coding, if required
- Establish a data analysis plan and procedures
- Plan for and hire and train an appropriately sized and qualified staff
- Develop ways to protect the confidentiality of the research and the information respondents provide
- Protect human subjects and the communities in which they live by ensuring the privacy of personal and community information and avoidance of possible harm
- Establish guidelines and procedures for interpretation, dissemination, and utilization of research results

Each of these steps should be carefully considered, outlined, and described in detail in the initial research proposal, even if the work in the field calls for changes to be made later (see Figure 4.1). Consideration of these steps has the advantage of avoiding the kinds of conflict and confusion over research directions we mentioned earlier. It also allows researchers to think through and prepare in advance for the problems that inevitably occur in the field.

Cross Reference: See Tables 4.3 and 4.4 in this chapter

Figure 4.1 Steps in the Research Process

(1)	(2)	(3)
Develop the Research Base	**Decide on Research Methods**	**Access the Field Situation**
Frame Questions	Determine Sampling Procedures	Develop Human Subjects Guidelines
Build Guiding Theory/Conceptual Model	Develop Data Collection Plan	Determine Staffing Plan
Identify Population	Design Data Collection Methods	Develop and Administer Training Protocols
Find Research Site	Schedule Data Collection Activities	Determine Data Management and Field Security Procedures
Identify Research Partners		
(4)	(5)	(6)
Select Data Analysis	**Develop Final**	**Determine Dissemination**

Procedures	Documents	Procedures
Develop Text Coding System	Identify Audiences	Identify Possible Sources of Resistance
Select Appropriate Computer Software for Each Data Type (Text, Mapping Network, Elicitation)	Develop Guidelines for Participant Involvement in Presentation of Results	Schedule Location and Times for Dissemination
Solicit Participant Aid in Interpretation of Results	Develop Multiple Audience	Develop Strategies for Addressing Resistance
Select Procedures for Analysis of Survey Data	Appropriate Dissemination Formats	
Conceptualize Triangulation Strategies		

Which design is best for the given research question depends on what the researcher wants to know, from whom, and under what conditions as well as on the requirements of the funder and the audiences for the research. If the investigator wants to determine how a representative sample of people from a particular community feels about a problem or issue, a survey research design might be called for. Survey research usually follows certain principles of probability sampling, instrumentation, data analysis, and presentation designed to ensure that the results of the survey can be generalized to the entire population. If the researcher wants to know if program A is more effective than program B, then a controlled experiment is most desirable. The conventions of experimental design call for random assignment of subjects or larger units of intervention to treatment and nontreatment groups, pretesting and posttesting, and "experimental integrity" or control over the conditions of the experiment. If the study audience is convinced only by either one or both of these approaches, then a qualitative design will not do, but a mixed methods design that has both a quantitative comparative approach and a qualitative descriptive approach could be appropriate.

On the other hand, if the researcher really is not familiar with the characteristics of the population of interest, the parameters of the problem to be addressed, the components that should be included in a program, or even what its outcome should be, then ethnography is probably the most suitable choice. The conventions of ethnographic design call for exploratory investigation (participant observation and open-ended interviewing), selective investigation of targeted topics (semistructured observations and interviews), collection of data and artifacts related to cultural domains, and then the collection of generalizable survey data on individuals and networks.

Cross Reference: Book 3, chapters, 4, 5, and 6

Cross Reference: Book 3, chapters 7 and 8

Cross Reference: Book 4, chapter 1

Cross Reference: Book 3, chapter 9, and Book 4, chapter 5

Cross Reference: See Book 3 and Book 4, chapter 3, for information on these approaches to data collection

As we will indicate, many, if not most, projects require the use of mixed designs, especially in cases where studies have several purposes or where an initial design calling for one kind of data—a self-reported survey, for example—is modified to include systematic observation to confirm the accuracy of participant self-reports or the collection of data at the cultural level through elicitation and mapping techniques.

An experimental design might include an ethnographic component to describe, explain, and verify what is actually happening during the implementation phase. The final stages of ethnographic research often call for surveys based on random sampling of the study population once initial ethnographic description is complete. These surveys determine the distribution of specific behaviors or beliefs in the larger community. Ethnographic research by definition uses a mix of data collection tools and research designs. Researchers in other fields refer to these mixed designs as "mixed methods research" (Bernard 2000; Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003; Cresswell 2009; Haxton and Harknett 2009). The challenge to the researcher is to choose the best combination of approaches for studying the specific research problems. In some cases, as the following example illustrates, the original approach to data collection must be modified or complemented to produce useful results.

Example 4.1

Using ethnography to study weight-loss clients who don't lose weight

A group of weight-loss therapists collected data on their overweight clients by having them keep daily logs of what and how much they ate. The therapists could not figure out why their clients, whose daily self-reports of food consumption contained only approved low-calorie items, did not lose weight. They began to suspect that some of the clients were cheating. To check, they added a data collection strategy called "shadowing" for some of the clients, observing and taking notes on how they prepared their meals, what they ate, and how often. They found that clients did not exactly cheat, but they systematically served themselves larger portions than allowed, unable to believe just how small a three-ounce serving of meat is. They also forgot to record small snacks and "tastes" that they consumed while preparing meals. The unreported increments almost doubled their allowable consumption of daily calories.

The self-reports were a very economical way to collect data. However, as the example above indicates, data from the self-reports were not accurate. The original research design needed to be modified to accommodate the new data collection technique, the question that called for its use, and the analysis and integration of the new and different forms of data to be collected. The change also had an effect on the overall cost and duration of the project. This example demonstrates how a seemingly small change in sampling or data collection procedures can influence the entire research design or set of methods planned for the project.

Example 4.2

A mixed methods ethnographic study of alcohol use and sexual risk among men in India

Alcohol use, especially the use of distilled alcohol and "strong" (high-alcoholic content) beer and wine has increased rapidly in India over the past decade. Most studies of alcohol use in India are epidemiological, using large-scale surveys that look for patterns of association between demographic characteristics and alcohol use in different parts of the country. A partnership of organizations, including the Institute for Community Research and the International Institute for Population Sciences Mumbai, initiated a four-year study to increase understanding of cultural beliefs and practices related to alcohol use and the meaning of alcohol in relation to social activities and sexuality and to assess the interaction of drinking and sexual risk practices in a population of young unmarried and married men. The study was funded by the U.S. NIH/National Institute for Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and included multiple components. Social mapping, key informant interviews and GIS mapping identified places where alcohol was sold as well as general beliefs about who used alcohol and why and perceived consequences of alcohol use in the study communities. Sorting exercises obtained cultural-level data on men's reasons for drinking and their activities. In-depth interviews with sexually active drinkers obtained detailed information on drinking histories and specific events in which alcohol was consumed and men engaged in penetrative sex with partners who were not their spouses. A large-scale survey of 1,239 male residents identified through randomized cluster sampling procedures was conducted to identify statistical predictors of drinking and unprotected sex with multiple partners. Finally 44 women whose husbands drank regularly were interviewed in depth about the effects of alcohol on their lives and their households. The qualitative data were used to explain statistical relationships and to provide detail on the circumstances involving alcohol leading to sexual risk.

Logistical Considerations

All of the design features mentioned in the first part of this chapter (from identifying the question to analyzing and preparing the data for dissemination) must be figured out in the context of logistical constraints. The most elegant research design in the world will not work if the researcher does not have enough money, time, or trained staff to carry it out. Thus,

researchers always must keep in mind the need to assess the resources necessary to conduct the research. The final considerations then are:

- Deciding whether and how to sample from the population as a means of reducing the size of the group chosen for study
- Identifying logistical problems and solving them
- Locating, hiring, and training staff
- Determining as much as possible in advance the procedures for analyzing data
- Including use of computerized data management approaches to data analysis and the availability of suitable statisticians

The list above makes clear that designing a research project involves more than just choice of data collection techniques. We believe that research design really involves making a series of theoretically informed choices among alternative ways to proceed, from start to finish, in a research project. In the pages below we first discuss the variety of research designs and data collection techniques available to social science researchers, outlining the strengths and limitations of each. Each approach has implications for the selection of study site, sampling, methods of data collection and analysis, cost, and duration. We then discuss design considerations in greater detail in chapters 5 and 6.

Research Designs in Social Science Research

To aid the reader in choosing the right design, we provide Tables 4.1 (quantitative designs) and 4.4 (qualitative designs), which summarize the most common research designs used in the social sciences and their purposes. We include both quantitative and qualitative designs because both can be used in the conduct of ethnographic research.

Quantitative Designs

We begin with the quantitative end of the design continuum since readers may be more familiar with research plans involving the collection of quantitative data. We then describe the qualitative designs most frequently used by ethnographers and other qualitative researchers. Later in this chapter, in Tables 4.5 and 4.6, we talk about “mixed methods,” or how to integrate qualitative and quantitative research in each of the designs. Good ethnographers know when to choose one design over another and when to combine designs in their field research. Table 4.1 depicts the most common quantitative and experimental designs used in the social sciences and the conditions required for their use. This table also shows how qualitative research can be used in the development of instruments for and interpretation of results from such studies.

Table 4.1 Standard Survey and Experimental Research Designs Used in the Social Sciences

Design Type	Minimal Conditions for Appropriate Use

Cross-Sectional Research: Population and Sample Surveys	• A clearly known problem and context
	• Previous identification of relevant domains or possible responses
	• A target population whose characteristics have been indentified
	• An enumerated list of all members of the target population, by name or other discrete identifier
Experiments	• An hypothesis or prediction about the expected results of an experiment or controlled effort to induce change
	• Creation of control and/or comparison groups through random assignment of units to the groups
	• Rigorous control over the conditions by which a treatment or intervention is implemented
Quasi-Experiments, Case Control Studies, and Controlled-Field Studies	• A field setting or group interested in the problem

	• Treatment and comparison groups whose subjects' characteristics have been matched or clearly defined to indicate salient differences between them
	• An hypothesis or prediction about the expected results of an intervention
	• Rigorous control over the conditions by which the treatment or intervention is implemented

Population and Sample Surveys

The term *survey* can be confusing, since a survey is both a research design and a method of collecting data. A study that uses statistical methods to select respondents systematically or randomly and that has a survey instrument (a structured interview or a questionnaire) as its only source of data is said to use a survey design. However, survey instruments can be and are incorporated into other kinds of studies, including ethnographies. In these cases, the survey becomes just one of a number of different types of data collected.

Surveys are the most widely used form of systematic data collection. One cannot read a newspaper, conduct a political campaign, institute a marketing strategy, or engage in public policy planning without encountering the results of surveys. Surveys are used in the needs assessments that precede program planning and implementation for specific groups or institutions, in attitudinal surveys that attempt to measure changes in attitudes or opinions, and in ethnographic projects to confirm whether statements made by key informants about a group are shared by members of that group. Whether conducted by mail, telephone, electronic mail, or in person, surveys are used in any study in which the researchers need to elicit a limited amount of information from a large population whose characteristics—including the language they use, their age, location, and other demographic factors, as well as their accessibility and willingness to answer questions—already are reasonably well known.

 **Definition: A population is an entire group of people or objects selected for study. Information gathered from or about the entire group is a census. A sample is a small**

group selected rigorously from a large population. The characteristics or responses of the sample are assumed to represent those of the population itself

Population surveys, or ***censuses***, involve asking questions of an entire group of people; where populations are very large and resources preclude surveying everyone, ***sample surveys*** are used instead. Sample surveys involve using statistical procedures to draw a smaller group —or sample—***from a large population so that the characteristics of the sample are quite close to those of the larger group. Data collected from the smaller group are assumed to characterize what would have been collected from the larger group.***

While surveys can be quite efficient and economical, there are real limitations to their utility and validity.1 They should only be used when:

- The population itself and the kinds of questions to be asked already are known
- The researchers are familiar both with the language and vocabulary of the participants
- Researchers know whether the concepts and ideas inherent in the study are meaningful to the participants

 **Cross Reference: See Book 2, chapter 8 for further information on the statistical procedures used to create systematic or random samples**

Below we present several examples illustrating how incomplete knowledge about the study population can result in biased or inaccurate survey results.

Example 4.3

Bias in census surveys

The United States Bureau of the Census traditionally bases its decennial headcount on members selected from household units. Despite attempts to define the term *household* as broadly as possible, certain segments of the population, including those who are homeless, go uncounted or undercounted because they cannot be located in standard living units.

Example 4.4

Bias in telephone surveys

U.S. political pollsters in 1948 seriously underestimated the strength of Harry Truman's support. Basing their estimates on a telephone poll, they predicted Wendell Wilkie's victory, not realizing that the large number of persons who did not have telephones had not been polled. People without phones voted overwhelmingly for Truman, earning him the election. More recently, Howard Dean's campaign for president of the United States exuberantly relied on email and Internet communication, failing to realize that only about 15 percent of the

population at the time were active Internet users. That percentage was insufficient to win him the Democratic Party nomination. Barack Obama's political campaign, on the other hand, utilized internet, cell phone, and face-to-face community organizing strategies and managed to reach a high enough percentage of the population to win the election in 2008.

Example 4.5

Addressing potential bias in survey language

A team of researchers were discussing how to describe "people under the age of twenty" in questions for an interview to store owners about their attitudes toward what appeared to be the increasing incidence of petty theft, loitering, and panhandling at the local mall. The researchers were surprised when they could not agree, even among themselves, on a name for such individuals that didn't have some kind of negative connotation. One researcher objected to the use of the term *juvenile*. "MY kid isn't a juvenile; he's never been arrested." Another asserted that only when juveniles were delinquent did the term *juvenile* have a negative connotation. Others felt that *teenager* and *adolescent* also were unacceptable because they implied irresponsible or negative behavior. They compromised by using the term *young people*, explaining to survey respondents that they meant "people between the ages of twelve and twenty."

Example 4.6

Bias introduced by survey interviewers

AIDS research has been conducted largely through surveys for the past twenty years in different parts of the world. Most of these surveys draw from the same source of questions regarding sexual risk behavior. They ask about type of partner (e.g., "casual," "regular") and whether and how often the person has had sex with each type of partner with or without a condom. Ethnographic research has shown that there are many different types of "partners" known through local terminology and that "sex" can mean anything from holding hands to full-scale penetration. Further, local ethnographic research can reveal that under certain circumstances, even full-scale penetration is not referred to as "sex" if it does not mean, for example, in the case of Mauritius, the loss of virginity, which is characterized not by penetration but by the presence of blood and pain. In-depth interviews conducted by researchers in the ICR/IIPS study of alcohol use and sexuality revealed that men often reported that they had engaged in "oral sex" when they meant kissing. These examples make it clear that AIDS survey researchers have to adapt standardized questions about sexual risk by describing specific behaviors or adding locally equivalent qualifying language.

Example 4.7

Bias introduced by survey researchers

Anthropologist Rosalie Wax (1971) reported how she helped the sociologist David Reisman make sense of the responses by working-class women in the United States to his survey of attitudes toward participation in the political system. Reisman had collected very few answers to his questions, and because his respondents giggled or were silent when interviewers tried to probe, he decided that feelings of intimidation must be inhibiting the voting participation of women with little education or status in civic life. Given the few answers to his survey, he assumed that the women he interviewed either had little or no knowledge about political processes or had extremely limited communicative capabilities. Wax, whose background was similar to that of many women in the target population, simply went out and organized informal conversations with the women about politicians, elections, and the act of voting. She found that the women thought Reisman's questions were silly. One question in particular had provoked great derision among respondents: "That interviewer asked me if I ever felt afraid when I walked into a voting booth! Whatever in the world could make me afraid of a *voting booth*?? Of course I'm not afraid! How do you answer a question like that?"

The examples above illustrate how crucial it is that researchers be familiar with the behavior patterns and characteristics of the population to be surveyed—as in the first two examples—and agree among themselves about the terminology to be used—as in the last two. Even more crucial is that the language and patterns of speech in the survey be couched in the same meaning system and frame of reference used by the people who are to answer the questions, as is illustrated in Example 4.5. When surveys lack such **construct validity**, survey results become nearly useless, as was the case in Reisman's initial study.

Definition: Construct validity refers to the match between the meaning intended by the researcher and the meaning assumed by the respondent

Another limitation of surveys is that they assess only what people think, know, or report that they do at a specific point in time. A survey research study that obtains data from only one point in time is called a **cross-sectional study**. Some researchers try to correct for this time limitation by using longitudinal designs in which the same data are collected, usually from the same people, at multiple time points—for example, six months to a year apart. Survey researchers call such studies **trend studies**, if different samples are drawn from the same population each time, or **panel designs** when exactly the same people are being followed.

Definition: Cross-sectional studies examine phenomena at a single point in time

Definition: Trend studies interview different randomly selected cross-sectional samples of the same population over time to discern population trends. In panel designs the same randomly selected people are interviewed at different points in time to discern

changes in the study population

Trend studies administer repeated surveys or interviews at specified intervals to the same or different samples selected from the same population as the first one. If the samples selected for each subsequent interview contain different individuals from the initial set of time their utility can be compromised. Panel designs correct for this problem by randomly selecting a study sample and then administering repeated interviews only to members of the original sample members. However, the composition of the panel—and consequently, the kinds of results obtained from it—can change significantly as members drop out over time. This may mean that the results obtained at time one may come from quite a different group than the results obtained at the end of the study, which can render the results somewhat questionable. All panel designs, therefore, must analyze patterns of loss in respondents or attrition and report on attrition as a possible source of bias.

Surveys cannot provide much historical or contextual data to explain why people responded as they did, beyond the individual respondent's own experience. It also is difficult to corroborate the accuracy of survey respondents' answers if no other types of data are collected. However, combined with other forms of data collection, such as field observations, analysis of documents and artifacts, informal conversations, and in-depth interviews, surveys can add great strength to a study because they are the primary way that researchers determine whether or not ideas held and behaviors engaged in by a small number of people studied intensively are more widespread in the general population. They also are important in determining the range of variation in reported beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and even **biomarkers** within a target population.

 **Definition: Biomarkers are biological or genetic indicators of physical conditions, syndromes, stressors, or diseases assessed through the conjoint collection of tissues and body fluids such as blood, urine, and saliva samples**

Experiments

In social science research, the purpose of experiments is to establish a causal relationship between actions taken, or actions carried out, by researchers and effects of those actions on a specific educational, environmental, social, medical, health-related, or other human problem. For example, researchers may wish to learn if an innovative program or a new treatment actually is effective, which means that it has the beneficial impact expected. Natural scientists, medical personnel, psychologists, educational researchers, evaluators, and funding agencies tend to be quite familiar with experimental and quasi-experimental designs because experiments are the primary designs used in their fields. Research questions in these fields focus on determining whether an intervention or "treatment" has an effect by taking measurements before and after the treatment has been administered to a group (a "pre-post design") and then comparing the results from the treatment group to a comparison or control

group that did not experience the intervention treatment. Table 4.2 displays the types of groups that experiments compare—treatment, control, and comparison groups.

Table 4.2 Differences Among Treatment, Comparison, and Control Groups

Treatment Group	Control Group	Comparison Group
• Participates in intervention or experiment	• Does not participate in intervention or experiment	• Participates in the same or a variant of the intervention or experiment, or in a different kind of intervention or experiment related to the research question
• Subjects randomly selected for study and randomly assigned to group	• May receive a traditional or customary treatment	• Subjects are not randomly assigned as individuals to treatment groups but are assigned to treatment in naturally occurring groups (e.g., classrooms, work groups). These groups **may be** randomly selected and **sometimes are** randomly assigned to treatment or comparison conditions
• Population characteristics and all other nontreatment conditions matched to those experienced by control group	• Subjects randomly selected for study and randomly assigned to group	• Population characteristics and/or treatment conditions differ from treatment group, but differences are explicitly stated and described
	• Population characteristics and all other nontreatment conditions matched to those	

	experienced by treatment group	

Experiments always involve comparisons (Porter 1978). Most often the comparisons are between two randomly assigned or similar groups, one of which did, and one of which did not, experience an intervention. When the impact of an intervention is assessed by comparing the condition prior to and after the treatment or intervention, the design is referred to as a "pre-post test design." Table 4.3 displays the most common research designs used for experimental research (Campbell and Stanley 1963).

Table 4.3 Experimental Designs Using Treatment, Comparison, and Control Groups

Design 1: Treatment and Control Group

RE	O	X	O
RC	O		O

Design 2: Multiple Treatment Groups

RE	O	X1	O
RE	O	X2	O
RE	O	X3	O

Design 3: Multiple Treatment Groups and a Control Group

RE	O	X1	O
RE	O	X2	O
RE	O	X3	O
RC	O		O

Design 4: Treatment and Matched Comparison Groups

E	O	X	O
MCOMP	O		O

Symbols:

E = experimental
R = random assignment
C = control group (no treatment or standard treatment)
O = observation (point where measurements are taken before and after)
X = treatment or administration of experimental program
MCOMP = matched comparison group (where random assignment is not possible but units can be matched on critical criteria for comparison purposes)

Observations or measurements can be taken at multiple points after the intervention has been conducted to determine the longer-range effects of the intervention against the comparisons or the controls.

Examples 4.8 and 4.9 describe the use of a pre-post test design to assess program or treatment effectiveness.

Example 4.8

Using experimental design to assess language arts programs

A group of elementary teachers wanted to know which of four language arts programs was most effective for non-English-speaking immigrant children. They decided to run pilot studies to examine each of four possible series of materials. During the summer, they each underwent training in how to use the programs. Then they recruited volunteer children from among the immigrant communities in the area and randomly assigned them to five different groups. Then they administered a test of English language ability to all the volunteers. For the pilot study, four of the groups of children received instruction in language arts, each using a different one of the four programs under discussion. The fifth group of children participated in a play program and received no language arts instruction at all. At the end of the summer, the teachers readministered the test of English language proficiency to all five groups and compared the results. They inferred that the program used by the group with the highest test scores was the most effective. They also assumed that the group receiving the lowest scores might be the group that received no language arts treatment at all.

Example 4.9

Using experimental design to assess wound treatment

A group of medical researchers were interested in determining which conditions best promoted the healing of superficial wounds: cleaned and exposed to air only; cleaned and bandaged; or cleaned, treated with antibiotic salve, and then bandaged. To determine which worked best in field conditions, patients with similar wound conditions were randomly assigned to groups, each of which was subjected to a different “treatment condition.” After a specified period of time, the healing rates were compared to see which worked best.

In the examples above, the intervention or treatment varied, but the condition treated—lack of English proficiency in the first case and existence of wounds in the second—remained the same in both groups. In a good experiment, the researchers try to make sure that the only difference between the subjects—or patients and students, in the examples above—is in the treatment or intervention they receive. In some experimental research, one group of subjects—the control group—will receive no treatment at all or will receive whatever has been the standard or traditional treatment. Effectiveness of the treatment or intervention is measured by assessing differences among all the treatment conditions, including the control group (which has received limited, standard, or no treatment), a specified time AFTER they have been

treated.

In many cases, researchers cannot establish a real "control group" because it would be unethical not to treat people who are injured or in need of a program or because the regular or standard treatment is known to be inadequate (Rapkin and Trickett 2005; Shadish, Cook, and Campbell 2002). For this reason, many medical and educational programs use multiple "comparison" groups rather than the traditional control group.

Example 4.10

An ethnographic experimental design with multiple comparison groups

In an NIMH-funded five-year study directed by a U.S./India Interdisciplinary Team consisting of an anthropologist and cultural psychologist, the intent was to reduce sexual risk behavior among married men by addressing "gupt Rog," a culturally based set of symptoms signaling sexual concerns linked to unprotected sex. The study took place in three similar urban, low-income communities in Mumbai that were randomized into two intervention communities and one control community. The intervention was developed in conjunction with health providers trained in Western medicine and providers trained in homeopathy, Ayurvedic practice, and Unani Muslim-based medical traditions, referred to as AYUSH. In the two intervention communities, allopathic providers (community 1) and AYUSH providers (community 2) tailored their intervention to the stories men told about their sexual and other health concerns. This allowed for comparison of intervention effectiveness between two different types of providers in similar communities. At the same time, the research team was concerned that one community might be left with no intervention, so they decided to offer a community prevention program via street dramas in all three communities, thus holding the "community level intervention" constant. This decision satisfied the conditions of randomization while at the same time meeting the ethical concerns of the project directors (Schensul, Verma et al. 2004; Schensul, Mekki-Berrada et al. 2006; Schensul, Nastasi et al. 2006).

Example 4.9 above includes multiple comparison groups so that no patient went untreated. Example 4.8, however, *could* have a real control group because their experiment took place during an optional summer program, not the regular school year. Thus, the control group was not deprived of regular classroom instruction. The primary ethical considerations in the implementation of interventions that involve treatment and "control" or "comparison groups" are whether there are risks associated with withholding or delaying treatment or intervention in a comparison group; whether the quality of a standard treatment or intervention is sufficient to warrant including it without upgrading it; and whether there are negative social consequences of random assignment of individuals to one or the other of the study groups.

Experimental researchers make every effort to make sure that both the administration of the intervention and the characteristics of participants in each of the groups are as similar as possible. In the first example above, results would not be valid if the children in one of the

groups already had had some instruction in English or if one of the teachers were much more competent than the others. Similarly, the researchers' inferences about the effectiveness of healing treatments could be questioned if the subjects in one treatment group were healthier or much younger than those in the other groups because rapid healing could be attributed to health or age rather than to the experimental treatment.

Experimental researchers try to assure comparability of groups by assigning subjects randomly to treatment groups. They assure what is called "procedural validity," or comparability of the treatment, innovation, or intervention by developing highly structured protocols for the teachers, medical personnel (in the examples cited above), practitioners, or other individuals who supervise the treatments being used and then train them in how to carry out the protocols precisely. Researchers then observe the results of the interventions. One limitation of experiments is that they usually must take place in a laboratory, clinical, or institutional setting; the kind of controlled and rigorous conditions required for true experimental designs—or even quasi-experimental designs (see Campbell and Stanley 1963; Cook and Campbell 1979; Reichardt and Cook 1979; Shadish et al. 2002)—rarely can be secured in the field. Notwithstanding, randomized assignment to treatment and control groups and educational counseling or prevention interventions standardized in curriculum or other instructional manuals now are occurring more often in field or community settings as well. Situations calling for standardized intervention manuals include treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDs, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy prevention, and intervention with people with mental health and drug abuse diagnoses. In these cases, the control group receives whatever the normal program or protocol would be.

Controlled Field Studies or Quasi-Experiments

True control groups often cannot be created. Further, differences among experimental subjects and in (or among) treatment administration(s) can lead to differences not legitimately produced by the intervention. While random assignment of subjects can reduce this problem, as we have noted earlier in this chapter, obligations to clients in schools, social service agencies, public health clinics, and most other real-world settings sometimes preclude not only random assignment but also no-treatment control groups. For example, federal laws in the United States prohibit withholding educational services from children with special needs. If the pilot study described in Example 4.8 had been carried out in public schools during the regular school year, none of the children could have been excluded from language arts instruction altogether. Even the control group would have had to receive whatever instruction had been offered to English Language Learners previously, so that researchers would have had to make comparisons among multiple treatment groups rather than a true control group. Similarly, AIDS research federal guidelines preclude the use of "no treatment control groups" precisely because known treatments for AIDS exist. Thus, in a recent AIDS research project "standard" and "enhanced" interventions were compared. The "standard" was a culturally sensitive but nonethnically specific intervention for an ethnically mixed group, compared to two "enhanced

interventions," one of which was specifically designed and targeted for African American injection drug users in one location and the other similarly designed and targeted for Puerto Rican injection drug users in another (Weeks et al. 1995).

A modification of the true experiment—the controlled field study—finds wide use in applied settings such as schools and clinics, where practitioners still want to know if their programs are effective or their hunches are valid but where the kinds of control over subject characteristics and assignment found in a lab cannot be maintained. Controlled field studies substitute for experiments when random assignment is not possible but where considerable control over how procedures are implemented still can be obtained. They take place not in laboratories but in the natural habitat or customary environment of the participants.

Example 4.11

A controlled field study of an arts education program

Centerfield Middle School wanted to set up an Arts Focus program that both integrated arts instruction with regular "hard" subjects and provided children with extended immersion in one of several arts disciplines. The school hired trained arts educators in theater and drama, music, and fine arts and helped each of them to establish an integrated curriculum to be offered daily for ninety minutes throughout the year. Recognizing that some parents wanted their children to receive less intensive instruction in the arts while others preferred electives other than arts courses, the school planned to establish three instructional streams: arts focus, arts electives, and regular electives. Students enrolled in the arts electives stream enrolled in regular "hard" subjects plus semester-long fifty-five-minute elective classes in arts classes of their choice. Children in the regular electives stream simply enrolled in the traditional program, a mix of hard subjects and whatever semester-long nonarts electives they chose, including computer science, gardening, special sports, or chess club. The school wanted to compare the impact of participation in the various streams on both academic achievement and interest in school. They planned to collect regular achievement test data for all the students before the school year started and to administer an attitudinal survey assessing how committed students were to their studies at the beginning of classes. They administered the survey and collected the test scores again at the end of each subsequent school year, matching the pretest and posttest scores for each of the children to assess changes over time and compared the changes across streams.

Example 4.11 above is a controlled field study; it takes place in the natural habitat of middle school children—a public school. It would be a VERY controlled study (a "true experimental study") if the children could be randomly assigned to each of the curricular streams, thus ensuring that differences among the groups would be minimized. However, because it is a public school, Centerfield must permit students—or their parents—to choose their stream. Notwithstanding, the streams themselves constitute quite different "treatments," and both the training received by teachers and the existence of a curriculum and instructional

materials assure both comparison and a degree of **procedural validity**.

Definition: Procedural validity refers to the preciseness with which a study or an intervention is implemented according to its research design

Pretest and posttest measures also have been established, and the school's plan to aggregate matched individual scores on these measures assures some degree of reliability in the results. Centerfield's teachers also can examine the characteristics of students in the different streams for differences in aptitudes, ability, gender, race, socioeconomic status, and other variables to permit more valid comparisons among the groups by controlling for these factors in analysis.

Case control studies are another approach to quasi-experimental study design. Case control studies often are done by epidemiologists interested in why disease or death occurs in one group but does not in another, presumably similar or even identical, group. The term ***case control*** refers to the selection of cases fitting the study criteria in which the so-called problem is present and is matched with similar controls in which the problem is absent. The objective is to determine what differences exist between these two groups that might explain the presence of the problem in the cases. The samples for case control studies are usually obtained through accrual—that is, as the instances of the problem occur in the selected population, they are included in the study sample, and a match that does not show the presence of the problem at that time is selected.

Definition: Case control refers to the selection of cases demonstrating the presence of a problem matched with controls that have similar characteristics but in which the problem is absent

Example 4.12

Case control study of acute respiratory infection in China

Pneumonia is the most common killer of children between the ages of zero and five in certain areas of China. The Chinese government, working with a government research center, the Capital Institute of Pediatrics in Beijing, set out to determine why. One strategy they chose was a case control study. To do this study, researcher Dai Yaohua chose a region of China in which reported deaths from pneumonia were especially high. Over the period of a year, she was able to accrue a hospital-based sample of approximately 400 households in which a child had died of pneumonia. As households with a death of a child in the target age group entered the sample, she was able to choose a matched sample of children of the same age who had been reported with severe pneumonia but survived. She was then able to determine, by systematically comparing households and disease history, what factors associated with the health history of the child, household demography and economics, beliefs about the disease, and beliefs about the health care system were most likely to contribute to mortality.

Limitations on Controlled Field Studies and Quasi-Experiments

Even in controlled field studies, where messiness caused by variability among the subjects themselves can be accounted for by matching participants and describing naturally occurring differences among the groups, procedures can go awry for a myriad of reasons. This can lead to results not attributable to the intervention.

Example 4.13

Procedural problems in a field study of playground use

An urban Parks and Recreation Department was trying to reduce the incidence of aggressive behavior among children of different age groups who frequent the parks. A local sporting goods company offered to donate recreational equipment for use on the playgrounds if the Department would hire an aide to supervise its use. The Department staff agreed and planned to compare the number of police reports and parental complaints received from playgrounds with and without aides and equipment. The program started late, however, when a fiscal crisis prevented the aides from being hired until late July. At the end of the summer, there appeared to be no difference between the behavior observed among children at playgrounds with aides and those without. The sporting goods company deemed the program to be a failure and withdrew its support, even though the program actually had been implemented for less than a full month and not as intended.

Example 4.14

Procedural problems and disasters in a field study of bilingual education

The number of Limited English Proficient students at Highlands Elementary School recently tripled. Sally Ames, a committed and creative teacher at the school, convinced her principal to let her establish a bilingual program that supported instruction in both Spanish and English for the students. After the first year, the principal transferred to another school, but Sally's enthusiasm had already convinced the remaining teachers in her school to learn Spanish and begin to implement a three-year program of dual language instruction for all the children in the school. The new principal somewhat reluctantly agreed to continue the experiment. However, while on a Caribbean scuba-diving vacation during the Christmas holidays, Sally drowned. Having lost both its inspirational leader and a supportive principal, the program faltered, and by the end of the second year, the school had reverted to a more traditional program of transitional bilingual education that used Spanish for two or three years only, and only as a support to early exit into full-time instruction in English (Martinez 1998).

Was either of these programs a failure? Probably not. These kinds of crises, changes, and catastrophes are the reality of everyday life in the field. A limitation of experimental approaches or controlled field studies is that they assume that no factor other than the intervention could have produced the observed results. When they focus only on measurement of outcomes and do not document the treatment process itself, they cannot provide any information about what factors other than the intervention could have influenced the results. Thus, for example, the sporting goods company deemed the donation of its equipment to have been a failure, ignoring the fact that the program didn't begin until the summer had nearly ended and before measurable differences among playgrounds could have accrued. Similarly, researchers trying to assess the effectiveness of the bilingual program after three years using only a pre-post test of proficiency in English and Spanish would declare the program ineffective—ignoring the loss of key personnel and the change in program design halfway through its implementation. For these reasons, ethnographic research directed to careful description of the program context and process is a necessary complement to quantitative research designs.

Qualitative Designs

Researchers do not always ask questions about causality alone. Often, what they really need to know is what actually happened in a setting. Even in experimental research, researchers may need to collect information about the processes of implementation of a project to help explain the results obtained—as was the case in some of the situations described above and in earlier chapters when researchers found that their designs did not match with conditions of life that emerged in the field or when they could not force circumstances to conform to conditions and stipulations required for good experiments or controlled studies. It should be noted that these questions, especially when set in the context of evaluation of program outcomes, also are about causality. For example, the qualitative work that is built into a description of project implementation is directed to exploring what factors, in interaction, might explain either anticipated or unanticipated results.

Cross Reference: Examples 2.4, 4.1, 4.14, in this book

Different kinds of research questions require different approaches to investigation. Thus, researchers must construct research question to best match the type of program or phenomenon that they plan to study. In intervention research or program evaluation, for example, rather than asking, "Does this program work?," "Which is the best program?," or "Is this program effective?," researchers may find that they need to address questions such as the following:

- What does program adoption mean, and how can we define and operationalize it?
- Why do people say that they are adopting a program?
- What IS happening in the program?
- What is the program's history, and what currently is happening in it to contribute to the outcomes we observe?

• How can we explain the events and outcomes that DO occur?
• WHY is the program successful?

For such questions, qualitative designs such as case studies—and ethnographies are culturally informed case studies—are more appropriate because they allow us to assess and describe what really is happening after all as well as what is happening over time rather than at one point in time, or "pre and post." They also provide a way to document those events that impede or enhance success of participants' efforts.

Cross Reference: See chapter 1 of this book for the kinds of research questions most suitable for qualitative and ethnographic research

Other kinds of qualitative research questions can be raised. For example, a researcher interested in the use of drugs used in clubs and party settings might compare how similar types of drugs are marketed, sold, and used in downtown and periurban or suburban clubs and bars, what supports or inhibits this process, and whether there are different consequences associated with using these drugs in different environments. An asthma researcher could ask whether and how well young adults of color manage chronic asthma and whether contextual factors (peers, work setting, economic conditions) or access to care make a difference in control. For each of these projects, little or no prior research literature exists; thus the situation calls for qualitative and exploratory research.

In Table 4.4 we display the most common qualitative designs used in the social sciences.

Table 4.4 Standard Qualitative Designs Used in the Social Sciences

	Minimal Conditions for Appropriate Use	**Description**
Case Studies	• A population, process, problem, context, or phenomenon whose parameters and outcomes are unclear, unknown, or unexplored	Case studies usually focus on detailed examples of "cases"—individuals such as students, smokers, people with diabetes; institutions such as schools, clinics; or cultural settings such as festivals, parks, or political rallies. These "cases" are examined for patterns of similarities and differences.
	• An identified	

	and operationalized community, target population, or other unit of study	
Ethnographies	• A population, process, problem, context, or phenomenon whose characteristics, parameters, or outcomes are unclear, unknown, or unexplored but for whom the community, geosocially defined, can be bounded	Case studies usually focus on situating a problem in a specific community defined by geography or ethnicity. The study takes into consideration history, contextual present, culture, and ecologically and critically framed factors that relate to the study topic as it affects or is interpreted by individuals or institutions.
	• A defined or operationalized group	
	• Use of open-ended interviews and participant observation along with other tools of inquiry	

	• A concern with using cultural concepts to guide the research and help to explain or interpret data	
Narratives	• Individual(s) willing to tell stories, life, career, personal histories	Narratives or stories of aging, death, or dying in which individuals describe their life trajectories and how they are approaching death; career narratives in which people describe the history of their involvement in specific activities—baseball, drug use, a career in teaching, piano playing—and the links between their past experiences and the present. Narratives usually involve respondents in reflection on their own lives.
	• An interpretive framework based on the concepts and meanings used by a storyteller	
Compressed or Rapid Ethnographic Assessments or Focused Ethnography	• A focused intervention problem	Rapid ethnographies are used to obtain data quickly from multiple sectors of a community on a pressing issue or problem. Interviews, elicitation tools, and other techniques are used by many researchers, including lay researchers, to gather and synthesize as much information as possible to guide action.

	• Brief studies of three days to six weeks	
	• Use of a combination of elicitation techniques, focus groups, and key informant interviews to get information on a specific cultural domain needed for developing a culturally appropriate intervention	
Participatory Action Research	• A group of partners	Ethnographic research conducted in partnership with members of the community or organizations serving the community, or both, with the specific purpose of bringing about structural or cultural change. This approach is often referred to as community-based participatory research.
	• A specific agreed-upon concern	
	• An agreed-upon research design including data collection methods	

	• A plan for joint data analysis	
	• A planned use for the data	

Case Studies and Ethnographies

Case studies and ethnographies focus on a single unit for the investigation, whether it be a group of patients, as in clinical studies of mental or physical illness; a single but complex organization, such as a school district; or a collective farm that produces many different kinds of agricultural products. In the first instance, the case study focuses on the clinic. The individuals who use the clinic become part of the case study. Another type of case study involves a group of community residents. Example 4.1 described a study of dieters who live in a specific community and who attend a particular weight-loss clinic. The case study focuses on the community, the dieters, and the program they attend. Several examples above describe case studies of innovative educational programs. In chapter 5, Example 5.9 involves a case study of a very complex statewide program of competency testing for teachers. Studies of institutions might involve an entire school, agribusiness corporation, or health care facility. Despite the complexity of the institutions, such studies still would be considered case studies because the "N"—the unit of analysis that is to be investigated and described in the study—is one. Most, though not all, ethnographies focus on case studies that describe more than one subunit embedded in a single unit, whether that unit may be a community, school, group, or individual.

Ethnographies are case studies because of their focus on a single entity, but they differ from case studies in general in that, as we have indicated in the first part of this book and in Table 4.4, they always include in their focus the *culture* of the group or entity under study. That is why an ethnographic case study seldom focuses on an individual N of one person. That person cannot illustrate the culture of the group or larger entity under study other than to describe how he or she experiences it and to portray how he or she thinks other people in the community experience it—as traditional ethnographers once did. Other types of case studies —*not* ethnographies—are biographies, oral or clinical histories, and studies of innovations, group processes, organizational dynamics, or the characteristics of and interaction in any organization or group of people. Case studies usually are framed within a specific explanatory social or natural science discourse, a discipline such as psychology, history, or sociology, or an applied field such as social work, psychiatry, medicine, or education. That is why the TECAT program described in Example 5.9 is a case study and not an ethnography; it does emphasize process and description, but the description is not a cultural one. By contrast, the description of the Learning Circle Program presented in Examples 6.1 and 7.4 later in this

book is derived from an ethnographic study because one of the key features of the investigation was the delineation of the culture of the participants and how it influenced the culture created in the program. Similarly, LeCompte's studies of a Navajo school district (Examples 1.1, 1.6) and Schensul's studies of children's physical activities and AIDS risk in Mauritius (Examples 1.4 and 6.2) also would be considered ethnographies because of their focus on the culture of the community in which the studies were situated.

Ethnographies and other forms of case studies always involve a consideration of people and events in their natural habitat. They are, therefore, ideal for answering questions such as "What's really happening in this program, in this community or specific setting, or with this individual?" "How is this different from other processes in the community?" The focus of such research, then, is on what makes the people in the study tick. How do they behave? How do they define their multiple worlds? What is important to them? Why do they say and do what they do, and what structural or contextual features influence their thoughts, behaviors, and relationships?

Case study researchers and ethnographers typically live with or in the institutions or groups they are studying for extended periods of time because it requires a long-term, focused effort to become acquainted with the participants, an understanding of the dynamics of their interaction, an understanding of how they relate to the physical and material environment, and how to elicit the meanings, goals, and objectives that may be important to the participants. Ethnographies and other case studies all use participant observation and various forms of face-to-face, in-depth interviewing as the principal forms of data collection. Consequently they require that researchers develop rapport with and trust among the people under study over time. Notwithstanding, they also employ many other different kinds of data collection as supplements to and corroboration for observations, including:

- Formal and informal interviews
- Questionnaires
- Standardized tests and measurements
- Elicitation techniques
- Archival records
- Recordings, audiotapes, and videotapes
- Still photographs and photo-voice
- Artifact collection

Typically, ethnographers and other case study researchers find out what members of a group are doing and why by observing their actions and interactions and talking to them. In addition, they study the organization of the group and of the agencies and institutions that serve or relate to it. They try not to take for granted anything they see or hear, always cross-checking their own perceptions and conclusions with information from research participants and additional observations they themselves may have made at other times. They then assemble all the information they have collected into descriptions of relationships and recurring patterns of behavior and belief within institutional structures and larger policy-related and political and economic dynamics so that a full portrait of the group can be constructed.

Cross Reference: Book 3, chapter 5–7

Cross Reference: Book 3, chapter 9

Cross Reference: Book 3, chapter 9

Cross Reference: Book 4, chapter 3

Cross Reference: Book 4, chapter 3

Cross Reference: Book 4, chapter 7

Cross Reference: Book 4, chapter 8

Cross Reference: Book 4, chapter 1

Narratives

In recent years, some researchers have come to study single individuals in a kind of research called **narrative inquiry** (Clandinin and Connelly 1994). A relatively new form of research design, narratives obtained from different people and sources can be used to assemble a composite picture of a group's experiences. Such narratives resemble life histories or oral histories, but they focus on a particular problem or address a specific slant on that life history.

Definition: Narrative inquiry is the study of individual people's stories. It involves collecting and analyzing written texts that include aspects of a person's history and lifestyle that lead up to and may explain their current situation

Anthropologists use life histories or other narratives to understand the role and experience of individuals, which may be unique to their time and setting but patterned across individuals during that period of time and place. It is also common for anthropologists to collect narratives or accounts of specific experiences (e.g., narratives of entry into drug use, narratives describing the most recent experiences in treating a health problem, or managing encounters with teachers in a child's school). Generally, narratives produce text data in the form of transcribed interviews that provide rich descriptions of particular events, situations, or personal histories.

Anthropology has a long history of using the accounts of single individuals, commonly called **key informants** or cultural experts, to contribute to the development of a picture of the beliefs and practices of a community. Key informants typically are chosen because they are quite knowledgeable about their own culture and also are willing and able to communicate with anthropologists.

Definition: Key informants are individuals who are knowledgeable about their own

culture, experts in specific areas of their culture, and able to explain the ways of their culture to outsiders

However, there are distinct differences between the purposes of stories told by key informants and those produced by participants in a narrative study. The anthropologists' focus remains on the culture of the group, and the stories collected from key informants are not seen as representative of the individual's practices, beliefs, and values, but rather as representative of or as *typifying* all members of the group. Of course it is always wise to remember that key informants constitute only one source of information, and key informants, with their own experiences and sources of bias, can be wrong, or partially wrong. This makes conducting interviews with everyday residents all the more important.

Unlike ethnographers, narrative researchers require no similar and necessary cultural referent; the stories they collect are viewed as representative of the experience of the individual storyteller alone. Narratives also differ in that they create a text that explicitly describes the narrator in terms of four directions: Events that hark *back* toward the past, events or phenomena that anticipate movement *forward* toward the future, descriptions of *inward* states or feelings held by the narrator, and *outward* or horizontal elaboration of the narrator's context, environment, current activities, and associates (Clandinin and Connelly 1994). Further, many narrative researchers adhere to the belief that narrative inquiry should involve particularly egalitarian relationships between the researcher and subject. Not only is the story being told co-constructed but also the researcher's story is shared with the participant and becomes an integral part of the research (Bloom 2003). This sense of shared meaning construction is a highlight of postmodern and feminist notions of the researcher's role. Finally, the rules of narrative interviewing generally call for three-part interviewing in which the first interview focuses on history and an overview of the topic, the second explores in detail important issues that emerge in the first, related to the topic, and the third addresses the most sensitive dimensions of the topic. In this way, the interviewer builds intimacy and increasing knowledge leading to better questions about the most salient dimensions of the issue. At the same time the respondent has the opportunity to gain trust, deepen self-reflection and personal understanding, and become comfortable with the interviewer. These factors increase the salience, sensitivity, and accuracy of the most challenging dimensions of the interview.

Strictly speaking, narratives are constructed through face-to-face interaction with the speaker, though they also can be constructed from a variety of other sources. Sometimes these texts originate in books or articles. They can be created from plays, court transcripts, films and videotapes, or even from the stage directions used to direct such productions. However, most often they are generated by individuals in the course of talking about or recording their life experiences. They usually start out in the form of entries in diaries or journals or as interview transcripts or oral histories elicited by researchers. They also can be generated digitally in workshops or recorded conjointly in photo-voice sessions. Narratives focus on knowledge, beliefs, behavior, and personal reflections and insights. They are used to study how people practice their professions, how they learn to carry out tasks, how they come to know about

their world, and how they experience transitions that take place while aging. They also are used to highlight the experiences of people who have been oppressed or marginalized where they live. In the latter cases, narratives often are defined as "giving voice" to people whose experiences are not well known in the mainstream of their society. Finally, narratives can be used to present the multiple perspectives held by different individuals in a given setting (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

The format of a narrative interview should reflect the cultural style of personal "storytelling." For this reason, as with any tailored in-depth interview format, narrative interviews should not be forced into either the structure of "grand narrative," with plot, setting, characters, conflict, conflict resolution, and a moral or summing up (Heath 1996) or other interviewer-generated structure. Particularly when talking with individuals whose culture is not informed by Western European and North American-style grand narratives or with youth whose peer groups actively reject such narrative structure (Heath 1996), ethnographers need to take care not to impose such structures on the discourse of participants—if, in fact, what is desired is the discourse style of the participant (see LeCompte 1997 for a discussion of the pitfalls involved in such imposition).

Some research theorists argue that narrative, by itself, does not constitute a research design. Rather, they hold that narrative is a data collection technique that can be used fruitfully in a variety of research designs, including oral historiography, ethnography, and case studies. Notwithstanding, we include narrative here among the designs discussed primarily because it has become so widely used to call attention to details of practice as well as to the experiences of marginalized individuals, especially in the fields of education, gender, and health.

We now move to a discussion of three approaches to research that are often called research designs but more properly should be called modifications of qualitative or ethnographic research designs for specific purposes. These approaches are introduced here in Book 1 and are discussed in more detail throughout the books in the **Toolkit**.

Rapid or Compressed Research

There are many occasions when resources of time, money, and staff do not permit a full-fledged ethnography, even though it is clear that an ethnography would be the most appropriate design. In these cases, some methodologists have designed modifications of traditional ethnography to accommodate to shortened timelines and/or multiple sites. We refer to these approaches as "compressed ethnographic designs." Others may call them rapid assessments or focused ethnographic studies (e.g., Pelto and Gove 1992; Scrimshaw and Gleason 1992; Beebe, 2001; Handwerker, 2001). Compression is possible under certain circumstances. First of all, data collection techniques must be capable of being used conveniently in a brief period of time. Favored for this purpose are cultural elicitation techniques such as pilesorts, free lists (e.g., for types of health problems, sports, common foods, types of nonprescription drugs used, pets people keep, ways of teaching English Language Learners, different groups of students in a high school and other cultural domains) and discussion of their meaning; individual and group

interviews with representative samples of individuals (see Book 3, chapter 8 on focused group interviews); in-depth interviews with cultural experts or "key informants"; and brief surveys administered to small representative samples. Triangulation of these multiple data sources is necessary to produce a comprehensive and consistent picture of a specific cultural domain.

Other considerations also are critical if compressed designs are to produce valid data. First, the ethnographers already should be somewhat familiar with the field setting and/or the cultural context, and, ideally, they must speak the language of the local people. Second, the work should be focused on one aspect of the culture. It cannot attempt to cover a wide spectrum of beliefs and behaviors in different cultural domains. For example, focused ethnographic studies can be conducted on symptoms of infant diarrhea for purposes of improving diagnosis and treatment (but not on childhood diseases in general) or on environmental barriers to millet production (but not on barriers to agricultural production in general). Third, ethnographers may not be familiar with the local setting. In such cases, "outsiders" may partner with "insiders" who are members of the group under study and who understand and can explain local cultural practices and meanings. Working with local experts or partners speeds the work and ensures validity. These partners can assist in establishing the context for the data collection, participate in designing the research, and help in interpreting the results. This can avoid mistakes deriving from the researcher's lack of familiarity with the setting.

Example 4.15

Triangulation in a multisite rapid assessment of nutrition and primary care

Anthropologist Susan Scrimshaw reported on a United Nations University–funded sixteen-site investigation of nutrition and primary care conducted from a household perspective. Group interviews (conversations on an informal basis with informants or small groups) and focus groups (small, homogenous groups gathered for structured group discussions of appropriate research topics) were part of the repertoire of data collection techniques used in this rapid assessment project.

In Scrimshaw's study, triangulation involved repeated questions, discussion, and actual observation, looking for the same information or information on the same topic. The study focused on poor and rural households with children under five. Random sampling was possible in nine countries, but not the others. Purposive or opportunistic sampling was more feasible and "concerns for representativeness could be honored by a strong awareness of what was typical or deviant for the culture." Also, "families could be added to the sample if greater numbers seemed necessary because of a wide variability in responses" (p. 31). Scrimshaw notes that "the RAP [rapid assessment procedure] is best done by researchers either from or familiar with the cultural setting who are starting with an already existing good basis of information." But she cautions that "even where researchers are local (i.e., nationals),

communities may be wary of outsiders" (Scrimshaw 1992).

Action Research Approaches

Another adaptation involves research specifically designed to bring about clear institutional or community structural change. Some researchers call this approach "action research"; others reserve the term for research designed specifically to eliminate structural inequalities such as limited- or poor-quality mental health services for poor rural residents, gaps in computer and library resources in low-income urban schools, or preferential hiring of more highly skilled workers in private hospitals in urban areas of Sri Lanka. Still other methodologists differentiate between action research (Greenwood and Levin 1998) and PAR, or Participatory Action Research, an advocacy approach (Schensul and Schensul 1978). Over the past decade a new field of research in public health has arisen, referred to as community based participatory research. Though most authors in this field are not anthropologists, the work done by these public health researchers has been influenced by ethnography, is community-based, rests on partnerships, and is directed toward solving a disparities-related issue in public health (Minkler and Wallerstein 2003; Israel, Eng et al. 2005). No matter the discipline, however, action research is site specific, problem focused, and involves researchers and participants in four specific steps: (a) the identification of a problem, (b) the joint conduct of research to gain better understanding of the problem, (c) joint analysis of research results, and (d) taking action to remedy the problem. Researchers and participants engage in all of these steps as partners, including joint action (Schensul and Schensul 1978; Stringer 1996). The following example illustrates the interaction of these steps.

Example 4.16

Using rapid assessment and action research to establish a women's health initiative in India

Kanani describes a project in India that combined the use of rapid assessment procedures with action research. A nongovernmental organization interested in folk perceptions of women's morbidity as the backdrop for establishing a women's health initiative began a project in two urban, low-income slum areas differing by religion (Muslim versus Hindu). An important outcome of the project was expected to be the establishment of a health center for women in each slum; this was a strongly felt local need. "Open a health center for us and you will know all about our health problems." The sample included married women between the ages of twenty and fifty with at least one child who were likely to have heard about women's illnesses arising from marriage and motherhood. Center staff used a combination of focus groups, free listing and pilesorting, ethnographic interviews, narratives, and key informant interviews. There were nineteen group interviews with about fifteen women in each group. The focus group discussions were to build rapport with women and to get the general framework of women's morbidity—types, etiology, treatment.

At first, researchers carried out informal interviews with naturally forming groups (or

networks) in neighborhoods. Later groups were systematically formed by including an equal number of older (age forty and up) and younger (ages twenty to thirty) women in neighborhood-based groups of approximately fifteen to eighteen women. The group discussions helped to build rapport with women and provided a framework for their health problems, including reproductive health. Participants encouraged their neighbors to describe their problems freely, thus providing considerable data on women's morbidity, local terms used by the women to describe health problems, and perceived etiologies and treatment patterns. Participants in focus groups located women leaders to help out with research and subsequent planning for health services and to decide priorities for subsequent research (Kanani 1992).

Ethnography is very useful in defining the problem, the cultural setting, and the action research partners in the first stages of an action research project. The most important consideration in conducting responsible action research is that the results are likely to be subjected to scrutiny by multiple audiences and critics. These include the research partners, research participants, public and private institutions, and the media and the scientific community. Great pains must be taken to ensure the rigor of the research and the appropriateness of the research design to all audiences since so much rests not only on the existence of valid and reliable results but also on research results that are seen as legitimate by the various audiences. If one of the main audiences for the research will only believe the results of a survey, focus group research will not result in a successful outcome. For action research to bring about the desired change, ethnographers must do an ethnography not only of the problem but also its social and political context, so that obstacles to change can be identified and change strategies seen as illegitimate to participants are not adopted.

Mixing Designs: Integrating Quantitative and Experimental with Qualitative Research Designs

Earlier in this chapter, we stated that qualitative and quantitative research designs are not mutually exclusive. Although some researchers are "purists" and prefer to do either qualitative or quantitative work, we believe that the best research uses features of both qualitative and quantitative designs to complement and strengthen each other. Below, Table 4.5 summarizes some of the main ways that qualitative methods can be integrated with quantitative design features. Table 4.6 demonstrates how, by contrast, quantitative methods can be implemented with qualitative research designs as readers plan out their research designs.

Table 4.5 Mixed Methods: Using Qualitative Research Methods with Quantitative Research Designs

Quantitative Design Type	Role of Ethnographic or Qualitative Research
Cross-sectional research: Population and Sample	**In Preparation for a Survey**

Surveys	
	• Identification of the problem and context
	• Identification of the range of responses
	• Identification of target population members and their characteristics, locations of target population members, and possible barriers to implementation of survey research
	As Complementary Data
	• For identification and exploration of social subgroups
	• To explain patterned variation in survey results
	• To explain patterned variation in survey results To explain external events and contextual problems that may have affected responses
Experiments	**In Preparation for an Experiment**
	• Identification of relevant and appropriate elements of the experiment
	• Identification of constraints to experimentation in the field
	• Pilot testing intervention or instruments for acceptability and feasibility
	• Developing and validating measures of change
	Explaining the Process of Implementation

	• Identifying possible differences in implementation of intervention between groups
	• Identifying external factors that might have affected implementation
	• Documenting content of intervention for comparison with outcome measures
Quasi-Experiments, Controlled-Field Studies, and Case-Control Studies	**In Preparation for an Experiment**
	• Identification of relevant and appropriate elements of the experiment
	• Identification of potential differences among treatment and control groups
	• Identification of constraints to experimentation in the field
	• Pilot testing of instruments or interventions for acceptability and feasibility
	• Developing and validating measures of change
	Explaining the Process of Implementation
	• Identifying possible differences in implementation of intervention between groups
	• Identifying external factors that might have affected implementation

	• Documenting content of intervention for comparison with outcome measures

Table 4.6 Mixed Methods: Using Quantitative Methods with Qualitative Research Designs

Qualitative Design Type	Role of Quantitative Research
Case Studies	• Survey to confirm and validate participant defined patterns
	• "Case control" matched sample to identify factors associated with presence or absence of element (e.g., disease, school performance, drug use)
Ethnographies	• Survey to confirm and validate ethnographically defined participant concepts and patterns
	• "Case control" matched sample to identify factors associated with presence or absence of element (e.g., disease, school performance, drug use)
	• Time series design (repeated observations of the same units over time) to define change more accurately
Narratives	• Survey to demonstrate presence of patterns revealed by narratives, using language and concepts of participants
Compressed or Rapid Ethnographic Assessments or Focused Ethnography	• Brief cross-sectional surveys with small samples
	• Brief pre-post test surveys and panel designs for assessing intervention
Participatory Action	• Use of both qualitative and quantitative design features to accomplish the purpose designated by the problem

Research	and the partnership

Now that we have discussed the design options available to ethnographers as they begin their work, we turn in chapter 5 to a discussion of the decision-making process that researchers use to choose ethnographic designs and the strategies employed to design them.

Note

1. *Validity* has several meanings. At its broadest, validity refers to the "goodness," authenticity, credibility, and quality of the research (Guba and Lincoln 1994). In experimental research, *internal validity* refers to the degree to which what happens in an experiment can be attributed to the experimental intervention that is the focus of the study (Campbell and Stanley 1963; Porter 1978; LeCompte and Preissle 1993). In sample surveys and in experiments for which populations are chosen randomly, validity also refers to how accurately the results obtained describe the larger population from which the study sample was drawn (Campbell and Stanley 1963; Jaeger 1978; Porter 1978; LeCompte and Preissle 1993).

5

Choosing and Designing an Ethnographic Research Project

We already have discussed the characteristics of ethnography and its paradigms and purposes in chapters 1 through 3; in chapter 4 we presented design options that ethnographers can use. To summarize what we have said so far, ethnography is an appropriate choice if the purpose of an ethnographic research project is to

- Determine the characteristics of a population
- Define a social problem
- Figure out which problems need solving
- Describe how people in a group explain and interpret their worlds
- Present what people do and why
- Provide information that will assist in planning a project
- Document a process
- Provide ongoing feedback to practitioners
- Monitor implementation, or find out what is going on
- Provide information that will help to interpret or explain outcomes

Where Do Research Questions Come From?

The work of most social science researchers or good investigative reporters begins with basic

questions— “What do I want to study?” “Where can I find it?” “Who is involved in the phenomenon?” “When does it occur?” “How is it organized?” “How did it begin?” “Why does it exist?” and “What purposes does it serve?” Below we describe how ethnographers begin to answer these questions.

Community groups, teachers, or health care providers who find themselves in need of information also can identify research questions or topic areas.

Key point ***Research designs begin with questions researchers and their partners want to answer about a particular problem, population, process, project, or topic they want to explore.***

Example 5.1

An arts education program solicits an evaluation, but the research question is unclear

A middle school in a Midwestern community decided to set up an arts program that would provide all its students with an intensive exposure to theater, music, and the literary and visual arts. The lead teacher contacted a researcher in the nearby state university to assist in doing a study of the program, knowing that evaluative information would help the school in seeking funding for the coming year and that documentary evidence of successes and failures would assist the teachers in improving the program over time.

In this case, teachers in the field situation identified the general topic for the study, but the research questions needed to be specified and clarified by teachers and researchers working together.

Key point ***Research questions also may come from the brainstorming of collaborative groups or the specific interests and commitments of anyone involved in formulating the question.*** One group of mothers in a training program for women in Hartford, Connecticut, for example, wanted to know whether a program for mothers and daughters would make a difference in helping young girls to avoid sex- and drug-related risks. This led to the creation of a five-year program to actually test this question (Schensul, Berg, and Romero 1997; Nastasi and Berg 1999). In another such example, residents and managers of residences in which older adults were living were worried because many residents did not want to leave their apartments and one resident had to be hospitalized for depression. They contacted researchers to request a partnership that would investigate the reasons for and extent of depression in older adults. The study resulted in a three-year project and an intervention (Schensul, Robison et al., 2006; Robison, Schensul et al., 2009).

Many researchers who come from minority, oppressed, or stigmatized groups choose to study the experiences of their own groups. For example, Andrea O’Conor (1994/1995), an educational researcher who also is a lesbian has studied the development of gender identity in

gay, lesbian, and heterosexual youth; Concha Delgado-Gaitan (1988), Angela Valenzuela (1999), Norma Gonzalez (2002), and many other Latino researchers who remember their own negative experiences in school have documented how treatment in schools leads Mexican American and Latino children to academic failure. Evelyn Phillips, an African American urban anthropologist, studies the construction and deconstruction and forced migration of African American and other urban communities (1996). Ken Williamson, an African American anthropologist, became involved in action research with African American and West Indian community activists (Schensul, Berg, and Williamson 2008).

Example 5.2

Selection by research site: A community coalition initiates a study

When informed by Centers for Disease Control (CDC) colleagues in 1986 that the pattern of HIV/AIDS transmission was shifting to infection via drug use, a coalition of community organizations in Hartford, Connecticut, representing several different ethnic/racial groups decided to mount a series of studies to find out how accurate the CDC's report was. The purpose of the research was to provide information that might prevent the spread of AIDS among intravenous drug users in Hartford's communities (Schensul 1998; Schensul et al. 1999; Singer 1999).

Key point ***For many researchers, questions arise out of the tasks they engage in at their own workplace.*** Others develop from requests for research by specific agencies or organizations. Private philanthropists and foundations, for example, often sponsor research congruent with the interests of their supporters.

Example 5.3

Selection by interested party: Initiation of cancer research by a cancer survivor

A successful Utah-based businessman donated several million dollars to the University of Utah to establish a cancer research institute. The businessman and many members of his entire extended family had suffered from unusually high rates of cancer. Dissatisfied with the success rates of cancer treatments, he charged the newly established institute with finding cures for the disease. In a similar Connecticut-based example, the Ethel P. Donaghue Medical Foundation, consistent with the will of the founder who was dedicated to health research of practical benefit, offered opportunities for research in cardiovascular problems and diabetes.

Key point ***Researchers also may find that funding initiatives generate new questions.***

Current medical research is heavily influenced by the kinds of funding available. HIV/AIDS, cancer, and heart disease, for example, are the most heavily funded—and therefore studied—diseases in the United States, notwithstanding that many other diseases affect just as many people. By contrast, until recently, disease prevention, which receives little money from governmental or private sources, has received correspondingly little attention from researchers despite its overall importance for public health. Funders of educational research also shape research initiatives and directions; those that are politically hyped and funded get priority in research agendas regardless of how effective they might be.

It is important to note, however, that funders can and do shift their attention to new areas of concern when the public campaigns for support in these areas. For example, public advocacy created widespread support for drug prevention research, which resulted in the founding of the federal Center for Substance Abuse Prevention in 1987. In response, a scholarly infrastructure focused on prevention research arose practically overnight. Subsequently, as prevention of chronic, acute, and addictive diseases came to be viewed as reducing long-term health, medical, and social costs, the field of prevention evolved rapidly. Prevention research now has high visibility in the domain of public health with its own public and private funding streams, policy institutes, research centers, journals, society and annual conference (the Society for Prevention Research) and research technology.

Key point ***Scholarly or personal commitments also generate research questions.*** It is important to recognize that despite myths about the objective nature of scientific investigation, research projects are always to some degree affected by the personal training, preferences, political views, experiences, and even the neuroses of the investigators carrying them out. People choose to do the kinds of research and to explore particular research questions that are compatible not only with what they value but also with their own views about the nature of reality, what constitutes truth, and how knowledge is most appropriately sought, verified, and put to use. They also interpret data in accordance with the ideas and concepts that they have found meaningful, either as scholars or researchers or as practitioners in their particular field. Thus, for example, without additional social science training, persons trained in medicine are less likely to focus on the psychosocial and emotional correlates of disease. Educators trained to look at whether or not an instructional technique produced the desired effect will be more inclined to examine the *process* of what happened when they have had training in anthropology.

Deciding What to Investigate: Transforming Research Purposes into the Elements of a Research Design

Once a researcher has identified an initial interest or problem area, he or she then begins the process of transforming a very large and often vague problem area into a series of quite concrete elements of research design. These include

- WHAT: The specific issues and research questions related to the problem area

- WHY: The reasons or rationale for focusing on this area
- WHERE: The place or site where the study can be conducted
- WITH WHOM: The categories of people with whom the problem could best be studied
- WHEN: The time span needed to conduct the study
- HOW: The way in which relevant information can be located and collected
- WHO: Which people can provide access to the site, people, or sources for information needed to answer the questions

At this point, two important steps must be taken. As we have described earlier, ethnographic investigators tend to examine very complex phenomena. Consequently, ethnographic research designs tend to be similarly complex, if only because they involve many quite different kinds of people, use multiple information sources and tools, and take place over a relatively long period of time. All of these factors create opportunities for felicitous surprises—or daunting mishaps. While individual projects will vary in complexity depending on what the investigator is trying to find out, all researchers must first **operationalize** the components of their research questions, which means to define the kinds of data that will be needed to answer the research questions. Second, they must create a **research design**, or a comprehensive blueprint for the entire project.

Definition: Operationalization is the process of rendering observable or measurable the phenomenon of interest in the study

Definition: A research design is an overall plan for conducting a research project covering all steps—from raising the research question through data analysis

Answers to the first four questions above facilitate this process. Operationalization tells the researcher what to look for or observe and measure in the specific site and indirectly suggests whom to contact or observe. The research design spells out how this is to be done. The design encompasses all activities that occur throughout the project, including those that are usually thought of as taking place at the end (such as how data will be analyzed and results disseminated) and how the research team will disengage from participants and say good-bye. Even though the ethnographic process has built into it a good deal of flexibility and intuitive activity, it is not a haphazard, serendipitous, or playful activity. In fact, the apparent spontaneity of ethnographic work actually mandates a good, solid substructure or framework. This framework or substructure is provided by the research design.

Key point ***All good ethnographers try to create an overall design in which anticipated details and activities are spelled out as far as current information permits.*** Of course, this does not mean that research designs are etched in stone or that the conduct of ethnographic research follows a logical, linear sequence. Quite the contrary. Designs—and researchers—need to remain sufficiently flexible to allow for contingencies. It goes without saying, however, that flexibility often is predicated upon a firm foundation!

Putting Together the Elements of a Research Design

Once data are defined and the initial stages of operationalization take place, other elements of the research design can be determined. As we mentioned in earlier chapters, construction of any ethnographic research design occurs around a set of decisions about what the goals of the project are to be. With the research goals clearly spelled out, the design then can accommodate new opportunities for exploration, changes of direction, surprises, and emergencies—while at the same time remaining faithful to the original goals of the project. Just as the date of a traveler's return or the airline he or she uses for a trip might change from those initially set out by a travel agency, research activities also change in response to unforeseen conditions. If, as often happens in ethnographic research, new goals are added or old goals are reformulated during the course of the project, the design should change to accommodate these goal changes as the project evolves. Unless the researcher—or vacationer—has at least thought through an initial itinerary or set of activities and considered possible alternatives and contingencies, however, luck alone will determine whether investigators or travelers complete their projects as planned and arrive at their destinations unscathed.

Unlike hapless vacationers whose changes in plans simply leave them happy to be home, researchers must make sure that the reasons for change as well as the changes themselves can be accounted for and articulated fully each time circumstances call for modifications in their research design. If they cannot, the project will grow increasingly haphazard, and the results will be correspondingly haphazard in the end. In the worst-case scenario, the study will produce no worthwhile results at all. Further, poorly thought through changes can pose risks to participants, as we discuss in Book 6.

The Importance of Collaboration with People in the Field

It is at the initial design stage that collaboration with people in the field becomes especially crucial. If collaboration in some form has not already been initiated during the course of identifying the initial problem area, the researcher needs to establish these relationships immediately. Collaboration with people in the field is crucial during initial phases of the design process, especially if the researcher is an outsider hired to conduct the study or is doing it as an independently funded investigator. External researchers may be relatively familiar with the particular type of project and its internal workings but will not know who the participants, service providers, or clients are, exactly how records are kept, who has access to what kinds of information, and who is willing to talk with whom at the specific site. Even researchers who are working collaboratively as insiders or semi-insiders will need to ask a lot of questions of others so as to ensure that the research problems explored are ones relevant to the people in the project, that the data collection strategies delineated in the research design are workable, and that the analysis and dissemination plans are both reasonable and effective.

Cross Reference: See Book 1, chapter 6, figure 6.1, for an example of how these questions are laid out in a "data planning matrix."

Elaborating Research Questions

Often, an initial research question or purpose has multiple smaller questions embedded in it. In order to get at the bigger question, the smaller ones must be answered first. Figuring out what a research design entails necessitates elaborating a single, very complex question into its less complex components. The following is a case study of how an initial problem area was elaborated into a series of questions that established the basis for what to study (i.e., formed the framework for a research design).

Example 5.4

Elaboration of an initial problem into research questions about urban American Indian children: The Learning Circle Program

Margaret LeCompte was approached by the Educational Director of the Phoenix Indian Center to help develop an evaluation plan for a program for which the director was seeking governmental funding: The Learning Circle, an after-school cultural and educational enrichment program for urban American Indian elementary school children. LeCompte agreed to help with the project because of her interest in the education of ethnic minority children in general and American Indians in particular. The initial problem was to develop a way to evaluate a project that had already begun. The director sent LeCompte the original program plan and asked her to address two areas: how a) to describe what had happened during the project's three years, and b) to determine what impact, if any, the program had had on the children during that time. These questions, in turn, had to be broken down into descriptive questions about program operations and assessment questions about the program's impact.

The first set of descriptive questions involved finding out the identity and characteristics of the participants in the programs.

- Who was the project director, why was she selected, and what was her background, training, and philosophy?
- What teachers were involved in the program, and what was their background, training, and philosophy?
- How many students were enrolled in the program, how were they selected, and what were their characteristics and backgrounds?
- How many parents participated, what were their backgrounds, and why did they enroll their children?

The second set of descriptive questions involved describing what was happening in the substantive part of the program, including planning meetings, classroom instruction, home visits, parent activities, and field trips.

- Where and in how many schools was the program located?
- What kinds of activities occurred in the classrooms? on home visits? at parent meetings? on field trips?
- How many children and parents participated in these activities?
- What did the teachers do to organize and plan their activities?
- What was their curriculum?
- What problems occurred during the course of the program's implementation?

Program impact (the second study question) also had to be assessed. The researchers and staff decided to define impact in two ways. First, how did the various participants feel about the program? Second, did participation in the program produce any noticeable changes in the children it served? The first question—how did people feel about the program—was further broken down in terms of "stakeholders" or participants as follows:

- How do the *children* feel about The Learning Circle?
- How do the *parents* feel about their children's and their own participation in the program?
- How do The Learning Circle *teachers and aides* feel about the program?
- How do the *regular classroom teachers* feel about the program?
- What attitudes do the *principals and administrative staff* of the district have about the program?

The second assessment question regarding behavioral changes in children in the program was defined in terms of academic achievement and school attendance; it was broken down as follows:

- Have Learning Circle students shown greater gains on the standardized achievement tests administered in the district than comparable groups of other children who were not enrolled in The Learning Circle?
- Do Learning Circle students exhibit higher levels of attendance than students who aren't enrolled in the program?

In the course of collecting these data, easily obtained from district records, it became apparent that all participants in the program were profoundly affected by the cultural emphasis of the program in ways that were not tapped by the questions above or measured by test scores and attendance rates. This led to further questions:

- What special emphases and practices does The Learning Circle have that other enrichment programs do not have?
- n • How do American Indian staff from multiple tribal groups develop a cultural curriculum that can serve children who are themselves from many different tribes?
- How do The Learning Circle staff translate values common to American Indian culture into instructional activities?
- How do the teachers resolve their own interethnic conflicts during planning sessions?
- What differences do teachers and parents notice in the demeanor of The Learning Circle children before and after they have enrolled in the program?

The answers to these questions led the program staff and the researchers to still other questions:

- How can a culturally informed program be strengthened by integrating it with innovative new ways of thinking about how children learn?
- Can a program like The Learning Circle be used with multiethnic populations other than American Indians?

This case study example shows how research questions can evolve from ones that seem relatively straightforward and descriptive into others that become increasingly complex and more deeply informed by theory. The following is a case study from another project that illustrates a similar process of question elaboration.

Example 5.5

Evolution of a research problem from concrete questions to theoretically informed ones: Managing diabetes among Puerto Rican immigrants

Researcher Henrietta Bernal joined forces with the Institute for Community Research to conduct studies of diabetes management among older Puerto Rican adults in the Hartford, Connecticut, area. While carrying out these studies, researchers noted that most of the patients were women between the ages of sixty and eighty-five. Could diabetes be related to migration, length of time in the city, or changing dietary patterns? During the course of research it became clear that exercise was not part of the daily program of these women. Researchers began to ask a series of questions:

- Why did women not engage in what researchers called "exercise" even when they had the opportunity to do so, and what did they do in the way of energy expenditure instead?
- Could dietary continuities linked to early onset of adult type II diabetes be found from childhood to adulthood?
- Could the experience of migration be related to early onset of type II diabetes?
- Did women believe that diabetes could be more effectively managed so that early onset could be prevented?
- What were women communicating to their children regarding the likelihood of contracting diabetes and whether or not it could be prevented?
- Did women link diabetes with other chronic diseases of adulthood, such as arthritis and cardiovascular problems?

The research team began to question whether behavioral and structural antecedents to diabetes could be found among younger women in the same community. Prior research on infant and toddler feeding patterns pointed to the early and consistent intake of foods high in sugar, starch, salt, and fat content. Less understood and equally important in diabetes prevention and management was exercise. But researchers knew nothing about activity levels in both older adults and children. They began to ask new questions.

- In what activities did children engage?
- Were there differences among children within the same age group with respect to activities?
- Were different energy levels associated with different types of activities?
- To what extent did parent, peer, school, or environmental factors influence energy expenditures in younger children?
- Could these factors somehow be related to socialization practices and parental modeling in the household and the community?

Answers to these questions were available for working-class white children who were the target population for the Framingham Children's Heart Health Study, but they were not available for urban Puerto Rican or African American children. Nor were instruments available that were culturally or contextually appropriate for use with these groups.

Researchers at the Institute mounted a pilot study designed to develop and test instruments;

determine the range of variation in energy outputs among Puerto Rican children between the ages of seven and ten; test an activities recall questionnaire against a mechanical measure of energy outputs to determine how accurately children could report in what activities they engaged, and assess peer, environmental, and parental socialization factors as possible influences on choice and frequency of daily activities and energy expended. The gender-specific results of this study produced yet more questions:

- To what extent do gender differences in socialization influence girls' and boys' behaviors, and at what age do these differences become significant?
- What really influenced young girls to choose indoor activities with limited energy outputs?
- In what ways does gender intersect with migration and acculturation experiences and environmental factors (for example, structural flaws in building construction that inhibit exercise-related activities; perception of gang or street violence; fear of sexual harassment) to limit options for girls and young women?
- What is the relationship of these factors to mental health and prevention of chronic diseases in adult women?

Having decided WHAT needs to be known, the researcher then can begin to work out specifics of the research questions to be answered.

What Are Data?

How, then, do researchers know what to look for? Throughout **The Ethnographer's Toolkit**, we have used the term *data* as if its meaning were fully understood and consistently shared by all of our readers, regardless of discipline or field of practice. Because we feel this is not a good assumption, we here define its use in research. Strictly speaking, a ***datum*** can be thought of as a single piece of evidence; ***data***, the plural form, are the body of evidence used by researchers and other professionals to support an argument, make a case, describe a phenomenon, explain a process or occurrence, or establish a warrant.

Definition: A datum is a single item capable of being defined as evidence for claims and statements made in a research project; data are the entire body of such evidence

However, what serves as convincing evidence in some fields may not serve so well in others. Four factors determine the degree to which data in any field can serve as good evidence:

- If they constitute the type of information germane to the research questions;
- If they have been procured or generated in ways considered legitimate by the discipline or disciplines guiding the study;
- If the researcher has made a convincing argument as to their relevance to the research question; and
- If they can be warranted to be reliable and valid.

Data come in all forms, shapes, content, and sizes, and some fields are more comfortable with specific forms than others. Experimental researchers and those using structured surveys look for data in the form of numbers or symbols—quantities, frequencies, differences between quantities and qualities, scores on tests, and tallies or frequencies of categorical or scaled data. Often, too, they exist in alphanumeric form, in which alphabetic letters represent categories or classes of phenomena that then are enumerated and manipulated statistically. Though the numbers are spoken of as data themselves, in most cases, the numbers only represent the real data—they do not constitute actual items and classes of tangible, empirical objects.

Disciplines that privilege numeric or numeric-like data may believe that numbers are the only legitimate form of data. However, more important than the form of data itself may be how they are obtained. Usually numeric or alphanumeric data are collected in highly structured and controlled settings (paper and pencil, digitally scanned, or computerized surveys) or by using equally structured and controlled procedures, including quantified coding of text and artifactual or visual data. Those procedures assure researchers that the data are reliable and valid measures of the construct are under consideration. In this form, they can be subjected to statistical analysis.

This is, however, a limited notion of data or evidence. What if the data available and relevant are not numeric or cannot easily be converted to numerical form? The kinds of data used by ethnographers and qualitative researchers usually are not initially numeric, or even written down. They must be elicited and recorded by researchers. What if a researcher wants to know why a group of people chooses to live on the slopes of an active volcano, but no written work explains this in local terms? What if the objects of interest in a study are handwoven textiles? They cannot speak. How can they be transformed into data to make an argument? What if a researcher wanted to find out about how young men of color live with asthma but finds that there is no research literature on the topic? How can the information be elicited from the young men themselves?

Qualitative researchers tend to privilege meanings embedded in the written or spoken word, the observable event, and the artifacts of material culture; these must be teased out of "lumpier" and "messier" representations of phenomena, including written descriptions, recordings of talk, notes on observations, in-depth interviews or narratives, collections of documents and artifactual objects, photographs, maps, and all manner of "stuff" that must be transformed into data before it can serve as evidence. The collection of these materials is guided by questions and concepts that frame the study. The concepts may be "fuzzy" or emergent at the start of a study, but the materials gathered must somehow refer to these questions or concepts. If not, the researcher will find herself "stuck" with "stuff" that has little relevance to the study at hand and will produce interpretations with little cohesion or integrity in relation to the research question.

Cross Reference: See Chapter 3, Book 4 on the use of artifacts in research

What Are Ethnographic Data?

The reference point for all ethnography is the culture of community members, whose meanings, values, practices, ideas, and cultural ways of knowing ethnographers privilege over those of outsiders, including other researchers. Thus, virtually anything can be defined as ethnographic data, as long as the data are defined by and framed within the set of cultural practices and meanings specific to a given community. That is, researchers must seek to define as data those elements that present phenomena through the eyes of the community members themselves. The operational questions, then, are "How would I know what meaning members of this community attach to their various forms of behavior or the objects they make and use? How would I be able to elicit the reasons for why they act as they do? How would I recognize such a reason if it were presented to me?" These questions are not simple because communities are complex (composed of residents representing different ethnic, age, gender, and class groupings); they are multilevel, including policy makers, media representatives, organizations, families, peer networks, as well as individuals. And they may include many sectors (education, health, aesthetics, agriculture, culture, tourism, etc.). Thus there may be many perspectives and voices represented in a single "community." Ethnographers must take care to understand and represent the diversity of voices and perspectives in the communities they study. This is important regardless of which paradigm(s) they choose to frame their work.

Ethnographers and qualitative researchers, then, must determine which observable or recordable forms of activity or artifacts from the cultural scene they want to study can be used to answer those questions. Donna Deyhle, for example, wanted to know just how dependent on subsistence agricultural practices the Navajo families in the Four Corners whom she studied were. She knew that they depended in summer on produce from their gardens and meat from their own flocks of sheep. However, they could not produce all of the commodities they needed, and she did not want to ask the families to keep detailed records of their cash expenditures. She was, however, able to collect records from the only store in the local area of what food items, as well as kerosene and other staples, were ordered and sold by the storekeeper. Virtually all of the customers in the store were Navajos from the local area; the few tourists passing through bought very different items from those purchased by Indians. By operationalizing store purchase orders and receipts as data on participation in the cash economy, Deyhle obtained an idea of the families' relative participation in the subsistence and the cash economy—or what they did and did not produce themselves (Deyhle, personal communication 1998).

It is important to remember that valid ethnographic data on a specific topic can vary from community to community. In a more heterogenous community, for example, store records would not clearly distinguish variations among households in purchases or Navajo purchases from those made by other groups. Purchases made outside the community or from individuals rather than commercial establishments would also not be recorded. Similarly, scores on a test of reading, writing, and mathematics would not be good measures of student attitudes toward their classes or the degree to which an after-school program reinforced the students' ethnic identity.

Measures of alcohol consumption would be amiss if they did not include the specific types of alcohol drunk in a study setting, the alcohol content of each type of alcohol, and the size and shape of the containers that are used to drink it, all of which may differ from one community or part of a country to another. This is why operationalization not only must have construct validity in the standard sense but also must be embedded in what is valued, desired, and executable in the study setting. This often can only be achieved if researchers create investigative partnerships with local community members.

The Processes of Operationalization and Research Modeling

Once a research question or purpose has been defined, researchers next must figure out what kind of data will best serve as evidence to answer it. What kind of evidence, for example, will show why young artists want to participate in a program in which their original performances are designed to convince other youth to remain substance free (Diamond et al. 2009)? What will explain why members of a community refuse to participate in a literacy program? What will demonstrate why Mayan women continue to wear their handwoven garments when doing so marks them for ethnic discrimination (Ludwig 2006)? What factors contribute to poor management of asthma that results in hospitalization in young men of color? What might be barriers to female condom use for urban American women? What actions are teachers implementing to help children think of themselves as artists (Holloway and LeCompte 2001), and do they work? How can an explanation for the forces that impede integration of whites and Latinos in an isolated mountain community be elicited (Alleman 2009)? What will provide a picture of the extent to which Navajo families participate in a cash economy versus subsistence agriculture (Deyhle, personal communication, 1998)? What is the meaning of "depression" for older adults who describe themselves as having a depression problem when standard diagnostic instruments do not identify them as depressed (Robison et al. 2009)? Can these questions be answered simply by asking people in interviews or questionnaires? If so, who should be asked? If the potential respondents are neither literate nor accustomed to introspection, will they understand what the researcher is talking about? If the behaviors of interest are ones that people engage in more or less unconsciously, how can the researcher elicit the reasons for their actions? Can manifestations of the meanings be observed, even if the meanings themselves can't be? And if so, what should be observed? When during the course of a study does one decide what to look for or who to interview, and how should this be done? These questions are part of the process of operationalization.

Operationalization involves figuring out what observable or measurable elements can be defined that signify the presence of what the researcher wants to study. Another way of putting this is to ask, "How will I know 'it' when I see it?" where, as exemplified above, "it" involves phenomena such as the following:

- Reasons for program participation
- Reasons for nonparticipation
- Reasons for wearing traditional dress

•Factors accounting for inadequate asthma management
•Barriers to female condom access and use
•Student identity as artists
•Teacher behavior related to "being an artist"
•Obstacles to ethnic integration
•Meaning of depression for those not diagnosed as depressed
•Participation in the cash economy

These topics can be thought of as consisting of independent variables or variable domains (possible explanations for "outcomes" or conditions), such as barriers to female condom use or obstacles to ethnic integration, or dependent variables—the "it" that the researcher hopes to describe or explain (such as patterns of female condom use, or ethnic integration). But creating descriptions or explanations that serve to explain these "outcomes" or "dependent variables" requires something tangible to observe, record, or measure. Usually, the concepts of interest are abstractions, not empirical entities. These concepts or abstractions must be rendered more concrete by defining them in ways that make their presence or impact detectable. In the case of program effectiveness, instruments that measure how much more children in the innovative program learn than in a traditional program can suffice as "outcomes," as could measures of how much more the children like the new program. However, studies that identify and explain HOW these outcomes occur—studies that involve meanings, processes, and intuitive as well as planned actions or practices—are more complicated and involve not only asking questions and observing people's behavior but also making justifiable inferences about the meaning of what they say and do.

Example 5.6

Proclaiming and preserving Mayan identity through weaving

Sheryl Ludwig found that the abstract concepts of identity and culture were difficult for the Mayan women weavers whom she studied to articulate or to apply to their own lives. Asking them who they were and with whom they identified proved rather fruitless. Instead, she elicited from them concrete stories about the meaning of the various colors, designs, parts of the loom, and items of clothing they wove. She heard them argue that wearing their own weavings marked them as "women from San Marcos del Valle," who were known to be the best weavers in the country. They said that wearing their own weavings made them feel beautiful and safe. She also heard them explain to their children the meanings embedded in the weavings, telling them to remember the meanings so that they would always be Mayan people. They also explained to Sherri the way that the placement of looms in the house and the parts of the loom itself reflected Mayan cosmology. From information such as this, Ludwig was able to infer the importance to the women both of their weaving and their own identity as Mayan women (Ludwig 2006).

While the most common forms of data come from interviews, observations, or other measures of what people think or have done (self-reports, surveys and questionnaires, field notes of observations) or what they know (tests), as Ludwig's work illustrates, data also can come from meanings embedded in objects created by and surrounding the people whom they study—what commonly is called the "material culture" and composed of artifacts. In the abstract, the Mayan women could not describe their pride in being Maya, but in the context of their artwork, they were quite articulate about many factors that Ludwig defined as measures of Mayan identity. These, then, served to operationalize the sense of identity that Ludwig sought to describe.

In the process, Ludwig was generating a conceptual model in which the "act of weaving" as individuals and the "wearing of woven materials," "pride in weaving," and the "telling of stories embedded in the weaving" in a group emerged as domains, contributing to the formation and sustenance of Mayan identity. The details in each of the domains were then elaborated in the description of the study. This "model," with four independent variable domains and one dependent domain, is further operationalized by constructing the smaller bits or components of these larger domains. This process is called operationization. With some advance knowledge of a field setting, researchers can develop preliminary models that can be modified and expanded or even changed completely while accumulating more "facts" in the field. In Ludwig's case, her model, which emerged from the field study, is now ready to be adapted to other similar settings and even to be quantified and measured more broadly if she so desired, perhaps with a larger sample of Navajo women, some of whom might not be weavers.

Conceptualizing Research Models and Conceptual Modeling

Constructing a research model is an important aspect of operationalization. A "formative" research model is a very useful way of summarizing what the researcher believes to be the most important domains and concepts guiding the study from the beginning. We use the term *formative* to convey the idea that the initial research model is a start at operationalizing. The "final" model is the result of all the hard work researchers do to make sure that all the appropriate domains are present in the model, that they are "deconstructed" properly into their constituent components, and that the independent domains and components relate both to each other and, most importantly, to the dependent domain. By this we mean that they provide convincing evidence of their association with the "dependent variable domain." The model that summarizes the description of Ludwig's work is a "final" qualitative model, the outcome of months of fieldwork testing its constituent components (domains, factors, subfactors, units and their interaction) through observation, conversation, interviewing, and creating artifactual collections.

Researchers build formative models based on their own experience, curiosity, knowledge base, self-conscious "biases" or predilections, close reading of the literature on the topic, and ideally, initial visits to the field—or if not that, at least in-depth conversations with people who know the field situation well. The formative model can be very general, or very specific,

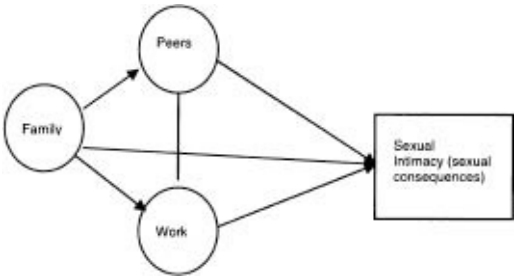
or somewhere in between.

Example 5.7

Building a formative model in Mauritius

Mauritius is an AIDS Low Prevalence country, which traditionally had strong constraints against premarital meetings between young men and women. However, rapid industrial changes in Mauritius in the 1990s offered new opportunities for unmarried young women to leave the protection of their homes, schools, and communities to travel to work in industrial locations around the island. The then-director of the Mauritius Family Planning Association, an organization with family planning programs in the industrial sector, and a colleague from the University of Mauritius School of Social Work were concerned about the potential for unprotected sex and its consequences as a result of these increased opportunities for premarital male-female interaction. While visiting Connecticut to participate in a short-term training program offered by the Center for International Community Health Studies at the University of Connecticut Health Center, they engaged in discussions with anthropologists Schensul and Schensul during which they evolved an initial research model for AIDS prevention research and intervention. The model included as the "dependent domain" sexual risk behavior. The independent domains reflected areas in Mauritian society where dramatic changes were taking place with the potential for fostering intimacy between unmarried men and women. They included "family," "peers," and "work." These operationalized main domains are framed in the formative model below (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 A Formative Research Model



This model includes a series of very broad, implicit hypotheses. For example, (a) changes in family organization, structure, and behavior contribute to increased opportunities for premarital sexual intimacy and sexual consequences, and (b) changes in peer relationships, activities, and access to information contribute to increased opportunities for premarital sexual intimacy and sexual consequences.

Continuing with this example, initial discussions produced a variety of possible "subdomains" or factors that might contribute to sexual intimacy and sexual risk (for example, reduced family interaction because of limited time and increased need for income; the absence of sibling "chaperones" because siblings were studying overseas; more occasions where male and female peers went out together; more opportunities at work for young men and women to

meet, etc.). Further, the nature of sexual intimacy and sexual risk was initially unknown—except for the fact that there were increasing numbers of pregnancies reported among unmarried female factory workers. But there was little or no literature on these topics, and no research was ongoing in the field at the time. Thus, as it was premature to include these further refinements in the model, they remained as questions for exploration. Another researcher, building a study based on Ludwig's work, for example, could begin with a formative model that was far more elaborated than Ludwig's initial model and in which the subdomains might be identified.

Formative models are very useful for a variety of different purposes:

- Formulating researchers' thoughts
- Summarizing the literature
- Identifying gaps in knowledge
- Identifying and including (or excluding) researcher's biases
- Guiding research questions and subquestions in the early stages of the research

As fieldwork produces more elaborate understandings of each of the domains in relation to the topic of study (the dependent domain), the domains are further operationalized into more specific factors, subfactors, and units or items. These models are useful guides for deepening the questioning process, building coding schemes, further refining hypotheses, and eventually, identifying constructs and items for inclusion in ethnographically derived surveys.

Here we add several caveats. First, the modeling process is designed to assist ethnographers to conceptualize their work more effectively, both initially and throughout the course of a study. It is not intended to "test a theory" unless and until the researcher is convinced that the theoretical framework is well evolved, based on empirical evidence from field research, and ready to be tested in other similar environments. Second, it is designed to assist the ethnographer to move freely along the inductive/deductive continuum in a recursive process. It is not intended to be used simply to build a top-down coding taxonomy. Third, the modeling process is extremely useful for reminding ethnographers to identify the concepts and constructs that are *unique* to the specific cultural setting rather than imposing concepts and constructs that derive from other potentially unrelated study settings or disciplines. More detail on why such models are useful, and how to build and use them in the process of ethnographic research, is included in Books 2 and 5.

Cross Reference: See Book 2 for a detailed description of conceptualization and modeling in ethnographic research and Book 5, chapters 3, 4, and 5, for a discussion of how to create codes using such concepts and models

Identifying Populations and Study Sites

After deciding more specifically how the study should be focused, establishing a formative model or set of questions, and deciding in general what sort of data will be collected, the next step involves figuring out with whom and where the study can be done. Often the *phenomenon* (the study question or problem to be addressed) or *population* to be studied cannot be defined without at the same time identifying an accessible *site* where it can be found. Thus these two questions involve interrelated and overlapping decisions. Recognizing the inseparability of these issues, we nevertheless begin our discussion somewhat artificially by discussing how researchers choose the population for a study.

What Is a Population?

The term ***population*** refers to the entire group in which a researcher is interested. Populations usually are made up of human beings, but they also can consist of communities, organizations, programs, animals, places or things, time periods, documents, words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs in interview texts and transcripts, specific activities or bits of behavior and other such units.

Definition: Population refers to the group in which the research is interested; the unit of analysis is the individual element or component aggregated to constitute the study population

Ethnographers usually study populations of people. The study of so-called “intact” or isolated groups, typically carried out by anthropologists in the first half of the twentieth century, made the task of defining a population much easier: the population was synonymous with the cultural group. However, few such groups exist anymore—if indeed they ever did. In fact, it could be argued that NO contemporary group on the globe is isolated in the manner assumed by traditional anthropology. Even where groups do exist in relative isolation from Western European influences, problems of access, ethics, cultural self-determinism, and other political concerns make it difficult for ethnographers to study them. More often, ethnographers study groups of people embedded within larger communities or institutions such as schools, which are in turn defined or selected by the characteristics or attributes that the individuals in the group possess.

Establishing Logistical, Definitional, and Conceptual Criteria for Selecting a Population

Researchers have many reasons for selecting the groups they study. The first step in selection of the study population involves determining WHY the group should be selected in the first place. Typically, this is because researchers believe that the group possesses a high concentration of the characteristics the researcher wants to study. The second step involves establishing a set of inclusion criteria or a list of characteristics that the members of the

population need to possess in order to be eligible for the study. Then researchers must go looking for people or things that possess those characteristics. Selection criteria address logistical, definitional, and conceptual considerations.

Logistical criteria stem from the resources available for the study. However wonderful from a conceptual perspective it might be to include certain individuals, a cost-benefit analysis of the time, money, and travel time needed to include them can make it clear that they should be excluded. For example, a study of drinking behavior among Indian men may exclude a comparative sample of men who have never drunk any form of alcohol because it is neither cost-effective nor required of the study design to include them. A longitudinal study of physical growth and nutritional status in Puerto Rican children living in the United States may require excluding those children who move back to Puerto Rico during the study period because of the cost of tracking them.

Definitional criteria determine how the group will be bounded, who is included in it, and how many to include. Considerations of inclusivity involve how many of the group members can be studied by the researcher, given where they are located, the needs of the study, and available time and financial resources. For example, researchers studying drug use in adolescents may determine membership in the study group by age, ethnicity, location, or other criteria. Financial limitations of the study, ability to locate the study sample, and statistical/analytical considerations all will influence decisions about sample size.

Conceptual criteria address the issue of sample saturation sufficiency (see below on saturation); saturation involves whether or not the proposed study group contains or exemplifies a sufficient number of members with the characteristics of interest to the researcher. A study of functional disability among African American older adults in a small city is important, but finding enough people with functional disabilities who are willing to participate in a small population of such adults over fifty may make the study impossible to pursue.

Researchers need to consider all three criteria. Figure 5.2 summarizes the logistical, definitional, saturational, and conceptual criteria that researchers need to consider in selecting a population.

Figure 5.2 Practical Criteria for Population Selection

SATURATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

• Can I find a group that possesses the attributes in which I am interested in sufficient numbers or intensity?

LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

• Has the group asked me to study it?

OR

• Do I have to find a group to study?

IF I HAVE TO FIND A GROUP TO STUDY,

• Can I get permission to study the group?

• If I get permission to study the group, will its individual members talk to me?

OR

• Are people who have the characteristics or attributes I am interested in not members of a known group?

• If so, how will I operationally define a set of people with the characteristics of interest to study?

ONCE I HAVE A GROUP AND PERMISSION TO STUDY IT,

- Do I have the resources to do a study with this group?
- Will sufficient numbers of group members be willing to participate in the study for me to meet sampling requirements?

OR

- Can I study all members of the group? Do I need to?

THE ENTIRE GROUP IN THE STUDY WILL HAVE TO BE INCLUDED AT LEAST INITIALLY IF:

- the group is very heterogenous and I might miss an important member if I don't; or
- if its characteristics are unknown; or
- if the group is very small.

DESIGN DECISIONS WILL HAVE TO BE MADE BASED ON THE FOLLOWING:

- How difficult is it to identify the members of the group?
- How far away or difficult to access is the group?
- How big is the group? Is it too big to study in its entirety?
- Do I have sufficient time and trained personnel to implement the study under these conditions?

SOME DEFINITIONAL ISSUES MUST BE CONSIDERED IF THE PEOPLE OF INTEREST ARE NOT MEMBERS OF A KNOWN GROUP,

- How can I "bound" or "operationally define" them for study?

AND

- Can I define a place, site, or organization where I might find them?

OR

- Can I identify a group or individual who might help me identify them?
- Once I have identified them, will they talk with me?

CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Do I want to study representative members of the group? If so, are the characteristics of the population known well enough to identify such members?

OR

- Do I intend to compare the people or group that I want to study with other people or groups? If so, do I want to study typical, extreme, unique, ideal, negative, bellwether, or exemplary cases (see LeCompte and Preissle 1993; See also Book 2, chapter 8 for a discussion of selection and sampling techniques).

OR

- Do I want to study a sample of the larger group?
- If I study a sample, how shall I construct it?

"Who" to Study: Defining, Operationalizing, and Bounding a Population

Once researchers have identified the type of population and cases that will meet their research needs, they must determine WHO will be studied. This requires two steps: First, researchers must operationally define the population to be studied in terms of an actual group that possesses the characteristics of interest. Second, they must locate that population in an organization or existing group to which the researcher has access.

Strategies for Selecting Populations

Ethnographic researchers use a number of systematic, nonrandomized approaches to select the populations they want to study. The first strategy is called ***criterion-based selection*** (LeCompte and Preissle 1993), in which researchers choose individuals to study because they possess a set of characteristics that match those of interest to the researcher. An initial set of criterion-based selection procedures—theoretical, extreme, typical, and unique case selection

—is used to determine patterns of difference between members of a population. A second set of criterion-based selection strategies—reputational, bellwether or ideal case, and comparable case—then are used if they will further illuminate the research questions. Below we list and define the principal types of criterion-based selection used in social science research.

Definition: Criterion-based selection involves choosing study participants because they possess characteristics relevant to the study

Types of Criterion-based Selection

- Theoretical sampling or selecting for conceptual considerations
- Extreme or dichotomous case selection
- Typical case selection
- Unique case selection
- Reputational case selection
- Bellwether or ideal case selection
- Comparable case selection

Theoretical case selection. The researcher chooses specific units because they exist within a context, possess certain characteristics, or act in ways that will permit the researcher to empirically test, modify, or generate theories.

Definition: Theoretical sampling involves choosing units because they help the researcher test a theory or explore a phenomenon of conceptual or theoretical interest

Extreme or dichotomous case selection. The researcher first defines a characteristic of interest and thencreates a scale by which individuals can be arrayed in accordance with how much of that characteristic they possess. The result is a continuum—for example, the range of academic performance among eleventh-grade students. Extreme cases are those selected for study at either end of the continuum—in this case eleventh-grade dropouts versus those who win academic awards. Studies of geniuses, psychopaths, musical child prodigies, or Nobel Prize winners are extreme case studies.

Definition: Extreme cases are those representing the ends of a defined population continuum

Typical case selection. The researcher finds the mean or average set of characteristics of a population, and then locates subjects to study who match the mean portrait. Studies of the average housewife, teacher, factory worker, chat group, or typical diabetic exemplify typical case studies. Typical case selection requires that the population already be well-enough known

that a mean or average can be identified.

Definition: Typical case selection involves selection based on a known average for the population

Unique case selection. The researcher finds and studies a case or event set apart from the normal flow of events—and generally not replicable. Studies of the impact of the *Challenger* spacecraft explosion or the election of the first African American president in the USA on schoolchildren or of city dwellers' response to an earthquake, hurricane, or sudden influx of immigrants exemplify unique case studies.

Definition: Unique case selection means selecting for study a nonreplicable event or situation

Reputational case selection. Researchers solicit recommendations from experts about people who best exemplify the kind of person the researchers want to study. Studies of competent administrators, expert mechanics, trustworthy drug dealers, talented music students, or uncooperative geriatric patients can be constructed using reputational case selection.

Definition: Reputational case selection involves the selection of a study group from recommendations by experts

Bellwether or ideal case selection. The researcher describes a "recipe" for a situation in which the researcher can say, "These are the ideal conditions in which to observe the phenomenon in which I am interested." The researcher then seeks out an example that matches that recipe or description. Studies of so-called effective schools are bellwether studies, as are studies of medical treatment administered under optimum conditions.

Definition: Ideal case selection involves choice of a case because it possesses all the necessary components for program success or maximum presence of characteristics of interest to the researcher

Comparable case selection. The researcher chooses cases because of their similarity along central characteristics of interest to the researcher. Cases may be independent (and randomly assigned to the treatment or comparison group); matched, as in a case-control design; or connected, as in a network study in which one person, who is selected because he or she meets the study inclusion criteria, lists others he or she knows with the same characteristics who are then included in the study. Studies that attempt to replicate the findings of a previous study in a similar site or with a similar population often are referred to as comparable case studies. Multiple-site ethnographies where researchers are attempting to study the same

phenomenon in similar settings also involve comparable case selection.

Definition: Comparable case selection refers to choice of a case because of its similarity to other cases the researcher has chosen

Cross Reference: See chapter 5 in Book 4 for a discussion of network sampling.

Operationally Defining and Bounding a Population

In the previous section, we discussed how researchers select populations whose characteristics are of greatest interest to the researcher. "**Operationally defining**" such a population means locating a specific group that has those characteristics. For example, researchers might be interested in studying why people persist in building houses in flood-prone areas. They then either need to find a population that lives in a flood plain and wait for a flood to occur or locate a community that has just experienced a flood and study the population there.

Definition: Operationally defining a population means locating a group with the characteristics of interest in the study

Bounding the population is a related process; it sometimes results in operationally defining the population to study—as in the case of the flood plain study described above. Populations can be bounded by whatever sets of criteria the researchers decide are relevant to the study. Sometimes the population is easily defined because it is *naturally bounded*—for example, anthropologists often studied island communities whose population was limited to island residents; or in drug research, they study locations termed "high-risk sites," such as shooting galleries and apartment buildings. However, operationally defining a population does not always bound it.

Definition: Bounding a population means limiting the group studied to a specific subset of people with the characteristics of interest

For example, a researcher interested in studying high-achieving eleventh-graders (an extreme case study) might operationally define her population in terms of eleventh-graders in a specific community, but then bound the study by limiting those who actually participate in the study to eleventh-graders involved in the honor society at several specific schools. Similarly, researchers interested in studying psychopathic killers (another extreme case) probably cannot, or would not want to, study all known psychopathic killers, or even those who are currently incarcerated. The researcher probably could not even get access to most incarcerated psychopathic killers. However, the researcher *could* identify an organization that works with

such individuals and bound the study by limiting it to those under the care of the organization. By contrast, Harry Wolcott's study of a school principal used typical case selection; Wolcott used data from the U.S. National Education Association to determine the characteristics of the "average" school principal in the United States; upon discovering that the "average" principal was a white, middle-aged, married male with a master's degree, he then asked the local school district where he lived to assist him in finding such a person. The study was bounded, in a sense, by the number of individuals in the district who fit the description, but also by the number of such people who were willing to let Wolcott observe them day after day for a year (Wolcott 1973).

Educational researchers often define their populations in terms of those students enrolled in particular subject areas, classrooms, or schools. In large studies that involve multiple school settings, they may define their populations by type of school (large or small, rural/urban; magnet versus charter versus "regular") or school-by-school population distribution (percentage of students across ethnic groups in urban high schools). Community-based researchers working in the areas of health, cultural development, or socialization often find that they must define their population not by location but by demographic characteristics or perhaps by demographic characteristics combined with the presence of a specific issue or problem. Many applied researchers investigate groups who define themselves simply by the act of requesting the study. One such example is that of an environmental justice organization that contacted the Institute for Community Research with a request to create a partnership to conduct research on problems of asthma management and treatment access among young African American, Latino, and West Indian males. Researchers interested in studying behavior in and with specific ethnic or social/race groups define the population by geography, ethnic identity (as determined by the individuals themselves or as ascribed by others), or both. In these instances, the group's self-definition—by national origin, tribal identity, reconstructed history, place of current residence, membership in a contemporary group, possession of a common concern, or a variety of other means—can influence how a researcher decides to bound a group.

In many cases, researchers start out wanting to investigate a problem involving a particular kind or category of person without knowing exactly who those persons are or where they might be found. Sometimes these groups are *artificially bounded*, in that they consist of people who have specific characteristics in common but either do not belong to any identifiable social group or belong to many different groups, none of whose affiliation definitively establishes group boundaries. Examples include youthful artists, unmarried pregnant teenagers, classical music lovers, and children with limited English proficiency. Others who could be defined as members of a group—American Indians, for example—still must be defined in terms of a location or site in which the group can be found—a reservation, urban Indian center, or Pow Wow group. People who possess other characteristics of interest to researchers may not be easy to locate, either because the characteristics involved are stigmatized or illegal—users of illegal drugs, pedophiles, or homosexuals—unknown to those who possess them, or difficult to diagnose—as in the case of individuals infected with HIV but

still asymptomatic, sufferers from the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, or carriers of genetically linked disabilities such as Recombinant 8 syndrome or Huntington's Chorea.

Cross Reference: See Book 4, chapter 6, for a discussion of how to locate such "hidden populations"

Table 5.1 provides some examples of how populations with characteristics of interest to a researcher were operationally defined and then bounded within groups to which the researcher could obtain access.

Table 5.1 Identifying Population Boundaries

Population to be Studied	Geographic/Definitional Boundaries Studied	Method of Identification
Urban Indian elementary school children	Children enrolled in Sanborn school district	Identified through parents
Hispanic youth with HIV/AIDS	Members of specific gay/lesbian/bisexual adolescent support groups; attendees at the local youth center for Hispanic HIV-affected teens	Groups or sites identified first through adult social workers and facilitators and then through individual self-definition
Potential artist users of a proposed community arts center	Artists represented by local galleries; members of local crafts coop; participants in community college arts classes	Researcher-created list of organizational memberships; self-defined artists and possible center users
Adolescent smokers	Young people in targeted urban neighborhoods	Self-defined through door- to-door enumeration of households with adolescents who smoke
Older adults at risk of sexually transmitted diseases	Adults over fifty living in geographic areas where injection drug use and unprotected sex occur	All adults over the age of fifty-five in buildings housing older adults in the target city

Clearly, not everyone in the locations used for operational definition possess the characteristics defined as desirable by the researchers in their search for a target population; however, such sites are more likely to be "saturated" with people who DO possess such characteristics and thus are more likely to be fruitful areas in which to do investigations. Regardless of how it is done, defining and bounding the population permits the researchers to distinguish between who or what is to be included in the population and who or what will not be included. Those to be included in the study are the "units" to be studied.

Definition: A unit of analysis is the element to be studied and used as the basis of examination and comparison in the analysis of the study data

What Is a Unit of Analysis?

Simply put, researchers call the specific "things" they study **units of analysis**. Usually, in social science research, the unit under study is a person—or group of persons. For example, in a study of voting behavior, each voter is a unit of analysis. However, units of analysis can be

many other things: cities, families, corporations, states, school districts, health care agencies, time periods, paragraphs in written texts or documents, interactions, books or novels, and clauses in transcripts. In intervention studies or experiments, they also may be—but are not always—what experimenters call "units of intervention." These units are the individuals who participate in programs or in evaluated interventions that include program (treatment) and comparison groups that constitute an "experiment." They could be classrooms and teachers selected for studies of the effectiveness of reading programs, children enrolled in different after-school sports programs designed to increase motivation to attend school, groups of injection drug users participating in studies of drug use prevention programs, or high-risk community locations such as shooting galleries, wooded areas, or back lanes in which youth or adults are involved in risky behaviors that could affect their health.

Characteristics, Size, and Location of Units of Analysis

Whatever they choose as their unit, researchers need to define units of analysis in operational terms because they need to be able to identify discrete individuals (or units) from the given population for observation, questioning, and/or counting. Here are some simple rules for defining units of analysis:

- They must be identifiable.
- They must be countable.
- They must be locatable.
- They must be measurable or describable.
- They must have identifiable beginnings and endings, i.e., the researcher must be able to distinguish one unit of analysis clearly from another.
- If the researcher is planning a survey, they also must be enumerated on a list of individuals so that a sampling frame, or list from which to select a sample, can be created.

Following are some examples of how researchers defined populations and then identified appropriate units of analysis within those populations.

Example 5.8

Identifying units of analysis from an incomplete but known list when locating the entire population is impossible

The American Home Brewers' Association wanted to determine how often home brewers produced their beer and how much they consumed. They also wanted to know which of the Association's services were most useful. They invited a researcher to design and administer a survey to answer their questions. The population of interest was "people who brew their beer at home," but the Association didn't have any way to contact every single person who might be a home brewer. Instead, the researcher decided to mail a survey to every person who subscribed to the Association's newsletter.

In the example above, the general population of interest is people who brew beer at home; for convenience, a unit of analysis from this population is defined as a person who receives a particular publication. This definition, of course, omits from the survey all the potentially numerous people who brew beer at home but who don't subscribe to the Association's newsletter. The problem was that the Association had no reasonable way to contact such people and had to account for the potential biases stemming from this unavoidable exclusion of potential respondents by describing them in terms of limitations in the selection process.

Less simply put, many studies—especially ethnographies—involve more than one, and more than one kind of, unit of analysis. Usually, smaller-scale units are embedded within larger-scale units. In qualitative studies, units can overlap (e.g. individuals in families; students in schools; teens in peer groups); in network studies particularly, no single unit can be considered to be independent of the others. In quantitative studies by contrast, units are considered to be separate and independent of one another. Following are several other examples that used several populations and a number of corresponding units of analysis.

Example 5.9

Identifying multiple units of analysis in a study of teacher competency testing

Shepard and Kreitzer (1987) studied what happened when the State of Texas decided to test all its teachers for competency in reading, writing, and basic computation. The state created the TECAT (Test of Educational Competency for All Teachers); it administered it to all practicing teachers, established training centers with materials to help those who failed the test succeed on subsequent attempts, and ended up firing a small percentage of teachers who were unable to pass the examination even after multiple tries. The researchers interviewed the politicians and businessmen who advocated the program and the legislators and policy makers who created it; analyzed newspapers, program plans, and documents; and talked to teachers who took the tests and the staff at the remedial training centers and principals at schools. They also examined the results of the TECAT itself.

Example 5.10

Identifying multiple units of analysis in a study of teacher behavior

LeCompte's (1974) study of teacher behavior in elementary schools began with a fourth-grade teacher as the unit of analysis. However, written descriptions of the teacher's behavior in the classroom yielded three other units of analysis: verbal episodes, activity segments, and minutes—devoted respectively to instructional, managerial, or discretionary activity. These other units constituted and were embedded within the teacher's "stream of behavior." Identifying the categories of these units and aggregating them permitted the researcher to determine the underlying structure of classroom life for this teacher and three other teachers

whose behavior was similarly observed and analyzed.

Example 5.11

Identifying multilevel units of analysis in a study of older adults and flu vaccination

Interactive "unit" effects represent a challenge in traditional randomized controlled designs but can readily be addressed through ethnographic evaluation in multilevel intervention designs. Every year, influenza causes many deaths, especially among people sixty-five and over. An ethnographically driven intervention study to improve influenza vaccination among African American, Latino, and Italian older adults living in low-income senior housing was implemented in one large building of 200 residences. The results were compared against a second similar building where no intervention took place. The units of intervention were the study's intersectoral steering committee, the building management, a committee of resident peer educators, and individual residents of the building. In the intervention program, all of these "units" interacted both as planned by the intervention and in unplanned ways. Together, the first three sectors improved vaccination acceptance among individual residents as compared to residents in the "control building."

The studies described above are good examples of research using *embedded samples*, or smaller-scale and quite different units of analysis embedded within the larger unit of analysis. The first two cases started with one unit—in one case a teacher; in the other, a teacher competency testing program—and are considered to be *case studies* or single units. Example 5.11 began with three "units" in a single setting and is also a "case study," even though it involved a comparison at the individual "unit" level with residents of another building. In all cases the individual units themselves are quite complex. The TECAT program described in Example 5.9 involved many different kinds of people over a period of several years; documenting what really happened and the impact that the TECAT had on teachers required that the researchers look at a wide variety of data sources. Thus the population of ONE program (one unit of analysis) included other populations of teachers (another kind of unit), legislators and politicians and test administrators (other kinds of units), newspaper articles (yet another different kind of unit), policy documents, archival texts and tests (still more kinds of units), and many other things.

The researchers had to define *units* from each of these populations and then provide criteria for how they would identify them. For example, they identified three kinds of teachers within the general population of teachers: those who passed the test on the first try, those who passed it after one or more failed attempts, and those who never passed it. A sample from each of these categories was interviewed or sent a self-administered questionnaire to complete and return to the researchers.1 Similarly, the vaccination program involved identifying multiple units at different "levels" and in evolving interaction with one another over the course of the study.

Even a unit that appears to be less complex than a statewide program can yield many different populations. The behavior of LeCompte's four teachers in Example 5.10 was made up of populations of activity segments and verbal episodes; these in turn took place over a population of minutes—which in turned varied by the type of activity. These units had to be operationally defined, just as the home brewers and the teachers were, in order for the researcher to make decisions about what would and would not be included in the category—or where one unit began and another left off. For example, LeCompte defined a verbal episode as the words, gestures, and pauses included between the initiation of a topic and its end. Thus, verbal episodes varied considerably in duration, but they were distinguishable from one another because each one addressed a single, identifiable topic.

Defining units of analysis is relatively easy to do when the units are discrete, as in the case of people or organizations; people usually are limited by their physical characteristics—or, as in the case of the TECAT, by actions they do or do not take—and organizations are limited by the extent of their members. However, the boundaries of people and organizations can blur depending upon the way they are defined and the purposes for which they are being studied. In a study of role behavior, for example, when does an employed woman obstetrician with children cease being a mother and start becoming a doctor? And when is she a friend, and neither a doctor or a mother? Even what might seem to be unambiguous physiological characteristics can blur: Suppose a researcher wanted to study the health-related behavior of "women of childbearing age." Census data and other demographic studies often define such a population operationally as "all females between the ages of fifteen and fifty." However, while such a definition probably maximizes the number of units with the desired physiological characteristic—fertility—it also includes many females who cannot, will not, or do not have children, for one reason or another. It also eliminates females above the age of fifty and below age fifteen who are capable of having children. Thus, researchers either can elicit the help of the women (the research participants in the study) in order to make specific and proper distinctions among individuals in a general population or risk obtaining data that is rendered somewhat inaccurate because it includes units of analysis that are inappropriate to the study. Researchers can clarify the characteristics of individuals by carefully worded initial questions in surveys or by careful preliminary fieldwork that permits identification in advance of a population limited to individuals the researchers really want to investigate.

Strategies for Selection of Sampling and Units for Study

Sampling involves a different process from the selection processes described above. Researchers (and laypeople, too!) sometimes use the term ***sample*** instead of population to refer to the group under study; however, this is, strictly speaking, inaccurate. A sample is a systematically selected subset of a larger population that has been identified and whose units of analysis have been defined prior to the sampling process.

 **Definition: A sample is a systematically selected subset of a larger population**

Sampling is implemented when studying the entire population of interest is too time-consuming or expensive or when it is not realistic because the population is too large. Under these conditions, researchers create samples by systematically choosing (sampling) members from the population in such a way that the smaller group accurately represents the larger one. Samples, however, cannot be created from groups whose size and characteristics are not already known fairly well in advance. This is because researchers must strive for representativeness in their samples such that the characteristics of the sample closely approximate that of the entire population. If the characteristics of the population are not known, then the degree of representativeness of the sample cannot be ascertained.

Researchers make their selection of a sample by choosing accurately some representatives from each of the many different types or strata of members in the group or population. If the researcher does not know what types of members are included in the group, it is impossible to create a sample that is truly representative. However, if the types included in the group already are broadly known, then "quota sampling," the simplest form of sampling, can suffice in certain circumstances.

Quota Sampling

Quota sampling involves deciding how many subgroups there might be within the population of interest and then selecting a set number of individuals (a quota) of people from each of these subgroups. For example, political analysts might have determined that 50 percent of the population in a particular census tract was white, 30 percent was African American, and 20 percent was Latino, and that women were as likely to vote as men. To predict which candidate that census tract chose in an election, they could interview 100 voters—fifty males and fifty females—as they exited from the polling places, dividing them according to what the researchers thought their ethnicity was and asking them how they voted. Wanting to interview fifty whites, thirty African Americans, and twenty Latinos, they would first determine their respondents' ethnicity by asking them to identify themselves and then interview until they had filled their quota of each ethnic group. If they had already interviewed twenty-five white males and twenty-five white females, they would try to avoid questioning anyone who looked white and would exclude from interviewing anyone who identified as white despite the researcher's previous attempt at identification. Quota sampling, however, is not a very accurate way to represent the characteristics of a group.

Systematic and Probabilistic Sampling

Ethnographers also use systematic selection and probabilistic sampling procedures when seeking to conduct research with a larger, representative sample of individuals, households, clinic patients, or social units such as clinics or schools. Systematic selection and random sampling usually is carried out in studies involving quantification (survey research) or

intervention research. These strategies require the compilation of a comprehensive list of all the members of the given population or a randomized way of accumulating interviewees that assures that all members have a chance to be included in the sample. Systematic sampling (for example, every third asthma patient on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays at three points during the day at three times during the year) can be done without a list. If it is done with advance understanding of when patients with asthma are likely to come into the clinic, the approach should produce a representative sample of asthma patients for that clinic. Generating a random sample requires being able to bound the population and compile a comprehensive list of all the members of the given population. Such a list, called a "sampling frame," assures that all members have an equal chance to be included in the sample. Thus in a community setting, it may require house or individual enumeration (like census enumeration) or other such techniques. In a school, on the other hand, it requires obtaining up-to-date student lists.

To initiate the sampling process, researchers first define the units of analysis. Then they find or create a list of the specific units to be contacted for the study, or find, enumerate, and list the units from within a population of inanimate objects such as books, documents, artifacts, or time segments. Once the list is created, its characteristics are scrutinized once again, and then mathematical procedures are used to select a representative sample of a size the researchers can reasonably manage to study, given their resources and the requirements of statistical analysis. For more information on the sampling process, see Book 2 of this series or any number of books on sampling procedures (e.g., Henry 1990 or Bernard 2000 for a discussion of sampling related to ethnography).

Cross Reference: Book 2, chapter 8

More accurate methods for selection involve systematic or probabilistic sampling, which permits the researcher to check to see that the sample drawn really is representative—that is, that it does possess the same characteristics as the larger population. It also permits researchers to assess accurately how big the group really is by counting how many units are in the sampling frame, and therefore, what percentage of the population should end up being sampled.

In this chapter, we have addressed how to select a topic, with whom, and where a researcher will conduct a study of interest. We also have defined what data are and how to operationalize them into convincing evidence that supports the argument pursued in the study. In chapter 6, we move on to discuss sources of data as well as multiple strategies for collecting data and recording them for analysis.

Note

1. A unit of analysis also can be a *sampling* unit when, as in the case of Shepard and Kreitzer's study, it defines what kind of items will be selected from a larger population.

6

Collecting Ethnographic Data

Techniques for Collecting Multiple Types of Data
Resources and Logistics: How Ethnographers Allocate Time, Money, and Staff
Creating Planning Documents and Timelines

Techniques for Collecting Multiple Types of Data

In this chapter we summarize the methods and data collection techniques that researchers use for recording and collecting their data. Table 6.1 provides a general overview and summary of the general strategies used by ethnographic researchers, the purposes for each strategy, the target populations for which the strategies are best suited, and what the data look like once they are collected. Books 3 and 4 of **The Ethnographer's Toolkit** describe in detail how these techniques are implemented. Book 3 covers what we have termed the "essential methods" of ethnography: observation, tests and repeated measures, surveys, individual and group interviews, content analysis, collection of cultural artifacts, and examination of secondary or archival data. Essential ethnographic methods, especially participatory observation and face-to-face interviews, are those without which no researcher can conduct an ethnography. Book 4 addresses a number of important supplementary or "enhanced" strategies, including creation of cognitive cultural maps and consensus analysis, audio and visual recording, collecting and cataloging cultural artifacts, digital storytelling and photo-voice, using secondary data sources, and collecting digital data. Book 4 also addresses other somewhat specialized forms of data collection, analysis, and sampling used by ethnographers for specific purposes. These include social network analysis, spatial mapping, location and selection of so-called "hidden" or elusive populations, photovoice, and digital data collection. All of these are commonly used in ethnographies, but we call them enhanced techniques because they are used to enhance or make more rigorous a study that is already set up as an ethnography. In addition they require some additional technical skills. By themselves, they cannot be used to create such a study.

Table 6.1 is a complete compendium of the most common methods for data collection used

in qualitative research as summarized in Books 3 and 4. When informed by the concept of culture, these are the stock in trade of ethnographers, who, as we mentioned earlier in this book, are evidence "omnivores," tireless in seeking multiple ways to assemble the evidence needed to describe and explain the phenomena they study accurately and in detail.

As we have said previously, any of the above listed data collection strategies could be used alone in a perfectly viable qualitative study, but by themselves, most would not suffice to support the creation of an ethnography. This is because doing ethnography requires reconstruction of a complex set of cultural characteristics related to the study topic in conjunction with the people or groups under study. Doing this well involves a complex process of triangulation with multiple sources of data, each of which is used to confirm the accuracy of the others.

Table 6.1 Data Collection Methods

METHOD	PURPOSE	TARGET	PROCEDURES FOR DATA COLLECTION	DATA CONTENT
OBSERVATION	Record situations as they happen Record the meanings of these events at the time for study group participants	Activities Events and sequences Settings participation structures Behaviors of persons and groups Conversations Interactions	Create written or taped field notes Create written or taped records of informal interviews and conversations Create video records Take or obtain photographs Create or obtain maps Create observational checklists	Depictions of: • Physical settings • Acts • Activities • Interaction patterns • Meanings • Beliefs • Emotions • Objects
TESTS AND REPEATED MEASURES	Determine efficacy of an intervention or verify an hypothesis about a treatment or innovation	Intervention Innovative program or treatment	Conduct systematic observations or collect survey data at two or more points in time	Qualitative or quantitative measures of change from Time 1 to Time 2 (and beyond)
POPULATION OR SAMPLE SURVEY	Determine variation in attitudes, knowledge, perceptions, demographic information, and behavior of a	A large group whose general parameters are known A representative	Use self-administered questionnaires Conduct structured interviews	Quantifiable answers to closed-ended and forced-choice or multiple-choice

	known study population Obtain limited information from many people	sample drawn from a large group		questions
ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEW	In-depth information on selected topics Personal histories Cultural knowledge and beliefs Description of practices	Representative individuals Key informants or topic experts	Conduct in-depth interviews: • Unstructured • Semistructured • Elicitation techniques (including vignettes or dilemmas)	Answers to open-ended questions Responses to elicitation materials
CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SECONDARY ARCHIVAL, TEXTUAL, OR VISUAL DATA	Elicitation of themes or content in a body of written or printed media Provision of historical or background information	Documents Books Diaries Records Artistic products Transcripts Photographic or videotaped records Maps	Locate sets of documents or other potential data Obtain permission from gatekeepers or owners to use the materials Develop and apply analytic categories reflecting the conceptual framework and research questions for the study	Sorted, coded, and/or enumerated texts or other printed materials
FOCUSED GROUP INTERVIEWS	Obtain information about: • Norms • Behavior • Attitudes • Cultural domains • Innovations • Appropriate topics and wording for instrument content	Target groups familiar with or belonging to the group or phenomenon under study	Conduct interviewer-led group discussion Use elicitation techniques to stimulate focused discussions within the group	Transcripts of conversations guided by the interviewer's questions with the text then coded
ELICITATION METHODS	Obtain data on ways people categorize and organize understanding of cultural domains	Individuals Small representative sample(s) of people from the target	Use interviews to solicit individual responses to elicitation tools (such as pictures, maps, lists, material objects)	Lists Sorted or categorized items Transcripts of discussions

	using researcher-initiated stimuli	group or groups		
AUDIOVISUAL METHODS	Obtain or create accurate detailed audio or visual record of events, interviews, program activities	Key informants Groups with expertise in research topic Small groups or classrooms Special events Artistic events	Audio or visually record targeted events or components of events selected in advance	Coded transcripts of audiotapes and videotapes
SPATIAL MAPPING	Obtain data on the ways in which social, demographic, cultural, economic, political, and geographic data vary across spatial units	Representative samples of target group, institutions, or material culture Gatekeepers with access to recorded information	Conduct individual and group interviews on cultural variables and their location in space Observe and record the location of events, behaviors, groups, institutions, meaningful items in the physical environment, and objects of material culture Elicit existing materials from agencies or organizations possessing such information	Geocoded responses to surveys Counts of use Spatially located qualitative or quantitative units for mapping Multiple slices of spatially arrayed information, superimposed on a single site
NETWORK RESEARCH	Obtain data on patterns of relationships and exchanges among individuals, groups, and other social units Understand diffusion of behavior and information through a network	Representative, targeted, snowball, or systematic network sample of the target population	Conduct interviews with index (startpoint) individuals; identify and then interview members of their respective networks	Quantified behavioral, attitudinal, or knowledge-based variables for individuals and their contacts, pairs (dyads), and larger groups Qualitative description of networks in space and time
COLLECTION OF CULTURAL ARTIFACTS	Discovery of meanings attached to and function of material culture items made, used, purchased, traded for, or otherwise obtained by	Individuals or group members who possess, make, know about, or use specific	Locate items and their custodians or owners Arrange reciprocal and ethical strategies for borrowing or transferring	Text-based descriptions of the origins, manufacture, modes of use, composition, and design, function, and meanings of

individuals or members of a group Elicitation of description of cultural technologies	items of material culture	ownership of items to the researcher	the artifact Photographs, drawings, or other visual reproductions of the artifact

Triangulation and Redundancy: Using Multiple or Alternative Sources of Data

Just as aeronautical and civil engineers build mechanical and structural redundancy into airplanes and bridges, ethnographic researchers build redundancy into their data collection methods. This is done for several reasons. First of all, multiple sources of data serve as sources of confirmation or corroboration for each other. Surveyors never establish the existence of a straight line with fewer than three points; similarly, researchers try to assure that each question asked by the researcher is answered by more than one data source. Researchers use this sort of **triangulation** (Denzin 2005) as a way to create confirmatory redundancy.

 **Definition: Triangulation involves confirming or cross-checking the accuracy of data obtained from one source with data collected from other, different sources**

Triangulation is not duplication of effort; rather, it assures that information elicited from each key informant or other data source is corroborated by information from others—preferably people who have different perspectives on the subject or who occupy different positions in the project from initial informants. For example, data collected from documents such as project proposals and organizational charts can be verified or cross-checked by field observations or interviews directly with participants as well as meeting minutes and other historical documents to make sure that what was intended to happen really did transpire. Observations of behavior can confirm that people actually are doing what they say they are doing, or that assertions made about an issue or event by key informants or in-depth interviewees can be matched against information about the same topics from a sample survey of the entire population under study to confirm or contest the accuracy of the original interview data or the survey account. Another reason for using multiple sources of data is to make sure that if one data set or source proves to be unreliable or incomplete, others will provide the information needed to answer each research question posed. A third recognizes that different types of data, collected under different circumstances and by different investigators, may produce different and complementary rather than confirmatory information on the same topic. Examining an issue under multiple lenses can deepen both inquiry and understanding.

In The Learning Circle program, LeCompte and her team of researchers had to create redundancy in achievement data because the achievement tests mandated by the state of Arizona changed each year of the program.

Example 6.1

Triangulating student achievement measures to compensate for gaps in the testing program: The Learning Circle

During the first two years of The Learning Circle program, the school district in which the program was located used the ASAP (Arizona Standardized Assessment Program), a test of reading, writing, and mathematics for grades four and eight. Teachers also administered a practice ASAP to grade three. Chapter I remedial programs used the federally mandated Gates-MacGinitie tests to measure the impact of those programs in reading and math for students in grades one through six who were enrolled in those programs. All teachers did reading inventories—criterion-referenced assessments mapped to the reading curriculum in the district. Unfortunately, none of these tests used the same scoring techniques or reporting procedures, and because no children were involved in all the programs or grades in which tests were used, there was no systematic way to measure progress with the same instrument each year. The researchers also learned that students who were considered limited in their English proficiency had been excluded from all standardized testing. Many of these children were in programs whose enrollments could have served as comparison groups to The Learning Circle children.

Then, in the third year of the program, the state stopped using the ASAP. Furthermore, teachers in the third school to join the program failed to administer the reading inventory to their students. Adding to all these problems was the high turnover of students in the district, which meant that it was difficult to find a group of children who had been enrolled in the program for more than two years. And that meant that the researchers had an assessment nightmare.

The researchers decided to do the best they could by collecting every bit of data available. First, they decided to add teacher grades as a measure of achievement and to attempt to find them for the previous years, since those measures, however subjective they might be, were the only consistently collected data on all children for all years. (Even grades were a bit of a problem; some teachers used two scales: one, a regular one for children in regular classes, and another, an "inflated" one for children in remedial classes, where the grade of A really counted as a C). They also included in the assessment systematic collection of teacher, counselor, and parent opinions about the behavior of Learning Circle students. By *triangulating* with data from all these sources, the researchers hoped to get a picture of how effective the program really was.

The situation faced by The Learning Circle researchers is typical of the situation faced by most researchers in education or otherwise. Not only are data seldom commensurate, but often entire years of data may be missing, aggregated incorrectly, or processed using inappropriate statistical procedures that render the information meaningless (LeCompte and Goebel 1987; Aguilera 2003). This is increasingly the case with data for minority, low-income, and

language-minority students.

Another example taken from ethnographic research of AIDS risk on the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean shows how multiple sources of data can be integrated to provide a comprehensive picture of AIDS risk in a location where actual AIDS cases are rare.

Example 6.2

Triangulating data on HIV risk, drug use, and sexual behavior in Mauritius

Anthropologists Schensul and Schensul, family planning director Geeta Oodit, and staff of the Mauritius Family Planning Association conducted a study of exposure to HIV infection among young Mauritian adults through unprotected sexual activity. Sexual behaviors were not commonly discussed in Mauritius, especially among young, unmarried women who considered the maintenance of virginity to be a priority. To learn about sex behaviors, the research team used a combination of complementary data collection techniques. First, young health educators conducted observations in parks, at clubs, on the beaches, and in other locations where young people were known to interact in groups or pairs. They also questioned key informants (taxi drivers, hotel receptionists, factory supervisors, club managers) about the social and sexual behavior of young women and men. These data were useful in providing information on whether and where sexual activities were carried out, but not on who was involved or what they did.

To find out about who did what, researchers carried out open-ended interviews with young women to find out their histories of involvement with relationships, boyfriends, and their specific sexual behaviors. These data showed that young women were involved in unprotected penetrative sex, but the data did not include information on how much, how often, and with whom. Finally, the research team conducted a 600-person survey among young women on these topics. Data from in-depth interviews provided more information on types of unprotected sexual behaviors that could be considered risky, as well as the distribution of these behaviors in the target population. Data from the observations and ethnographic interviews were triangulated with survey data to illustrate the range of behaviors in the study population, and together with the other sources of data, provided a comprehensive picture of the changing context of sexual behaviors and increasing AIDS risk in Mauritius.

Both of these examples show how researchers designed studies with multiple data sources and then used each piece of information to cast light on the others. Sometimes, such triangulation actually casts doubt on the accuracy of information. Usually it permits researchers to modify, elaborate, confirm, or adapt their interpretations of a cultural scene in an ongoing, recursive manner.

Although creating redundancy and triangulating with many data sources tends to produce more credible research results, a researcher’s capacity to collect mountains of corroboratory data is limited by the resources available to carry out the study. In the next section we discuss

just how researchers design studies within the limits of a variety of constraints.

Resources and Logistics: How Ethnographers Allocate Time, Money, and Staff

We have discussed previously how the size and proximity of the population or site to be studied create logistical decision points for the researcher, and in chapter 5, we organized some of those decisions in the form of questions researchers must consider (Figure 5.1). However, up to this point, we have been discussing set-up and execution of a project with little reference to the realities of resources available to the investigators. We now turn to this most important set of considerations.

Generally, a researcher's resources include the following:

- Time
- Physical space for study personnel, materials, archiving and storage of data
- Money
- Availability of a variety of skilled fieldworkers
- Secretarial and clerical staff
- Data managers and analysts
- Supplies and materials for data collection and analysis
- A range of requisite hardware, including computers, appropriate software, fax machines, copiers, printers, audio and videotape recorders, and electronic storage and communications devices

More or fewer of these resources will be required, depending upon the size and complexity of the topic or program under consideration; the number of sites to be included; and the timelines and informational requirements of funders, research partners, or policy makers who have an interest in the research.

Early in this book we discussed the importance of research design in helping researchers make decisions about how they should carry out a project. Research designs should always be framed in the context of available resources so that they can guide researchers to establish the limits of what they can and should do in any given project. Clearly, to the extent possible, such limits should be negotiated in advance of the study among researchers, funders, partners in the study, and agencies commissioning or supporting the research itself. A project is of little use, no matter how impeccably done, if the results arrive long after the date by which users needed them for program planning or other deadlines. Similarly, an elegantly conceived research design that costs more than the funding agency is willing to provide will not be carried out. Sometimes projects are mistakenly underbudgeted, as occurred in a study of men's sexual health and AIDS risk in Mumbai (Schensul et al. 2006), where the India research team underestimated the cost of field and staff expenses and had to "make do." More often than not, programs or research partners would like to have more information than researchers are able

to provide with the resources they have available. It is at this point that ingenuity is required in design so that researchers can figure out alternative—and less costly—ways to meet everyone's needs as much as possible.

Example 6.3

Negotiating less costly student impact measures for an arts education program

Because school personnel deemed existing achievement batteries in math, science, and language arts to be inadequate as assessments for an experimental arts program, researchers doing an evaluation of the program's impact were asked to use different assessments of student progress that could be linked to the distinctly different goals and activities of the program. Unfortunately, such assessments did not exist. While some research in the field *was* being carried out on the relationship between arts and cognition/achievement, the researchers knew it would not produce any usable instruments by the time they would be needed for the evaluation study. In any case, the project had no funds to purchase such instruments even if they had been available. The teachers had, however, decided to require students to keep journals about their thought processes during the program and also to assemble portfolios of their work. The researchers decided to help the teachers develop strategies for coding these already legitimated student products for indicators of growth and development and then to use those indicators to assess the impact of the program.

The next example describes a different sort of situation in which the funder did not provide enough money to complete a study despite its very broad base of community support. As Example 6.3 indicates, researchers often can find sources of data that will satisfy important client needs while still meeting researcher needs for containing cost or meeting timelines. In this case, however, in order to meet the expectations of both the community and the funder, the organization decided to draw upon other available resources as needed. The result was a good product, delivered in a timely manner, with excellent community cooperation, but one that cost significantly more than the amount allocated by the funder.

Example 6.4

When to justify exceeding budget limits on a research project

Community organizations, both formal and informal, were forced to react to infrastructural and service changes imposed by central authorities in many Connecticut cities. To assist in planning for these changes, the Institute for Community Research initiated a communitywide, neighborhood-based, participatory survey with an ethnographic component. Over eighty community organizations and 250 people participated in this project. Components included the following:

- A network of agencies that were key sources of planning and other information for their constituencies
- A censuslike survey instrument prepared by experts with collaboration and critique of census questions from community and agency representatives, and administered to 2,600 households
- Focus groups and discussions in target neighborhoods that designated specific issues or problems to be explored in a separate set of open-ended and closed-ended questions
- Development of neighborhood histories and the creation of booklets integrating ethnographic, historical, census, and special-issue data for each neighborhood
- A complete, easy-to-use data set with instructions for each of the “umbrella” agencies to use for proactive planning purposes

The primary funder, a local community foundation, provided the largest grant it had ever made to support this project. All audiences needed, and some demanded, a level of methodological sophistication and rigor comparable to that available through much larger survey research consulting firms. Despite the extraordinary level of funding provided by the foundation, the study design cost approximately twice as much as the grant to support it. To cover the many unanticipated costs that arose with a study of this scope, the Institute for Community Research decided to draw on its reserves and fund the study completely, with the full agreement of its board of directors. The result was a project and a set of products that satisfied most audiences and paved the way for future research collaborations. It also preserved the Institute's reputation as a community partner that met its obligations in spite of cost overruns.

Creating Planning Documents and Timelines

The entire process of matching logistics to research needs and desires can be greatly facilitated by the use of a data-planning matrix that spells out the principal issues addressed in a research design.

Components of a Data Planning Matrix

- Which research questions are to be asked
- Which data will answer those questions
- Where, and from whom, can those data be obtained

- In what form will the data be collected
- Who will be responsible for collecting, analyzing, and writing up the data
- When will each stage of data collection, analysis, and report writing begin and end
- How, by whom, and to whom will results be disseminated

Figure 6.1 presents an outline for helping researchers plan out the activities needed for their projects. Beginning with the research question itself and the conceptual rationale underpinning the need for particular forms of data, completing a plan such as Figure 6.1 for a project will help researchers think through every aspect of a research design from question formulation to interpretation of data. Table 6.2 then gives a concrete example of at least parts of a complete data collection planning matrix, one that was created for one component of The Learning Circle research project. Notice that it is lacking the conceptual rationale, the data format, gatekeeper information, timelines, and a dissemination plan. The latter was developed in the context of another part of the research project. The other components were not required for the evaluation aspects of the project.

Figure 6.1 Data Collection Matrix Planning Outline

Research Question: What do I need to know?	Conceptual Rationale: Why do I need to know this?	Data Type: What kind of data will answer my research question?	Data Source: Where, or from whom, can I obtain these data?	Gatekeepers: Whom do I contact for access to these data?	Data Format: What form will the data be in, once collected?	Timelines: When will these data be acquired, and by whom?

Table 6.2 An Initial Data Collection Matrix for The Learning Circle Program

Research Question: What Do I Need to Know?	Data Type: What Kind of Data Will Answer My Question?	Data Source: Where or from Whom Will I Obtain the Data?
What are the characteristics and culture of each of The Learning Circle models?	Cultural characteristic matrices detailing beliefs, practices, activities, and language usage in the Native American, Anglo, and Mexican American Learning Circle models	Previous evaluation reports Field notes from participant and nonparticipant observation Curriculum guides and documents Interviews with teachers and students
Which processes were used to	Descriptions of curriculum	Minutes of LC program staff meetings

develop the alternative Learning Circle models?	development activities and program implementation activities	Interviews with LC staff Interview with LC Program Director
What adaptations to the original model were necessary to work with groups other than Native Americans?	Descriptions of curriculum development activities and program implementation activities	Interviews with parents Interviews with teachers Interviews with community participants from various groups Teacher survey instrument
Do children who participate in Learning Circle exhibit positive attitudes toward their own culture?	Self-reports from children Reports from teachers Reports from parents Attitude inventory	Interviews with children Narrative accounts of children's experiences LC teachers' Anecdotal Record analysis Interviews with parents Interviews with teachers
What attitudes toward people/peers from different ethnic/racial groups do Learning Circle children exhibit initially?	Self-reports from children	Children's attitude assessment instrument Interviews with children
To what extent to children's attitudes toward people/peers from other ethnic/racial groups change as a consequence of Learning Circle participation?	Self-reports from children Reports from teachers Reports from parents Sociometric analysis	Attitudinal inventory Pretest/posttest data Interviews with children Interviews with parents Interviews with teachers
What is the nature of the intergroup interactions and relationships among Learning Circle and non-Learning Circle participants?	Self-reports from children Reports from teachers Reports from parents Sociometric analysis	Interviews with children Interviews with parents Interviews with teachers Observation of children in various social settings
Does participation in Learning Circle increase the interaction among children of different ethnic/racial groups?	Friendship network matrices Documentation of intergroup and cross-group conversations Documentation of study and play groups, friendship patterns, and patterns of visiting and neighboring	Field notes from participant and nonparticipant observation in school classrooms, playground, hallways, lunchrooms, buses, field trips Observations in neighborhood settings Sociometric analysis of friendships and conversations
What obstacles to intergroup interactions do Learning Circle children experience in school, the community, and the program itself?	Self-reports from children Reports from teachers Reports from parents Descriptions of community activities and events	Interviews with children Children's narratives and stories of school and community experiences
Which Learning Circle practices, activities, and services are the most effective in improving children's intergroup interaction and	Self-reports from children, parents, and teachers Attitudinal inventory Documentation of intergroup	Interviews with children Interviews with teachers Interviews with parents Children's narratives and stories of school and community experiences Field notes of participant

understanding of other ethnic/racial groups?	and cross-group conversations	and nonparticipant observation in program activities
Which Learning Circle practices, activities, and services have been most effective in promoting the cultural identity and self-esteem of participants?	Self-reports from children, parents, teachers regarding children's/parents' sense of cultural identity	Interviews with children Interviews with teachers Interviews with parents
Do children who participate in Learning Circle exhibit positive attitudes toward school?	Self-reports from children Assessments of teachers Assessments of parents Persistence in school	Interviews with children Interviews with teachers Interviews with parents
Which Learning Circle practices, activities, and services have been most effective in promoting academic success for participants?	Self-reports of teachers Self-reports from students Self-reports from parents	Interviews with children Interviews with teachers Interviews with parents Attendance records Children's narratives and stories of school experiences
To what extent do children who participated in Learning Circle maintain satisfactory academic progress?	Academic achievement measures	Teacher assigned grades District-administered standardized test scores Learning Circle teachers' Anecdotal Record analysis

Another model is one that has been used successfully by many federal agencies for demonstration research planning and evaluation purposes. As a project management tool, it uses the concept of the "GOAM" (goals, objectives, activities, management plan) to develop a "management by objectives" operating framework. The GOAM model links to the theory of the project on the one hand and a staffing and resource allocation plan together with a more detailed description of the steps required for carrying out the workflow for each year of a project. It provides a "management by objectives" guide to the workflow for each year of a project. GOAM components can be monitored and changed intermittently to accommodate the realities of a project or study in the field. Further, if certain critical activities are not completed by the time designated in the GOAM plan, the project management can be alerted to the possibility that the goal or objective might need to change or that the project is behind and will not accomplish its designated plan in the appropriate period of time. Even a modest research project should incorporate some version of these tools of practice as guideposts to successful implementation and completion.

Table 6.3 An Example of Project Goals, Timelines, and Completion Information from Urban Women Against Substance Abuse

ACTIVITIES	TARGET DATES	COMPLETION	COMMENTS
	10/15/2010	11/15/2010	

A. ADMINISTRATIVE A1. Recruit and hire staff A1.1 Advertise for director and trainers A1.2 Interview for director A1.3 Hire director A1.4 Interview trainers A1.5 Hire trainers A1.6 Hire outreach tracker	12/1/2010 12/15/2010 12/15/2010 1/15/2010 1/15/2010	12/15/2010 1/15/2010 12/15/2010 2/1/2010 1/15/2010	Director resigned and new director was hired by March 30, 2010
PILOT PROGRAM A2. Development A2.1 Prepare curriculum draft A2.2 Recruit girls and mothers A2.3 Deliver orientation session A2.4 Deliver curriculum sessions to girls A2.5 Deliver curriculum sessions/mothers A3. Evaluation A3.1 Develop observational measures A3.2 Test measures A3.3 Finalize measures A3.4 Implement process evaluation A3.5 Implement outcome evaluation	4/1/2011 5/1/2011 6/28/2011 7/1/2011-10/1/2011 7/1/2011-10/1/2011 4/1/2011 5/15/2011 6/15/2011 6/28/2011 10/15/2011	4/15/2011 5/1/2011 6/28/2011 7/1/2011-10/1/2011 7/15/2011-10/1/2011 4/1/2011 5/30/2011 6/20/2011 6/28/2011 10/15/2011	Pilot scheduling went as planned with slight delay in start date for mothers. More sessions offered in first month to ensure scheduled end date; attendance of mothers is irregular
IMPLEMENT PROGRAM A4 Deliver program/girls A5 Deliver program/mothers	1/15/2012-4/30/2012 1/15/2012-4/30/2012		
EVALUATION A6 Process evaluation cycles A7 Outcome evaluation cycles	Ongoing through cycles 1/15/2012; 5/10/2012; 11/15–2012; 5/15/2013		

Summary

In this chapter we have described the major data collection tools from which ethnographic researchers can choose and the logistical and conceptual circumstances under which they may prefer one set of tools over another. Usually researchers will select at least three or four ways of collecting data because these access different kinds of information from different subgroups within the study site. At the same time, triangulation of information on the same topic from different data sources is critical to the validity and reliability of ethnographic research. Studies that use only one form of data can be subject to criticism for lack of scientific rigor and validity. We have also reminded readers of the importance of thinking through in advance what resources and logistics are required to carry out a study. Sufficient resources and careful and realistic planning can go a long way toward ensuring the success of a study, even when conditions in the field change.

The next step in research design involves considering ways in which ethnographic data can be analyzed and triangulated to produce answers to research questions and to create the

research “story.” In chapter 7, we provide a language and set of procedures for approaching the initially daunting task of ethnographic data analysis.

7

Data Analysis: How Ethnographers Make Sense of Their Data

The entire data collection process described in previous chapters can be exhilarating. During data collection, researchers experience the excitement of discovery as they learn about and from participants in the study. They also get pleasure from interacting with and getting to know participants in the field. However, when faced with the results of data collection—piles of raw data—the process of analysis, or turning data into something succinct and useful, can seem very daunting. Notwithstanding its initial terrors, once initiated, data analysis is as exhilarating as data collection, because it is in the analysis phase that researchers begin to make *sense* of what they have learned.

Analysis as Both a Cognitive Process and a Technical Procedure

We think of ethnographic data analysis as a conceptual and cognitive process beginning in the mind of the researcher. It is quite different from the analytic techniques used by quantitative researchers. Many experimental and most survey researchers begin their data analysis only after most or all of their data have been collected. Most people who have had classes in statistics remember that such courses treat analysis as a technical or mathematical procedure. Quantitative researchers enter their data into a computer once they are collected. The computer then performs a number of mathematical manipulations and emits finished results—graphs,

tables, percentages, and levels of significance. These manipulations usually are guided by *an already established theoretical approach* embedded in the data collection instruments. This theoretical approach creates a blueprint for analysis, although there may be plenty of room for exploration and interpretation in quantitative analysis as well—especially if, as is often the case, the results do not turn out as expected.

The key difference between ethnographic analysis and quantitative analysis lies in the phrase above—"an already established theoretical approach." Although as we have said in previous chapters, the data collection process is guided by a "formative theory" or model, ethnographic data seldom accumulate as information already categorized according to an established theoretical approach. In fact, they usually appear as mountains of raw material—drawers full of field notes, boxes of interviews and tests, stacks of documents, maps, logs, artifacts, drawings and charts, photographs, videotapes and audiotapes, survey data, and other kinds of materials. While some raw data—numerical test scores, pilesort data, or quantified network and text data, for example—CAN be entered directly into a computer and statistically manipulated, most ethnographic raw data must first pass through the researcher's brain. Regardless of the electronic aids a researcher might choose to assist in data organization, management, and crunching, no computer software can actually create codes or categories, and no computer alone can code data well for the researcher. Creating the categories for sorting, organizing, and coding data is a cognitive process that must be carried out by the researcher. And actually sorting the data is a laborious, hands-on activity carried out by researchers as they pore over their assembled data. Computer software now is used extensively to aid in these tasks; information technology makes it possible for computers to more easily record data, duplicate information, enter codes, tabulate data, and even to build theory. In addition they help to locate and retrieve information much faster than researchers ever could do by hand. But computers do not make the decisions required for the analysis and interpretation of their outputs. The researcher must first devise a framework for categorizing the data, and then organize, sort, code, or otherwise reduce it into the categories of that framework before any of the data can be rendered meaningful or quantified.

Cross Reference: See Books 3, 4, and 5 for more discussion on decisions regarding use of digital or computerized techniques for handling of qualitative, text, or graphic data

Some of the sorting, organizing, and coding occurs throughout the life of the study, helped by the guidelines set out in the formative model (see chapter 5) and research questions. But much of it happens toward the end, after the data to answer most of the questions have been collected, at the point when researchers begin "putting the whole picture together." The end product of analysis, then, is a set of **results** that can be shaped into a story that answers the concrete questions that guided the study in the first place. That story must be sufficiently coherent and comprehensible so that it can be communicated to a variety of audiences. The story itself, in turn, must be understandable and **interpreted** by both the researcher and participants in the research site in order to determine what the story means for the community,

for other audiences, and for the disciplines to which it is addressed (for example, education, sociology, anthropology, psychology, social work, or public health).

Definition: Research results are the basic facts of the story told by the analyzed data. Interpretation involves determining what those facts actually mean in relation to the audiences for whom they are directed

Definition: Recursive analysis is an iterative process of raising questions, developing minihunches or hypotheses based on the questions, answering them with collected data, reformulating them in light of those data, then collecting new data to answer the reframed questions

When Does Data Analysis Begin?

A key feature of ethnographic data analysis is that the process is **recursive** or iterative. It involves continually raising questions in the field, further and further modifying and clarifying ideas about what has been discovered.

As the examples from chapter 2 indicate, ethnography is preeminently an *exploratory process* that involves continuously generating questions and answers in the field throughout the field life of a project. No good ethnographer goes into the field "blind" without at least doing some preliminary fieldwork to gain access, learning as much as possible from prior or related research about the phenomenon to be studied, and formulating initial research questions, models, hunches, and hypotheses. Nevertheless, ethnographers often do not enter the field knowing very much about what is going on in the specific sites they are studying. Further, their knowledge of the characteristics of the population(s) under study may be quite limited. If they do know quite a bit about the population and field site, they prefer to suspend their own knowledge by proceeding as learners rather than experts. As we have indicated earlier, ethnographies also do not just begin and end with a single research question. Rather, research questions evolve as complexities in the field become clearer. In addition, the process of getting into the field and meeting the individuals under study often raises questions that weren't anticipated when the project was originally designed. These new questions may call for other unanticipated forms of data collection and analysis that must be developed, tested, and used during the life of the study.

Ethnographic studies may begin simply with a guiding hunch or question. With only a general idea of what they are seeking to discover, ethnographers may start with an initial, very general model representing their research problem and seek to develop a more precise model in the course of the study. Alternatively, they could, however, also begin their research with a very clear, theoretically driven model and use the ethnographic study to confirm, clarify, or disconfirm the existence of items, domains, or patterns identified in advance in the original theoretical framework. Mixed methods studies use both quantitative survey and various types of qualitative data. They tend to use a formative model to guide the qualitative data collection

that is then transformed into a more elaborated theoretical model to be tested using a survey approach. They may then follow with additional qualitative data to explain quantitative results.

However they begin the process, all ethnographers begin to collect, analyze, and interpret data with their first steps into the field, their first set of field notes and experiences, and the first set of guesses, hunches, or hypotheses they formulate about the phenomenon under study. Some of this kind of analysis is rather informal, but however it is done, the process continues recursively until a fully developed and well-supported interpretation of the entire cultural scene emerges, ready to be communicated to others.

"Chunking" Data into Large Conceptual Categories or "Bins"

Ethnographers sometimes speak of how patterns and results "emerge" from qualitative data as if the emergence were a kind of mystical process. Though it might seem to be surrounded in a kind of mysterious haze, patterns actually emerge because the researcher is engaged in a systematic cognitive process involving comparing, contrasting, looking for linkages, similarities, and differences, and finding sequences, co-occurrences, and absences. How to begin that process, however, can seem somewhat opaque. The easiest way to begin is to visualize the data bank as an enormous, unassembled jigsaw puzzle. Tackling a jigsaw puzzle can be done in several ways. Assume that the puzzle represents the artist Van Gogh's painting, "Crows over a Wheatfield." Some people begin by looking at the photograph of the intact design first to get an idea of how the design goes together. Having done so, they then divide the pieces into light-colored sky pieces, field pieces, and dark cloud pieces and place them according to what seems to be their relationship in the original work. Others find what seem to be the edge pieces of the puzzle, assembling them first as a framework. Others first look for all the pieces that are the same color or design and put them in piles. They then work on assembling each pile separately. At some point, relationships between all the colors, figures, piles, and framework must be determined in order for the entire painting to appear. Both in the field and in their offices after fieldwork has ended, ethnographers engage in analysis strategies analogous to sorting puzzle bits into like and unlike piles, finding edge pieces, sneaking looks at an original design, and trying to put together the most easily discerned patterns first. They then attempt to tie all the multiple patterns in the puzzle into a coherent whole. One can think of analysis, then, as beginning in three ways:

- By sifting piles of information into large conceptual categories derived from the framework that initially informed the study
- By sorting information into "mundane" or everyday categories such as kinds of actors or settings, types of activities or beliefs articulated, or even similar time episodes or types of interaction noticed in the field.
- By using inductive, bottom-up searching to examine the entire data set for obvious smaller and larger themes and patterns

Cross Reference: For a more detailed description of units, variables, factors, and domains or patterns, see Book 2

Dividing data up conceptually can be illustrated by a study of the relationship between the

effectiveness of bilingual education teachers and how those teachers think children acquire a second language. Researchers informed their study by conceptual categories derived from prior research on ways that laypeople believe second languages are or can be acquired. They used these categories to divide up their data—entries in teacher journals, an attitudinal survey, field notes taken during class discussions and language lessons, and grades the teachers' students receive in English and Spanish—according to the language acquisition strategy to which it referred. The categories or "bins" were arrayed according their sophistication in explaining actual language acquisition processes. Doing this rough cut through the data permitted the researchers to classify teachers according to the sophistication of their understanding of language acquisition, and from there, to examine the relationship between those understandings and the actual grades of the teachers' language acquisition students.

Jennifer Vadeboncoeur (1998) used a similar strategy to assess student teachers' understanding of Paolo Freire's (1970) ideas of *conscientizacion*. She first linked Freire's notions of intransitive, semitransitive, and transitive consciousness to rationales students used to explain why they occupied specific positions in the social class system. Vadeboncoeur established three categories based on whether students felt that an individual's social status and set of privileges were completely a function of their own efforts (intransitive consciousness, or a focus on the individual or self), a function of interactions with and support or hindrance by others (semitransitive consciousness or an awareness of the impact on self of other people), or a product of systemic social structural constraints with which individuals and other people had to struggle (transitive consciousness, or a focus on structural patterns of privilege and oppression). Calling these three categories "self," "other people," and "the system," she then initially coded and divided her data based on whether or not journal entries and field note excerpts referenced these three large conceptual areas.

Another way to begin is to use mundane, rather than theoretically informed, categories. For example, LeCompte's study of the Arts Focus program initially divided all observational and interview data referencing the idea of "being an artist" into categories depending on the role occupied by the person from whom the data came. This rough cut created four categories, "being an artist" behavior or actions engaged in by

- Teachers
- Students
- Staff or administrators
- Parents

In Jean Schensul's study of alcohol use and sexuality among young married and unmarried men in Mumbai, the interviews included "scripts" or brief narratives of recent and first sexual encounters with and without alcohol. Using three key domains in the study design (partner, alcohol, and protection), the study team created codes that combined presence/absence of alcohol, presence/absence of protection (condom), and type of partner, resulting in sixteen Critical Event (CE) codes that distinguished them from codes in the rest of the narrative interviews. These scripts were then read closely and subcoded with emergent codes that

characterized differences across these scripts. These subcodes also were referred to as CE codes. They included, for example, “intention” (to have sex, use a condom), drinking pattern (alone, with friends, with partner), drinking location (bar, lodge, brothel, home), etc. These subcodes were then used to compare systematically different types of critical events to identify and explain those in which alcohol was a necessary factor (always present) versus never or only sometimes present, in relation to unprotected sex (Schensul et al. 2010).

Judith Goetz’s dissertation (1976) that sought to inventory everything that elementary students did daily used similar mundane categories. Goetz first created large categories of activities by distinguishing school from nonschool activities and then dividing the latter into home and nonhome activities. She then divided school activities into instructional and noninstructional activities and the instructional activities according to various kinds of groups (full class, small groups, individual work), subject matter (math, spelling, language arts, etc.), and pedagogical strategies. Similarly, Elyse Singer gained access to a body of qualitative/narrative interviews collected from young men and women in the Greater Hartford area on their early lives, social and romantic relationships, exposure to and use of drugs, and their recent sexual engagements with and without the use of the drug Ecstasy. As a new member of the study team, she read the interviews from a novel perspective. She noticed that youth talked about different risks and benefits of using Ecstasy and developed a coding scheme that detailed each risk and benefit. She then observed that youth weighed risks and benefits, and classified the interviews into five groups that reflected different approaches to the risk/benefit balance ranging from high balance to “out of balance” (out of control) and compared them in terms of their views of risks and benefits.

Goetz’s and Singer’s strategies come close to a purely inductive approach to finding out “what’s there.” Even closer are studies in which the researcher records close to everything that occurs in a cultural scene and then tries to figure out what’s there. This involves isolating specific items or elements, patterns, and structures (or relationships among patterns in the data) related to the research questions in order to make sense of what otherwise would be an undifferentiated morass of information. Items become those events, behaviors, statements, or activities that stand out, either because they occur often, because they are crucial to other items, or because they are rare and influential. Once they have been identified, related items can be organized into cultural patterns and then these patterns can, in turn, be linked together in consistent relationships.

LeCompte used this approach in her dissertation (1974). During her data collection, she focused on the stream of teacher talk in four fourth-grade classrooms, recording in notes everything the teachers said. She then went back to see what emphases showed up in those notes. What topics were emphasized, and which phrases had been used most often? Did there seem to be differences in how the teachers talked? In the themes they stressed? Which activities were associated with which other activities? In which activities were teachers engaged most? What did they talk about least often? How did these in turn relate to what teachers said their goals for their students were? As she went over and over the field notes, certain similarities and dissimilarities among the teachers began to become obvious. Although

the amount of talking each teacher emitted did not seem to vary much, dividing up the stream of talk into what LeCompte called verbal episodes and then developing a classification scheme for those verbal episodes revealed significant differences among them. The classification scheme evolved from inventorying the many types of utterances teachers emitted; sorting all of the verbal episodes into the classification scheme showed that teachers differed widely on what they talked about and the degree to which their talk emphasized keeping order and classroom management. These differences, in turn, were linked to differences in teacher philosophies of instruction and attitudes toward the capabilities of their students.

Each of these strategies required reading the entire database over and over again. The overall ethnographic picture never becomes clear all at once; instead, it slowly emerges from the morass of observations, interviews, and other kinds of information. Further, even though ethnographers can begin by using one of the above approaches, they ultimately end up using all three forms of data "chunking."  **Key point** This is because ***making sense of what they are observing requires ethnographers to engage in several ongoing levels of analysis at once.*** We now move to a more detailed discussion of what these levels are constituted and how they actually operate to produce different levels of abstraction in the process of cultural theory building.

Defining Terms: Operational and Conceptual Levels of Analysis

To talk about analysis processes, a vocabulary is needed that permits discussion of the movement from concrete to more abstract descriptions of or propositions about phenomena in the field, and from the most close-to-the-data explanations of phenomena in a specific study site to explanations that link the results of a given study to other studies and to current understandings in the discipline informing the study. The first kind of movement involves operational thinking, or figuring out how to recognize salient information when it appears. The second kind of movement involves conceptualization and theorizing, or how either to fit information into the specific sets of understandings and explanations extant in a particular scientific field or to transform those understandings in the light of new information.

When researchers think operationally, they move through data horizontally, looking for related phenomena at the same level of concreteness and complexity among real-world *items* or *units*. This is the lowest level of abstraction, in which researchers seek to identify and conceptualize (apply higher-level conceptual domains) to the very most concrete and tangible items within a body of data. The next level of operational thinking seeks to aggregate similar tangible items into *categories*, *factors*, or *patterns* of related items. These categories or patterns are given names—sometimes called "cover terms" (Spradley 1979); the names represent the class of relatively similar items. The process is referred to as identifying *patterns*. Charles Ragin, a sociologist, refers to these patterns as "configurations" or groupings of variables (Ragin 2003). Identifying patterns moves the level of abstraction upward vertically from concrete real-world "things" to abstracted classes of things that relate to one

another—or are patterned—in specific ways. Having identified patterns, researchers first engage in a process of refining and modifying their categories; they then look for ways that patterns themselves are linked or related to one another. Groups of patterns that are related to or associated with one another in specific ways are called *structures*, which can be diagramed as *summative models*.

Cross Reference: See Book 2 for a discussion of how ethnographers create these categories and use them to guide research designs

Cross Reference: See Book 2, chapter 10 for a discussion of summative modeling and interpretation

For example, initial inspection of the range of small, living, creepy-crawly creatures invading one's mountainside campsite might reveal that while some have six legs, some have eight; some are winged while others are wingless. Some have hard shells while others have soft, squishy bodies. The six-legged creatures can be aggregated based on morphology into the category of "insects"—a cover term that precisely describes no single individual in detail but which subsumes a wide variety of creatures that share specific characteristics. Further, while eight-legged creepy crawlers such as spiders share many of the same characteristics as insects (including their lack of desirability at a campsite), they differ sufficiently in morphology as to constitute a discrete category of their own—arachnids, another cover term or category name. Given similarities and differences within them, the categories of insects and arachnids can be subdivided; insects, for example, include subpatterns or subcategories such as beetles, flies, mosquitoes, butterflies, and moths. The categories of insects and arachnids are, in turn, components of a larger *structure*—in this case, animals, which also include mammals, birds, and crustaceans. The above delineation or taxonomy of creepy crawly creatures is based more or less on biology; different criteria might be used to distinguish categories of creatures on the basis of such things as their annoyance factor, the seasons in which they might be present, their general toxicity to humans, and the ease by which they can be eliminated from the campsite. What has just been described is a primarily inductive, or bottom-up, process although formative models can specify elements of such delineations or taxonomies in the early stages of a study that help to guide the work. It also is operational in that it sticks closely to what is found in a specific research site.

When researchers think theoretically and conceptually, they also begin by looking at the most concrete *items in* a database. However, their next step differs. Conceptual thinking creates the theoretical categories into which data can be organized so as to facilitate their interpretation and explanation. Another way of putting it is that conceptual and theoretical thinking provides the framework for organizing and explaining data; operational thinking shows how real-life data can be sorted into that framework. In the camping example above, an initial level would begin with items (or creepy crawlers) and aggregate them into a pattern that is related to a theoretical *factor*, "nuisances associated with camping." "Insects and spiders"

might be one operational pattern within that category. Factors are constituted of *variables*. Variables describe, or are characteristics of, a person, place, thing, organization, group, behavior, or set of attitudes. They also vary across items in a category. For camping, for example, the factor "nuisances associated with camping" might involve such additional things as "environment," "food," and "equipment." Variables help to describe which specific aspects of these factors make them camping nuisances, thus paving the way for comparison across different types of camping experiences. The conceptual factor "environment" includes the variables "weather" (too hot, too cold, too much rain and lightning, or drought) and "terrain" (rocky, steep, boggy, or quicksand); the factor "food" includes variables such as difficulty in preparation, nutritional value, and weight; and the factor "equipment" includes variables involving specific types of equipment (tents, shoes, packs, camp stoves) and their related problems (respectively, propensity for leaks, quality of fit, weight, and explosive potential). These factors and variables may be recognized early on in a study, for example, in a formative conceptual model, and elaborated upon during the intensive data analysis phase; this process is parallel to the process of integrating units, categories, patterns, and structures.

Cross Reference: See Book 1, chapter 5 and Book 2, titled *Initiating Ethnographic Research: Models, Methods and Measurement*

To summarize: items, patterns, and structures operationalize variables, factors, and domains. The *variable* "biological sex" can be part of a *subfactor* called "sexual identity," which in turn is a component of a *factor* called "sexual preference," or the sex of the person with whom an individual desires sexual relationships. These, in turn, fit into a conceptual *domain* called "gender orientation." Operationally, these terms refer to specific *items* of behavior, such as wearing dresses, affecting specific speech styles, and restricting sexual relations to persons of the opposite biological sex. These, in turn, can be aggregated into *patterns* of related behavior called heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual orientation. Those patterns, in turn, constitute sex- and gender-related *structures* specific to the study site.

The preliminary model with which a researcher begins analysis is structured around a series of concepts and usually includes an initial set of operational items, patterns, and even guesses about structures. The model is unpacked and elaborated as data are collected and organized during the study, as new domains, variables, and items are identified, and those expected to be present are not found and thus eliminated from the model. Alternatively, a new model may emerge during the study, becoming more elaborated throughout the life of the study. Subcomponents of the model can emerge at any time during the study and be added to guide further data collection and analysis. The major *domains* of interest in the model become the primary categories for organizing; more precise coding takes place within them. The factors and variables subsumed within them form additional subcategories that can be operationally coded, classified, compared, and interpreted.

Cross Reference: See Book 1, chapter 5 and Book 2, chapters 4–6, which discuss the importance of initial modeling in framing data collection and initial organization of data in the analysis phase

Cross Reference: See Book 3, chapter 1 for a discussion of cultural domains

Table 7.1 displays how the various levels of concrete, operational, and empirical elements in a study are linked to the theoretical and conceptual of explanation. Levels of explanation (theorizing "why does this occur?") are found on the vertical axis of Table 7.1. The explanations of the most concrete and operational items in a study are locally generated and may make sense only at that level. More aggregated or abstracted operational levels of description are explained by midrange or substantive theories that can link to and illuminate findings from other similar or analogous studies. At the highest levels of conceptualization and the most abstracted categories of data analysis, researchers may seek explanations for the phenomena they study at the paradigmatic level. The initial taxonomy or arrangement of items as patterns and structures derived from the initial model can be organized as hierarchies, as illustrated in Figure 7.1 below. Depending on how much prior knowledge the researcher had before beginning the study, Figure 7.1 up to the variable level could serve as an initial coding system for a drug use study. In this taxonomy, the variables could be coded qualitatively; that is, whenever there is any mention of anything related to gatekeeper or location, the variable would be coded. If researchers wanted to quantify the variable, the data associated with each qualitatively coded variable would be extracted and quantifiable items identified and measured (e.g., either present/absent or in the form of 3 to 5 point Likert scales ranging from low to high, never to always).

Cross Reference: See Book 1, chapter 3 for a summary of research paradigms; Book 2 also presents details of how explanations for empirical phenomena are variously informed by different social science paradigms

Table 7.1 The Theoretical/Conceptual and Operational/Empirical Levels of Research

Abstract ← Empirical / Operational → *Concrete*

Local ← Theoretical / Conceptual → *Paradigm*

	Structure	*Pattern*	*Unit*	*Item or Fact*
Domain	Leisure Activities			
Factor		Camping		
Subfactor			Camping Nuisances	
Variable				Creepy Critters, Equipment, Food, Weather

Figure 7.1 Conceptual Taxonomies and Coding Levels: Domains, Factors, Variables, and Items for Coding and Analysis, Used in a Study of AIDS Risk Associated with Drug Use Locations

DOMAIN:	**HIGH RISK SITE**				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
FACTOR: LOCATION:	SHOOTING GALLERY	APARTMENT	ABANDONED BUILDING	ENCLOSED ALLEYWAY	UNDER BRIDGE
VARIABLE:	EXPOSURE (DEGREE OF PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE SITE)				
Quantification	Very High	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low
VARIABLE:	GATEKEEPER (WHETHER SOMEONE IS THERE TO GUIDE AND ENFORCE ACCESS)				
Quantification	Present Powerful	to	Absent Weak		
VARIABLE:	PREVENTION ***ITEMS*** USED (CLEAN NEEDLES, LITERATURE, CONDOMS IN PACKAGES, BLEACH KITS OR EVIDENCE OF SUCH)				
ITEM:	Always Present	to	Never Present		
Quantification	Always Used	to	Never Used		
DOMAIN:	**DRUG USE PATTERNS**				
	(1)	(2)	(2)		
FACTOR:	DRUG	MODE OF INGESTION	SOCIAL CONTEXT		
VARIABLE:	MARIJUANA	VEHICLE	PARTNER		

ITEM:	Type	Pipe	Regular		
ITEM:	Cost	Needle	Acquaintance		
ITEM:	Carrier (blunt, etc.)	In liquid	Unknown		
	Pills				
	Inhaled powder				
DOMAIN:	**DRUG RISK BEHAVIORS**				
FACTOR:	DRUG USER INTERACTIONS				
VARIABLE:	USER RELATIONSHIPS				
VARIABLE:	TYPE OF EXCHANGE				
VARIABLE:	USE OF PROTECTIVE STRATEGIES (BLEACH, COTTON, DISPOSABLE NEEDLES)				
ITEM	(NO ITEMS IDENTIFIED AS YET)				

These initial conceptual categories are guides to observation and interviewing. They are continuously enhanced, expanded, subdivided, and enriched throughout the course of the research, until, in the end, a much more elaborated system of organizing, arranging, and eventually coding data has emerged, one which can be applied to the entire data set. Hypotheses that relate subdomains to one another both within and across domains can be constructed throughout the analysis, as well as at the end. These relationships can be explored qualitatively by considering their co-occurrence with other relationships or how they are arranged in sequence or linkages in the text. The greater the degree of clarity with respect to the research question and the more experienced the investigator, the faster these categories emerge.

Finding Initial Themes or Regularities

As researchers pore over and over their data in the initial stages of cleanup and organization,

and even as they begin a more formal coding process, they all experience what ethnographers call the "emergence of themes." What this means is that as one becomes more and more familiar with the data, certain overall ideas, topics, or central tendencies become obvious. Sometimes, as in Example 7.3, they simply add to what the researcher already anticipated. Other times, as in Examples 7.1 and 7.2, they can be different from what the researcher originally planned to find.

Example 7.1

When additional themes emerge in a study in the course of data collection

Rita Tracy embarked on a small study (2009) of an after-school program in a community center attached to a large, low-income, and primarily Latino/a trailer court. The trailer court was located on the edges of an otherwise upper-class and white town. The center's after-school program had been in existence for decades, and Tracy wanted to know both what had contributed to its longevity and what the young people who participated and the staff themselves felt the program contributed to the success of participants. While she expected to find evidence of caring for participants among the staff and of helpful academic activities and programs for the students themselves, the provision of frequent meals and snacks for participants, even before they had done any academic work, as well as the heavy emphasis on making sure that children had plenty of time to spend during meals, looked more like "family dining" to Tracy than just a meal. That students were made to brush their teeth, reminded to do their homework, and nagged about being on time for their school schedules also was reminiscent to Tracy of what parents did on a regular basis. She gradually constructed a theme called "providing care as parents normally would," noting that the parents of some participants worked too many jobs or were not functional enough to dote heavily on their children or give them the attention staff felt they needed to succeed in school. In return, students said that they appreciated what they defined as "guidance" from the staff. Some even noted that their own parents had not encouraged them to do well in school, and in one case, had expected their daughter to drop out prior to graduating so as to care for her little sister. This participant said that without the guidance and encouragement of the staff, she might never have graduated. Tracy eventually integrated the "parental" theme into the overall analysis of her study.

The next example describes the emergence of two predominant themes in a study of the scheduled drug Ecstasy among young adults in New England. Ecstasy is a Schedule I drug, meaning that any use is illegal and, though it was developed for therapeutic purposes (to enhance communication and empathy in psychiatric patients), currently it cannot be prescribed.

Example 7.2

Two early emergent themes associated with Ecstasy use among young adults

Over past decade, researchers in Hartford, Connecticut, have tracked the use of Ecstasy among young adults. In earlier research, Ecstasy emerged as a drug thought of as enhancing intimate partner relationships and the quality of sexual experience. Since 2007, researchers have conducted focus group and in-depth interviews with young adult Ecstasy users to explore the association between the use of the drug and unprotected sex. Both types of interviews highlight two primary emergent themes. The first theme was associated with "mood alteration" related to two subthemes. The first was enhancing an existing mood such as anger, or joy, and reducing stress, emotional pain, or suffering associated with abuse, neglect, job or relationship loss, or a mental health problem or cognitive disability. The second theme was associated with pleasure. Two subthemes emerged with regard to pleasure, one related to sexual pleasure and the second related to "affiliative" (nonsexual) pleasure (enjoying being with friends for conversation, "chilling," or going out). These two primary themes referred to as "mediating pain" and "mediating pleasure" became primary patterns, or organizing frameworks around which study data were organized.

In the following example we illustrate how emergent themes can contradict or render obsolete the original design and model for a study.

Example 7.3

When emergent themes contradict the original intent of a study

In a recent study (2010) of two middle schools whose enrollments were forced to share a school site for eighteen months because of major renovation in the home school of one, Sara Staley initially planned to examine the degree to which ethnic integration would be fostered by the melding of the two enrollments, one a predominantly Latino/a focus school with an innovative dual-language bilingual program—the school that closed—and the other a traditional middle school program with a white and middle-to-upper-class student body—the site to which Latino students were temporarily moved. Staley was surprised on her first visit to Parker, the receiving school, to see that the entire campus had been filled with "trailers"—temporary classrooms grouped together and, she was told, intended for the students from Crowley, the school whose students were being moved.

Subsequent visits and interviews showed that not only had a completely separate set of classrooms been established for the visiting students but also Crowley and Parker students had separate entrances, parking lots, main offices, lunch schedules, recesses, and even assembly times. Further, Crowley students had to enter from the rear of the campus site, while Parker students kept their same entrance, near the front of the building. Putting all of these items or events together led Staley to declare a theme of segregation or isolation at the site rather than the integration and programmatic and enrollment mixing that she had expected to find. Staley was told by the principal at Parker that constructing two completely separate schools at one site was the only "practical" way for the move to be carried out, especially since it was done

midyear. Staley regretted what seemed to have been an opportunity lost—one that could have fostered cross-ethnic relationships—and she then had to rethink her conceptual framework to explain what she actually found in the site rather than what her initial expectations had been.

Regardless of whether the themes that initially emerge in a project are completely congruent with the original conceptual framework, modify it, or contradict it, researchers ultimately must move on to more detailed examination of the substantive material contained in the various data types collected so that the actual structure and content of the themes becomes more precisely described.

The Item Level of Analysis: Isolating Empirical "Bits" from Streams of Data

The identification of variables and the items (or subunits) with which they are operationalized is often guided by the preliminary model that informs the study's research questions or concerns. The cognitive process that researchers use to isolate variables and items resembles the games children play while learning to read: comparing and contrasting; analyzing their characteristics; looking for items that are like and unlike each other; sorting, sifting, and matching; clumping together those that are alike; separating those that are different. These processes facilitate defining each item clearly so that other researchers can proceed in the same fashion (see LeCompte and Preissle 1993). Glaser and Strauss (1977) call this process one of "constant comparison," in which each item—whether identified previously or just emerging—is compared to all other items so that they can be clearly identified, defined, or **operationalized**, and distinguished one from the other.

 **Definition: Operationalization means defining a concept concretely in such a way that it can be understood, observed, or categorized accurately by any researcher reviewing the same data or observing in the same setting**

Seeking negative instances—that is, where variables or items are unlike each other or contest the existing definition—is particularly important in this process. It helps the researcher to avoid making premature judgments about the meaning or identification of an item. In the example that follows, we indicate how variables were identified in one component of The Learning Circle Project. This stage of the process can take place only as the researcher reads his or her field notes, interviews, and other data over and over again until they become deeply familiar. This facilitates finding multiple instances of what can be operationalized as the same phenomena. Keeping a research journal in which the researcher notes ideas and hunches as they arise during the course of the study can be helpful in pursuing new ideas, definitions, items, and concepts at any point in the analysis process. Such journals are likely to be full of ideas that can serve as the basis for analyses.

Example 7.4

Using ideas and hunches from researchers' field journals to generate analytic categories (variables) for The Learning Circle study

Initially, Learning Circle researchers noticed that parents always were contacted by the certified teachers who worked with their children, not by social workers, paraprofessionals, truant officers, or other lower-status nonacademic personnel. They also noticed that considerable effort was made to give the parents advance notice of visits and to provide them with many choices in how they worked with the educational materials the teachers left in the homes for child and parent usage. Parent meetings also always involved a meal or refreshments—a practice denoting a significant event in American Indian culture. Parents also were encouraged to provide ideas for the curriculum. These variables—parent contacts by professionals, advance notices, parent choice of activities, and food served at program events—emerged *in a consistent pattern* after reading and rereading daily teacher schedules and transcripts of interviews conducted with the teachers, field notes taken while accompanying teachers on home visits, and records of parent conversations made during evening parent meetings.

Like most variables identified in ethnographic research, these did not emerge out of the air; they were congruent with the implicit goals of the program, even if they were not explicitly stated as goals.

In this particular case, the researchers felt that the variables and items described in Example 7.4 were significantly related to one of the overall objectives of the project: to build respect for the culture of American Indian parents and their children. Taken together, these variables, when present, seemed to indicate that parents were taken seriously by The Learning Circle professionals and that particular practices common to American Indian cultures were integrated, where possible, with Learning Circle activities. The example shows how the primary pattern—respect for culture of American Indian parents and children—is shown through two factors: parents taken seriously (indicated by three variables: enactment of contacts by professionals, sending of advance notices, parent choice of activities), and practices common to American Indian cultures (indicated by one variable: presence of food served at program events). Example 7.4 shows how researchers work recursively back and forth from theories, past experiences, and existing studies to their own data and then back again from their data to theory and experience to develop explanations for the events they observe.

The Pattern Level of Analysis: Aggregating Similar or Related Items into Groups

Patterns consist of groups of empirical items, variables, and factors that fit together and express a particular theme or comprise a predictable and consistent set of behaviors. Patterns are created using more or less the same cognitive process that we described earlier with regard to assembling a jigsaw puzzle. Once discrete "things" that are orderable, scalable, or countable have been isolated from the stream of data, researchers can manipulate them further; ordering, scaling, and counting them and testing hypotheses by exploring their interrelationships with other items and groups of items. For example, they can be formulated into scales or indices for use in various types of correlational analyses. Alternatively, text data can be coded using larger categories, such as those in the coding trees in Figure 7.1, or concepts such as "respect" in the case of The Learning Circle analysis or "pain mediation" in the course of the Ecstasy study. These coded data "chunks" can be managed by hand or through computer programs designed for the management and analysis of large amounts of text data. Once the items have been chunked or aggregated into, or categorized as parts of, patterns, they then can be compared, contrasted, defined, and confirmed with other patterns on an ongoing basis. Thus, through the process of comparison, contrast, and integration, "items" are organized, associated with other items, and linked into higher-order patterns. The patterns may have emerged from prior studies or a study's theoretical framework as in the drug- and high-risk site taxonomies depicted in Figure 7.1. In this instance, the study focused on high-risk sites, and the first phase of the study was devoted to locating, describing, and documenting behavior in such sites. Eventually, after six months of ethnography, the field team defined high-risk sites in a way that differed markedly from their initial definitions and were only tangentially related to the subdomains the researchers had originally designated in their initial conceptual model. With the additional knowledge obtained by ethnographers and outreach workers, the definition of a high-risk site was operationalized as either public (no gatekeeper) or private (with a gatekeeper). Private sites could be one of four types, with or without gatekeepers and with or without a prevention orientation.

Of utmost importance is that researchers allow considerable time for the kinds of cognitive activities described above to take place. It is easy to forget, at the point when themes are emerging from the data, that the existence and stability of themes themselves must be fully supported by concrete evidence—the kinds of evidence provided by richly layered sets of items showing how they are operationalized and patterns demonstrating how they are linked to other parts of the overall ethnographic description. Thus, researchers must avoid "premature closure" in data analysis, just as they must avoid premature departure from the field. In the latter case, the data collected will be insufficient to answer the research question; in the former, the evidence assembled will not provide a convincing argument that the explanations of phenomena provided by the researchers are credible.

The Structural Level of Analysis: Assembling Multiple Patterns into Structures or Local Theories Informed by Conceptual Domains

Once researchers have identified items and assembled them into patterns, they look for

linkages and co-occurrences as well as relationships between sets of patterns, using those to constitute *structures or local theories*. Structures can be thought of as the principal components depicted in the painting on a jigsaw puzzle, or the major elements of a story plot. Gradually, as more and more chunks of patterned pieces of a jigsaw puzzle are assembled, the entire picture comes together. The same thing occurs in a research project as the pieces of the analytic puzzle come together to create an overall picture—or to constitute the structure—of the phenomenon under investigation. It is the structural level of analysis that permits the researcher to assemble all the parts of the story that he or she wants to tell about the events observed in the study, or, put another way, it is at the structural level that the researcher creates the complete description of the phenomenon under investigation.

Of course, with jigsaw puzzles, the underlying structure or design—or the story to be told—is determined by the manufacturer beforehand; there generally are no real surprises. All the person putting it together has to do is to discover what the puzzle's creators intended for the user to discover, even though puzzles sometimes are created to be used in novel ways. Some puzzles may have a different picture on each side so that multiple perspectives must be considered before they can be assembled. Others consist of pieces that can be linked to many different pieces to form novel assemblies. Researchers also often discover things that are completely new and unanticipated in their data. Thus, while the analytic process often uses the researcher's past experiences, previous research studies, and social science theories to create the initial frameworks for defining items and patterns—or, to use the puzzle metaphor, the "edge pieces" that bound the overall design—these frames do not have to dictate the ultimate course that the analysis takes.

The process of creating structures involves comparing and contrasting, seeking links and relationships across patterns from multiple data types and multiple sources. For example, it is not enough to compare analyzed transcripts of teachers in a study with each other; the researcher also has to compare the results from the teacher transcripts, separately and as a group, with the results from observations of their classrooms, entries in their journals, attitudinal surveys, and other data. Further, the analysis takes place not only horizontally across results from different data types but also vertically, so that evidence assembled from item-level analysis can be used to substantiate claims made about higher-level relationships and linkages at the pattern and structural level.

In the case of The Learning Circle, the items of parent-related behavior fit together into a pattern that the researchers came to call "privileging the participation of Indian parents." This, in turn, was linked horizontally to other patterns that involved privileging Indian cultural practices and ways of knowing. In The Learning Circle, American Indian practices, beliefs, ways of communicating, and standards for behavior were given more importance by staff than were mainstream practices, beliefs, and standards. That importance was demonstrated in item behaviors such as those described in Example 7.3. It clearly marked differences between how American Indian teachers, children, and parents were treated in The Learning Circle and their treatment in mainstream programs. Looking further, a pattern of program-to-parent-related behavior that took parents' status and ideas seriously, combined with similar patterns of

director-to-teacher-related behavior, teacher-to-teacher-related behavior, and teacher-to-student-related behavior that all privileged Indian cultural ways of knowing, doing, believing, and interacting could be aggregated and linked vertically to a structure made of patterned ways of taking seriously the ways of knowing, behaving, believing, and acting of American Indian people. The researchers identified this overall structural element or theme as *respect* and determined that in this structure, respect was, indeed, one of the reasons why the program was so successful in inspiring participation of Indian parents and children as well as higher achievement among the students.

The researchers were aware of the importance of the concept of respect both from their previous experience with American Indian populations and from prior studies other researchers had done with American Indians. However, the material they assembled seemed convincing evidence that The Learning Circle itself embodied that concept in every one of its activities and practices. What was most interesting about this discovery was the fact that the concept of respect, as it was revealed in the ethnographic study, was not defined by program initiators as a goal or process central to the program. Nevertheless, the ethnographers discovered that implementation of every activity in The Learning Circle was done in ways that clearly signaled respect for Indian culture. Provided with this rich body of evidence, the ethnographers were able to suggest to program staff that *respect* was a principal reason for the program's wide acceptance within the Indian community and with its success both in reinforcing the cultural identities of students while at the same time in enhancing their academic success.

Seeking Complex Relationships across Domains and Structures by Using Multiple Levels and Sources of Data

Ethnographic and qualitative data are formulated and reformulated repeatedly into models consisting of relationships; these models are tested continuously against what researchers actually encounter in the research site. The process becomes what we have referred to earlier as iterative or recursive analysis. Qualitative analysis may begin with the first interview because such analysis helps to assure that the questions being asked are meaningful and the data collected are responsive to research concerns; it continues throughout the data collection phase. Qualitative researchers cannot begin to quantify their data until items are clearly identified; this is why qualitative researchers begin their analysis by identifying discrete items from the stream of behavior. Only once they have been identified can items be quantified. By contrast, quantitative researchers begin with data whose constitutive items already have been clearly identified during a prior study. Thus, quantitative researchers can begin analysis with enumeration and manipulation of results, so long as a sufficient number of enough respondents have provided data to make the model building process worthwhile. By contrast, qualitative researchers can engage in more quantitative approaches to analysis only in the later stages of a qualitative or ethnographic study. In fact, quantitative researchers often do not even think of beginning analysis until at least 50 percent of the sample has responded. Even at that, they can

declare few of their results to be definitive, since response rates smaller than 50 percent may not be considered representative of the larger population.

Interpreting the Results: Figuring Out What the Story Means

Once the data have been "crunched," the researcher first assembles them into a close-to-the-data story, or set of results. The results alone, however, do not tell the whole story. Results are facts, but the facts must be *interpreted*, or given meaning. By themselves, neither Staley's description of separation and isolation at Crowley and Parker schools nor LeCompte's depiction of what The Learning Circle did to include parents in activities are very *meaningful*. Interpretation permits a researcher to respond to the questions "So what?" and "Why is this important?" that the facts of the study generate.

Example 7.5

Interpreting gender-based vulnerability in SRI LANKA

In the study of vulnerability to interpersonal intimacy and sexual risk in Sri Lanka, the initial model identified family, peers, and work as the primary domains within which vulnerability to male/female interaction and subsequent sexual and health consequences might occur. Ethnographic fieldwork including observations and key informant and in-depth interviews added to the model information about sexuality, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases and enabled researchers to deconstruct or unpack these main domains into factors, variables, and items which were then quantified in a series of scales and used in a large survey. Analysis and triangulation of all the data compiled in the study showed a prevailing pattern of difference in results between male and female respondents, regardless of age, religious affiliation, or class. For example, unlike young men, women participated in more family events, went out with male and female relatives in family-driven rather than peer-driven outings, and turned to female relatives for information more than anyone else; women spent most of their time with female peers; women obtained information from female peers and relatives or TV and magazines; and women worked in gender-isolated factory environments. They had less information about sexuality and ways of protecting themselves than men. The research team argued that the gender-based limitations in "women's ways of knowing" rendered them more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and sexual risk in a globalizing economy. In Sri Lanka, new economic opportunities were resulting in changes in gender-based norms and behaviors, offering some increased independence of movement for women without providing opportunities for them to gain accurate information about sexuality or learning how to negotiate with men (Schensul, Schensul, and Oodit 1994).

The concepts in both the initial framework and the modifications that emerge during these studies provide the basis for helping the researcher go beyond the "facts of the case." "Going

beyond" means explaining results to the reader using various levels of theory. This means that explanations for what happened need to be presented first in the words of the local people, second in terms of the wider community and the specific discipline informing the study, and third, in terms of what the social sciences generally say about similar results. These nested levels are the theoretical levels depicted in Table 7.1: local or substantive theory, middle-range or disciplinary theory, and paradigmatic theory. Each of these levels provides an explanation of the results; each is linked tightly to concepts identified both prior to implementation of the study and during data collection and analysis stages. Thus, the implementation of a research study begins and ends with consideration of the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework first informs the initial research questions asked and then shapes the data collection strategies. During the analysis process, it assists researchers in both figuring out what to look for in the data and how the data are linked together in relationships. Finally, the conceptual framework presents a way of looking at the world and explaining phenomena within it that informs how the results obtained can be explained.

Levels of Theory

Local theory involves determining local explanations of events given by local people and participants. Sara Staley got such an explanation from principals at Parker School when they told her that *the only practical thing to do* when scrunching two complete schools onto one site was to keep them completely separate. However, researchers must not end their interpretation with local explanations. Thus, "practicality" must be viewed as only part of the answer to events at the schools. What if some of the practical reasons for keeping the schools separate disappeared (e.g., the move was done at the beginning of the school year so teachers would have more time to prepare; the school campus was larger so that the logistics of moving students from class to class, cars from street to parking lot, and teachers from classroom to classroom were not so complex; and the lunchroom was capacious enough to serve all children at times relatively close to a normal lunchtime)? Would the argument from practicality persist as a rationale? Would segregation remain? Do similar or analogous situations of separation exist in other schools? Does a pattern of social class and ethnic separation exist throughout the school district? If so, a higher-level *substantive* or *middle-range theory* must be sought to explain why principals set up segregated experiences even when they did not have to. Such theories may require stepping away from the local site to look at the structure of the community in which Parker and Crowley are located, or digging deeper into reasons for why the schools held only one activity all year long for both groups of students at the schools together. In fact, the larger community of High Plains is stratified and segregated residentially by race and class and populated by many exclusive, even gated, communities. Buses serve the more affluent communities best. Rita Tracy's research (2009, described in Example 7.1) documented that bus service to poor communities is less frequent, less convenient, involves more transfers to get downtown, and uses older buses than those serving the more affluent communities. Such service tends to marginalize the poor and people of color in High Plains by isolating them from

the rich. It stigmatizes poor people of color by inflicting on them the least adequate equipment and less accessible bus routes. One could aggregate this evidence from observations, public documents, interviews, and spatial data and then compare across it to develop higher-order structures called "distancing" and "marginalization." The middle or substantive range theory explaining the existence of these structures might then explain that the demographic characteristics of school enrollments in High Plains schools tended to reflect the levels of affluence and resources available in the neighborhoods the schools served. In the case of open-enrollment schools that drew from all over the district, the resources available to the schools reflected the social class status of the families served, such that richer families were able to send their children to schools that had higher levels of resources, and they also were able to restrict the amount of contact their children had with low-income, language minority, and ethnically different children. The substantive theory, then, might be that *schools tend to reflect the social class structures and behavior patterns of the communities in which they are embedded*. Thus, if a community is segregated and its inhabitants practice social distancing to avoid contact with people who are poorer and more "ethnically identifiable" than they, then the schools correspondingly will reflect similar structures. If the community as a whole ignores and marginalizes poor people of color, the schools likely will as well. Moving still higher, researchers could use existing research literature on segregation, isolation, privilege, disadvantage, discrimination, and marginalization to examine the political economy and structures of privilege and disadvantage in U.S. society overall. This would permit them to suggest a paradigmatic explanation: *That where asymmetries of power and prestige exist, they will be reflected in and reinforced by the institutions [including schools] extant in society.* Thus, as they move upward from concrete and local explanations, the levels of theory become more abstract and hence, more generalizable. In cases where no existing literature informs the local results, the researcher must generate a theory grounded in the specific study at hand that explains the results and suggests how it might alter or modify existing understandings. The newly generated "grounded theory" (Glaser and Strauss 1977) is then made available for others to test out in the light of other studies of the same or similar phenomena.

Summary

When ethnographers collect both qualitative and quantitative data, the qualitative data are continuously analyzed, providing the basis for survey or other quantitative research to follow. Sometimes, the qualitative data can stand alone; sometimes they provide working hypotheses that guide the construction of the quantitative research. Qualitative data can also supplement, extend, or provide context or explanations for the quantitative data. The process of integrating qualitative and quantitative data—seeing how each analysis verifies, validates, and enhances the other—is the final form of triangulation; it happens at the end of the analysis process. Researchers then interpret data using the theories from their conceptual framework; they may also triangulate among theories used to explain results in the same or similar studies to arrive at the best explanation for what they have found in their own study (see LeCompte and Preissle

1993 for a discussion of how this process of "theoretical sampling" can be used). Book 5 of **The Ethnographer's Toolkit** provides a much more detailed picture of the steps in qualitative and quantitative analyses of ethnographic data and how they can be integrated to provide a complete picture of the problem or situation to be explored in the study.

Cross Reference: See chapter 4, Table 4.4 and Table 4.5, for ways that qualitative and quantitative data can supplement each other in a study; see also Book 3 for a more extended discussion of mixed methods studies

Cross Reference: See Book 5

We now move on to chapter 8 where we discuss the construction and maintenance of the research teams and partnerships upon which ethnographic research depends.

8

Identifying and Building Research Teams and Research Partnerships

Building and Conducting Ethnographic Team Research
Building Interdisciplinary Community Research Partnerships
Challenges and Rewards in Ethnographic Teamwork and Interdisciplinary Intersectoral Partnerships

Most ethnography has been conducted traditionally by independent researchers working in individual field sites. However, ethnographers really never work alone. They depend on key informants, stakeholders, residents, and other people in the research site to provide them with information, feedback, good judgment, and access to resources to further their study. These collaborators are, however, identified during the process of the research, not before the study begins. In this chapter, we discuss ways of dealing with two different types of collaborative situations: building and carrying out ethnographic team research and building interdisciplinary intersectoral partnerships for research and intervention or social or policy change efforts.

Field schools, cross-site ethnographic studies, or evaluations and even dissertation work may be conducted by more than one researcher. The first type of ethnographic collaboration, the ethnographic field school, is quite common in the history of ethnographic research. Field schools are usually located in communities, and more often than not, students work in team ventures. As early as the mid 1940s, in an early and classic example of student team research, anthropologist Sol Tax sent a team of ethnographers to work on the Fox reservation (Martens 2004). University of South Florida Professors Nancy Romero-Daza and David Himmelgreen have been managing a summer field school on globalization and community health in Costa Rica for a number of years in which students conduct supervised and coordinated ethnographic research in relation to the needs of a local community in which the field school is situated (http://lists.ysu.edu/pipermail/urbanth-l/
2005-January/000254.html). In 2010, the website of the American Anthropological Association lists three ethnographic field schools—two in Mexico, and one in South Bend, Indiana (http://www.aaanet.org/ar/fs/fschool.htm). Jean Simonelli, an anthropologist at Wake Forest University, has run a field school in Chiapas, Mexico, for many years where students are trained to conduct team-based research in a politically sensitive geosocial space

(Simonelli 2000).

Team ethnographic research has a long and illustrious history. For example, Whiting and Child's well-known cross-site ethnographic study of childhood in six cultures began with the development of a field manual in 1953 to standardize data collection and continued to produce multiple publications on cross cultural aspects of social and emotional development (Whiting, 1953; Whiting et al. 1975, 1953). The challenges of cross-site educational policy-oriented qualitative research conducted on critical educational issues such as the results of desegregation in southern schools carried out in the 1970s are outlined in a 1983 article by Herriott and Firestone. More recently ethnographers, including Erickson et al. (1997) and Greg Chest and Kathleen McQueen (2007), have written about collaborative or team ethnography.

The second is a more recent trend, involving the implementation of complex, large-scale projects for which a research team is required in order to do the work and is defined before the project actually starts. The collaboration involved in this form of team research is carefully planned, strategized, and wholly intentional. These projects may take place across two or more field settings and often are conducted with research partners from other disciplines or sectors (Stull and Schensul 1987; Schensul and Schensul 1992; ICR http://www.incommunityresearch.org/publications/documents/CaseStudiesinCBCRFinal12.17.(Research team members and other partners are chosen specifically to bring to the project the proper skills and orientation, productive patterns of interpersonal communication, the highest quality informational and human resources, and problem-solving skills capable of implementing complicated intervention strategies. All of these are critical to the success of the study. For example, to build research infrastructure for collaborative research on oral health of older adults in Connecticut, Jean Schensul, an anthropologist, and Susan Reisine, a sociologist, assembled a multisectoral interdisciplinary research partnership team, the Oral Health Research Strategic Alliance (OHRSA) that consisted of representatives from geriatric advocacy organizations, the state health and social services departments, community health clinics and organizations coordinating their programs, the University of Connecticut dental and medical schools, community residents and geriatric researchers from the Institute for Community Research, and the University of Connecticut. To conduct an intervention study to improve female condom use in China, anthropologist Margaret Weeks of the Institute for Community Research and public health physician Su Su Laio of Peking Union Medical College coordinated a team that included the China Centers for Disease Control, local health departments, and the owners of small businesses catering to sexual service needs in two areas of southern China (Weeks et al. 2007). In contrast to both of these forms of group or team research, the "lone ethnographer" (Campbell-Galman 2007) or independent researcher does not face such complexities, and the researcher assembles most of the resources needed with assistance but without full-scale partnership required from others.

Team research is complex. For example, it requires agreement among all partners regarding the research topic, the research question, and the importance of consistency in comparative data collection across multiple sites or over time. Further, team research requires at least some clear-cut procedures to be established in advance of data collection and analysis

so that consistency in approach, data collection, and analysis strategies are maintained across the sites and time periods. The study methodology (research design, sampling, and data collection) must be coordinated across sites and across the research staff members responsible for the work. Steps in data management and analysis have to be identified and described in detail from the outset, both so that team members know what they must do and so that they can engage in joint activities. Team members and partners must form agreements with respect to the roles each will play, the responsibilities they have, what topics will be addressed in published work and who will be credited with authorship, and how communication with the public will be carried out. If the research is interdisciplinary and/or intersectoral, the inevitable differences in theory, approach, and methodology must be hammered out early in the design, implementation, and data analysis/dissemination phases of a project. Agreements about budgets, requirements of Institutional Review Boards, personnel policies and protocols, and other administrative details also must be forged, which takes time and care. Since most team research requires constant adjustments in relation to ongoing data collection and decision making, close monitoring and good communication across individuals and sites is critical.

Despite these challenges, there are many reasons why ethnographic research conducted in collaboration with others confers far more benefits than challenges or liabilities. Some of these include:

- Better access to research sites
- Better insights into what constitute important research questions
- More information helpful in the initial stages of beginning the research or writing a study proposal
- Greater exposure to different dimensions of the field site
- More information and greater ability to conduct controlled comparisons across sites, time, and situations
- Improved capacity to understand complex community problems by using the insights of different disciplines and local partners
- Increased likelihood of effective dissemination and use of study results
- Greater potential for identifying intervention, program and advocacy partners who are committed to mutually planned change based on the research

Building and Conducting Ethnographic Team Research

The first step in carrying out an ethnographic team research project is to determine what resources are required on the project. Though staffing requirements can be spelled out in the budget of a study proposal they may evolve and change as different team members weigh in with their specific needs, political allegiances, and interests; changes can continue to emerge throughout the course of a project, so administrative flexibility is required. Typical skills sets called for in an ethnographic team project include:

- social skills to facilitate entry and continued relationship-building
- observation and interviewing
- ability to use the mixed methods involved in ethnographic research
- data management skills
- data analysis and analytic software skills
- prior research experience

Perhaps most critical to carrying out a team ethnography project is the ability to get along and collaborate with other team members. Willingness to share information with other team members, the ability to find resources and communicate well with partners and participants in the field, competency in supporting and ensuring the safety of field team members, ability to participate in tricky negotiations to resolve conflicts involving cost and other resource sharing, to address the allocation of power to make administrative decisions, to determine how and with whom to analyze data, and how to write up and present research findings are all part of the collaborative effort.

 **Definition: Institutional Review Boards are federally mandated committees located in most research institutions. They review all research on human subjects to assure proper protection of participants' rights and privacy**

Identifying and Assembling a Research Team

Leadership is critical to a well-functioning ethnographic research team. Conceptual guidance, good working knowledge of personnel and budget management, group team building, and facilitation and supervisory skills are important qualities of an ethnographic team leader or principal investigator. These include the ability to organize work plans, see that they are implemented, provide feedback, and evaluate performance. Good team leaders recognize the value of individual team members and can identify ways in which they can offer team members individualized support in the areas of conceptualization, data collection, and analysis.

A well-functioning research team consists of individuals who have the skills to carry out the research or other tasks and responsibilities to which they are assigned and who know how to ask for help when they need it. Good team members are willing to work with others to build common conceptual understandings and can share in data coding and management systems; they serve as partners in both the conduct of the research and writing up of the results.

One challenge that must be met in a team study is the distribution of administrative tasks and responsibilities, such as regular reporting to funders, preparation of materials to be reviewed by **Institutional Review Boards** (sometimes collaborative projects are reviewed by several IRBs, rather than one), response to IRB queries, and budget or expense management. Ethnographers are not always trained to handle such tasks but they may be asked to do so in a team venture. While many people may have experience in or the inclination for such work, others will need training, assistance, and supervision in carrying out well these critical tasks on which a project depends for its survival.

Conflicts will invariably arise in the field, among team members, between team members and community residents, or with institutional staff in organizations involved in the project. Effective team leaders must identify the potential for conflict before it becomes full-blown and make good-faith efforts to resolve it by helping team members to find common ground.

Example 8.1

Resolving intrateam conflicts over how to carry out a survey

Team members in the ICR study of children's activities had a difference of opinion with respect to how the survey component of the study should be conducted in the field. One of the team members drew upon his expertise in epidemiological survey research to insist that the survey questions be asked in precisely the same way in every household setting and with every mother-child team. The second, a member of the same ethnic group as that with whom the study was being conducted, argued that each setting and person was slightly different and that some mothers were less well educated or literate than others and could not understand the questions as they were stated. From his point of view, valid research could only be conducted if the questions were rephrased slightly to ensure understanding. The unhappy epidemiologist called in the principal investigator to "fix" the problem. The result was a compromise in which the ethnographer was free to modify the questions as necessary so long as the rephrasing of the questions was written into the survey and checked by the epidemiologist to ensure equivalence of meaning.

Committed team members should certainly communicate with the team leader when a conflict arises in the field setting as well as seek help and expertise in resolving conflict before it interrupts the research process. To be effective, team leaders should investigate the situation carefully before blaming team members for making a mistake. They always should assume first that team members did their best in the situation and include them in attempts to resolve the problem.

While the leaders of research teams face all of the problems that individual researchers face, they also must address some that are significantly different. Two of the most challenging and contentious issues faced by ethnographic investigators leading field research teams involve the sharing of ethnographic data and the development of a common coding scheme. Both of these issues call for open dialogue focused on:

- Making sure that all team members clearly understand the goals and objectives of the project
- Committing team members to efficient production and timely sharing of ethnographic data
- Assuring the presence of continuous discussion and feedback on ethnographic data
- Formulating the initial coding scheme in a joint team effort
- Pretesting initial coding categories by applying them to already collected text data

- Establishing protocols and agreements for how to add codes to the initial coding

It is sometimes difficult to convince ethnographic researchers who have been trained to collect "their own data" and who may never have worked as part of a team that the data they collect themselves really belong to the research team. Some novice ethnographers have great difficulty sharing "their" data or writing up their field notes so that the materials can be used by others. As a remedy, team leaders can encourage field researchers to keep a separate log or diary with their own personal thoughts and comments while at the same time sharing their text data and project-related comments with other members of the team. Agreements can be made to assure ethnographers that the identities of their key informants will be protected. Requiring ethnographers to turn in field notes regularly, creating team storage spaces for field notes under each team member's name, and checking them regularly for feedback and completion all assist in enabling "lone wolf" ethnographers to become "members of the pack."

Team members who have never constructed or used coding taxonomies, who are used to operationalized concepts after they collect their data or who are not accustomed to operationalizing their coding categories for the use of others may be uncomfortable when required to participate in these team activities. A good team leader will convince such individuals that these activities are critically important to the sound collection and careful analysis of good data, regardless of how long they take.

In team ethnography, where every team member theoretically "owns" or can access all the data, team members must find ways of collaborating on publications and dissemination activities. Team leaders should work with the team to create "ground rules" for developing publications and establish the culture of the project in such a manner that ideas are shared and papers or other publications are authored jointly. This means draft guidelines for publications should be developed, discussed, and agreed upon, should be made clear to everybody on the team before a project begins, and should be shared and discussed with new team members. When community or other partners become members of the research and writing "team," as is the case in participatory ethnographic research projects, they also should become coauthors on published papers. Role definitions that differentiate and use the respective skills of research team members should be developed to permit appropriate inclusion of team members who may be able to carry out only some of the technical research tasks but without whose input the project would not have been possible.

Identifying Good Fieldworkers

Even the most experienced ethnographers find it difficult to carry out a study without assistance, especially in large, complex, or multisite projects. As a consequence, ethnographers build teams of research assistants to facilitate the work. Building an ethnographic research team requires seeking out and hiring field researchers. However, as

we've pointed out, finding good field researchers isn't always easy. What makes a good fieldworker, how do we know one when we see one, and where can they be found? In large part, the attributes that characterize good fieldworkers are the same attributes that characterize good ethnographers.

We believe that good fieldworkers are adventurous, resourceful, self-motivated, trustworthy, and able to take risks. They are people who are curious about what people believe and why people behave as they do and who are willing and able to explore and document or describe in detail *in writing* such cultural behavior and beliefs in the natural settings in which they occur, using the tools of ethnographic research. Someone who knows—or purports to know—everything there is to know about a community does not make a good fieldworker because he or she will not uncover any new information about the community in question. Sociability is an important element in fieldwork success. A good fieldworker generally is a sociable person who enjoys talking with others and does not mind asking many personal questions. Observational skills also are helpful in fieldwork; people who are able to discover information through interpersonal interaction also must be able to stand back and observe what goes on without being tempted to join the interaction. Fieldwork can be an overwhelmingly social experience, and at the same time, extremely lonely.

Good field researchers must understand the arena of culture to be investigated and all of the possible additional contextual factors that could potentially relate to it or influence it. They also must have the skills and enthusiasm to seek out cultural behavior that is salient to the purposes of the research project and to recognize it when it appears. Field researchers should, therefore, be able to conceptualize and to understand conceptual frameworks and models as they are developed in a team effort. They must read and study proposals carefully right at the start in order to learn the project. A field researcher who "skims" the study proposal is likely to experience difficulty obtaining all the data required by the project.

Example 8.2

Problems resulting when a team member inadequately learns the principles and concepts informing the study design

In a study of substance use in New England, a new anthropologist joined the study team without prior fieldwork experience in substance-use research or urban communities in the Northeast. The study involved a complex system of in-depth and survey research. The in-depth study guide had been developed by the study team and used over a two-year period in the field. The guide included specific topics and questions. An experienced interviewer could easily transform the guide into a checklist, although the field team chose not to do this in order to prevent missing areas of questioning and probing that were considered important to the study focus. The new field researcher immediately transformed the interview schedule into a checklist, without spending time trying to understand the primary study themes and focus. The first interviews conducted by the researcher following the checklist were quite limited and eventually required that the field researcher go back to read the study proposal in detail rather

than just “skimming” it in order to understand more deeply the meaning of the questions in the study guide. The consequence was that several interview opportunities were lost while this researcher did the needed “homework” to “learn the project.”

Finally, a good fieldworker must be able to translate what he or she sees into text—either spoken or written. Recording is one of the best ways to obtain, recall, and share new information. Field team members who are lax about recording or writing their field notes or who record incomplete field notes even after receiving feedback from team members are limited in their capacity to contribute to the combined knowledge resources of the research team. At the same time, they undermine the science of ethnography, which is rooted in the quality and contextualization of the observations and interviews. It matters less that a fieldworker can *write* finely detailed text. It matters more that the fieldworker can retain, recall, and record detail objectively, either through writing or oral recording or both, without confusing his or her own value judgments with strict observation. Example 8.3 displays some common kinds of inferences or value judgments that are incorrectly taken to be field description or observations.

Example 8.3

Confusing inference with description

A fieldworker noted in her observations that the respondents lived in an “old, rundown house in a bad neighborhood.” She added that her particular respondent was “shy.” Under probing by the project director to describe more completely what she *really* saw, the fieldworker added that the house was built in a style common in the 1920s; most of the paint was peeling off its wood frame siding, the roof had patches in it, and the screens on windows and doors were torn. Most of the houses in the neighborhood were in the same condition; residents had told her that several were used by drug dealers and that shootings were common on the street corners. These descriptors corroborated the fieldworker’s *inference* about the condition of the house and neighborhood, and they also permitted the project director and other readers to come to the same conclusion that the fieldworker had made. Determining if the respondent really was “shy,” however, was more difficult. The fieldworker reported that the respondent had been reluctant to answer many questions, looked at the floor instead of meeting the fieldworker’s gaze, and spoke in a very quiet voice. The project director noted that the respondent was an American Indian and that many of the questions in the fieldworker’s interview were quite sensitive for this population. Furthermore, the behavior the fieldworker described was common—and considered to be polite among American Indians. It probably was an indicator of cultural differences in interaction styles rather than shyness.

In this case, the fieldworker’s observations were based more on her inferences than on

actual observations. As a result, they were incomplete, because they left out details that could help readers arrive at the same conclusion as the researcher. Further, she was unable to link her observations accurately to the cultural spectrum of individuals and behaviors in the study community and hence described as “shyness” what really was culturally appropriate good manners.

Ethnographers may hire students, other ethnographers, professionals, and community residents to be field researchers in a team study. It is wise to remember that there is no such thing as the perfect fieldworker. Students or trained researchers from the community under study will have an insider’s knowledge of the community, but their information will be limited to what is available to someone who holds their particular position in the community. As a consequence, they will have to find ways to extend their access to information and build their knowledge. While students may have some training and experience developing conceptual frameworks, they still will need supervision, support, and guidance since they are, after all, in the process of learning to be researchers. Students or other professionals who are not from the research community will need help gaining entrance to the community and adapting to it, and students, at least, will need assistance in learning to gather, transcribe, and analyze the required information.

Over the past several decades it has become increasingly common for lay researchers from the study community to join ethnographic research teams. They may include residents from the community with relevant experiences and interests or college-level or graduate students from the community who would like to return to do research in a familiar setting. Such people are very valuable additions to an ethnographic research team. They bring in-depth knowledge about some aspects of the community, though they may have to be reminded that, like other researchers, their role is not to represent the entire community, nor speak on behalf of it. Instead it is to expand their personal knowledge through research and to use their preexisting membership in the community to access new avenues for information that other researchers might not be able to access. Local lay or student researchers bring much to a study; at the same time they need training in observational, interviewing, and recording techniques. If they can participate in the early development of the conceptual framework, they will be more able to hone their qualitative research skills because they will be sensitive to the concepts underpinning the study and the kinds of data needed to answer research questions. It is important to remind members of the research team who have advanced degrees that ALL team members have equal value, regardless of the educational, status, and ethnic differences that might be present among research team members.

Example 8.4

Building a diverse ethnographic field team

The Institute for Community Research and colleagues from the University of Illinois School of Public Health conducted a study of HIV risk among older adults in low-income housing for people over fifty-five in Hartford, Connecticut, and Chicago, Illinois. The study took place in

seven buildings that were diverse in location, size, composition, and placement in relation to HIV risk behavior, such as exposure to injection drug use and commercial sex work. The study required a team of field researchers who could conduct narrative interviews on drug and interpersonal intimacy with men and women aged fifty-five and over. The interviews were to be conducted in English and Spanish and possibly in other languages; the population of residents included Puerto Ricans, African Americans, West Indians (mainly from Jamaica), Italians, and Polish and Russian immigrants. Hiring was a challenge.

The project administrative team eventually decided on the following team members: a twenty-five-year-old bilingual Puerto Rican male outreach worker with an Associate of Arts degree from one of the neighborhoods who had introduced the idea of the project in the first place (he had observed some older Latino men from one of the buildings using drugs with younger men on the street outside); a sixty-six-year-old African American male outreach worker with a high school degree who was very sociable and had worked on other projects at the Institute for Community Research; a Puerto Rican health educator/interviewer with a BA degree who was from one of the neighborhoods and who had excellent rapport with older adults. The study director in Hartford was a Spanish bilingual anthropologist who had nearly completed a PhD. In Chicago, the principal investigator at the University of Illinois site hired a postdoctoral African American male sociologist and a predoctoral West Indian male with a public health background to conduct in-depth and survey interviews in predominantly African American buildings. All staff, including the Principal Investigators, participated in ethnographic and in-depth interview training. All the field staff received continuing feedback on their in-depth interviews until the desired level of detail was achieved. Difficulties in field situations were addressed as they arose, including those deriving from age differences between interviewer and interviewee that interfered with questions about sexuality; interviewee self-reports that were overridden by the depth of street drug knowledge and experience possessed by the interviewer; and the discomfort some older women experienced when asked to provide details about partner intimacy (Radda et al. 2003; J. J. Schensul, Levy, and Disch 2003; Ward, Disch, Levy, and Schensul 2004).

Community professionals on a research team (for example, school health educators, clinic service providers, nonprofit community outreach staff, teachers) may have higher status and/or less time for participation than do other team members. These characteristics can limit their access both to information and to particular groups. Nevertheless, when ethnographic studies require part-time staff, community professionals, such as teachers, can be important additions to the research team because they have the background necessary to understand both the research question and the importance of the research to the community. They also have many of the recording skills needed to do the work.

Collecting Data with a Research Team

The fieldworker has a triple responsibility—collecting ethnographic information about the topic in question in a team setting, negotiating the environment in which the data are to be collected, and communicating with fellow team members—including project administration and principal investigators/directors. While some individuals are very good at all of these activities, most are likely to have preference for one over the other. They also may have preferences for collecting one form of data over another. A talk with potential ethnographic fieldworkers will tell you whether they are willing and able to negotiate their own field situations, how much training and supervision they will need, what kinds of data they are likely to be best at collecting, and whether there could be problems with communication study findings on an ongoing basis.

Example 8.5

Matching data collection strategies with fieldworker preferences: I

A group of youths were collecting pilesort data on sexual behaviors of their peers. They were discussing different possible ways of collecting data on ethnic identity among high school students in the area. They listed surveys, pilesorts, individual interviews, group interviews, and observations. When asked individually which approach each would prefer, one young woman said she wanted to do one-on-one in-depth interviews, a second very outgoing young woman was interested in learning how to do focus groups, and a third, a rather shy young man, preferred the structure and social distance of the survey.

Cross Reference: See chapter 3 in Book 4 for details on these elicitation techniques

Example 8.6

Matching data collection strategies with fieldworker preferences: II

An interdisciplinary research team consisting of an anthropologist, an epidemiologist with a survey research background, and an anthropology student designed a study to collect information about children's activities and energy output and mothers' perceptions of the relative value of the activities listed. In planning the study, one member of the team wanted to collect observational data about activities children were involved with in the community, at school, and in and around homes. The second wanted to develop a survey instrument before conducting any observations, and the third wanted to record mothers' and children's histories of activity using in-depth interviews. The team was able to accommodate everyone's preferences by collecting and using data from all three approaches. This strategy also generated complementary data.

The following example illustrates how candidates for a position communicate their

willingness and interest in conducting field observations and interviews.

Example 8.7

Making compatibility with the required data collection strategies a job qualification

An independent research center sought an ethnographic researcher to head a team and to conduct field research among injection drug users in a local community. The project was one of a number of similar studies being carried out by a research consortium. Many staff members within the consortium agencies were very knowledgeable about the community in question and were available to introduce new members of the research team to the research setting. Two female candidates were interviewed. The first, when told that she would be expected to conduct observations and interviews, said that despite her communications background and her dissertation on a research topic similar to that outlined in the job description, she did not know how to enter the field and did not feel comfortable with the methodology. A second, who had no experience with the subject of the research but felt comfortable with the methodology and described how she would use resources at hand to enter the field, got the job.

Ethnographers are often trained to obtain and work on their own data. Communicating with others on a day-to-day basis about findings, discoveries, observations, and hunches may not be part of their experience. Researchers who, when interviewed, describe with pride their independence and productivity in the field and who have a history of working alone may have to be resocialized into the norms of team collaboration and communication.

Building Interdisciplinary Community Research Partnerships

Ethnographic research teams are one sort of partnership—that is, a partnership of ethnographers with common research interests. Other types of research teams may also consist of representatives from disciplines other than ethnography (for example, psychology, communications, public health, medicine, cultural studies, history, law, social work, etc.). Each academic/professional discipline or field has its own theoretical perspective, code of ethics, and preferred approaches to research. In addition, other members of research teams can include **stakeholders** who are not researchers but who ARE interested in using the data to improve their programs or policies that affect their communities. Often partners are **gatekeepers**. Sometimes, if the ethnographic research is part of a larger project that includes an intervention, stakeholders may include program, intervention, or outcomes evaluation staff. Finally, community-based collaborative or participatory projects always involve members of the involved community and may involve multilevel consortia.

Definition: Stakeholders are people or groups that are not involved with the project

or program but who nonetheless have a vested interest in its outcome

Definition: Gatekeepers are people who control access to information or the research site itself

Types and Levels of Multidisciplinary and/or Intersectoral Collaborations

There are several ways to structure complex research partnerships. One way is to build a very large project at a single organization that includes representatives from every interested constituency. This is an efficient structure because it centralizes decision making.

Example 8.8

Organizing a research partnership for representativeness and centralized decision making

Urban Women Against Substance Abuse was a five-year intervention study based at the Institute for Community Research whose purpose was preventing drug use and sex-risk behavior in preadolescent and young adolescent girls. The program included ethnographic researchers doing formative and curriculum-based ethnography on risk and resiliency behaviors and norms; an intervention staff that worked closely with the ethnographers and conducted weekly group sessions with girls and their mothers; and an evaluation staff that conducted both qualitative and quantitative process and outcome evaluation. Partners (school principals, instructors, and agency heads) were members of informal advisory committees that provided support to the program at the Institute.

Not all funders or community partners support this kind of structure, however. Funders may fear that placement of an outcome evaluation team in the same organization as the intervention will bias the results in favor of success. Participating or supporting agencies might reject such a structure because it consolidates program resources and decision making in the hands of a single and potentially a rival organization. And community organizations might object to such a structure because they fear that their identity or ability to make decisions might be reduced or lost altogether.

A research consortium offers another alternative to partnership. In a research consortium, the participating agencies each have a specific role and contribution to make to the overall project, and tasks and funding are subcontracted in an equitable way to each agency. For example, one agency may conduct intervention, a second may conduct research on the formative process of implementing the intervention, and a third may be responsible for research on the intervention's outcomes. Or, if the research topic calls for a multiethnic research team, researchers from each ethnic/cultural group may be selected from organizations based in their particular ethnic community. Studies organized in this way require an oversight committee and a management structure. The oversight committee consists of the "leaders" of

the organizations—senior people responsible for the study—for example, the principal investigators, directors, agency heads, or senior administrators who can make major directional or policy decisions about the study. The management structure includes the day-to-day field researchers and managers of the study (and usually the lead researchers or principal investigators) (Schensul and Schensul 1992; Schensul, Radda, Coman, and Vazquez 2009; Schensul et al. 2006). Consortium structures can be challenging. Some typical problems include the following:

- Decisions at the policy level may not be translated effectively to the management level.
- Room for confusion in direction and gaps in performance can be created when researchers on the management team report both to supervisors in their home organizations *and* research supervisors who may be based in other participating organizations.
- The project director may not be able to address directly poor performance on the part of a project staff member who is based in another organization when decisions to hire are made jointly but termination lies in the hands of immediate supervisors.
- Project team cohesion can be affected when participating organizations have different personnel policies, salary levels, benefits, and organizational cultures and expectations.

The following example shows how consortia, if well planned, can offer projects the advantages of better and more rigorous research design opportunities and the informational and staffing resources of a wide variety of organizations.

Example 8.9

Advantages of a well-planned consortium

For more than two decades, the Institute for Community Research has been an initiator and/or full participant in both AIDS research and research and intervention studies in Hartford, Connecticut. The first citywide AIDS study was conducted by a consortium consisting of three organizations—the Institute, the Hispanic Health Council, and the Urban League of Greater Hartford—and the local health department. These organizations had been working together to convey the message that HIV infection was a problem affecting the entire city, not a single ethnic or otherwise designated community. The benefits of a consortium study were its ability to convey the citywide importance of the problem; the participation of organizations

representing the major ethnic groups in the city; and the involvement of the local health department, which could disseminate the data immediately.

The project was a two-phase study of AIDS—knowledge and attitudes and behaviors in adults between the age of eighteen and forty-nine. Phase 1 took place in a multiethnic "bellwether" neighborhood; Phase 2 took place in two areas of the city and four neighborhoods where most African American and Puerto Rican residents lived and where two large public housing projects, the site of known drug use, were located.

During the planning phase, before submission of the grant, each organization defined its contribution and role in relation to the project. When the grant was awarded to the grantee organization, representatives from each participating agency formed a steering committee that met weekly to plan and review the progress of the project. The steering committee allocated responsibilities equally across the participating organizations. The project coordinator, based at the ICR, reported to the director of the ICR on a daily basis and to the steering committee for project monitoring. She managed the data collection team and coordinated the collection of over 600 interviews. Data were entered and analyzed at the Hispanic Health Council and presented to the steering committee for interpretation. The Urban League was responsible for ethnographic data collection in housing projects and two target neighborhoods. The final report was written by representatives from all participating organizations and submitted to the funder as a team effort. The published reports were cited as a product of the consortium: the AIDS Community Research Group. This group then evolved into the Consortium Advocating for AIDS Prevention (CAAP), a group of seven to ten agencies (depending on the project) conducting research, intervention, drug treatment, testing and counseling, needle exchange, and evaluation and dissemination of research results. This independent community AIDS intervention research consortium endured for a decade in the central Connecticut area (Singer and Weeks 2005).

Now many other examples of research consortia can be found in the United States and elsewhere, run by social scientists including anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and public health and communications researchers (ICR 2007; McAllister, Green, Terry, Herman, and Mulvey 2003; Metzler et al. 2003; Savage et al. 2006). Well-functioning consortia produce very high-quality data and better interpretation of research results. They also provide the infrastructure for better and broader use of the study for program or community improvement purposes. Perhaps the most important thing to keep in mind when planning a research consortium is to discuss these and other issues during the planning phase of the project. The best functioning consortia take nothing for granted and spell out detailed working arrangements in written documents, including procedures for resolving interorganizational conflict well before the project begins (Israel, Eng, Schultz, and Parker 2005).

Ethnographers as Members of a Larger Research Collaborative

So far, we have referred to instances where ethnographers are “driving” the collaboration, initiating partnerships, and facilitating the development of research or intervention projects. Most ethnographers, however, are not in this position, at least not initially. Instead, they may be members of a consortium or partnership in which they have specific responsibilities for collecting and managing data, reporting evaluation processes and outcomes, and supervising other research staff. What should ethnographers do when they are a small cog in a much larger and more complex wheel and only responsible for one component of a larger project? Do they have any special responsibilities for ensuring that collaborative efforts go well?

The natural tendency of any ethnographer is to try to understand the larger “ethnographic” picture in the project, the community, and the target population. Ethnographers make good managers because they can synthesize large amounts of information concisely and use this skill to make better and more informed decisions. Ethnographer managers in “middle management” positions can use their skills to access information and resources for the staff researchers they supervise. They can also study the structure of the project to determine when, where, and how to provide feedback to the project, even if they are not in decision-making positions. As staff researchers, their strength lies in their capacity to enter field situations that researchers from other disciplinary backgrounds may be unable to understand or handle. This enables ethnographers to produce important information and social capital unavailable through other project sources. Good ethnographers will stick “close to the field” where they do their best work. Their role in relation to a research partnership is then to ensure that the partnership is independent of and well connected and responsive to the communities it is there to serve. Thus, providing information on gaps in communication, missing study components, potential biases in community sampling or assessment, and errors in project administration that may have a negative effect on local communities are all important functions that can be played by a staff ethnographer. The ethnographer’s presence in the community also can facilitate reporting on community dynamics that could affect the project. Other brokering roles that staff ethnographers can play include linking community resources and leadership directly to the project, or the project and institutional resources directly to the community.

Cross Reference: See Book 7 for more information on ethnographically grounded complex intervention research

Challenges and Rewards in Ethnographic Teamwork and Interdisciplinary Intersectoral Collaborations

We began this chapter with a discussion of the many benefits that derive from collaborative community-based research. At the same time, those who venture into the realm of collaboration confront many challenges along the way. These can include seemingly unresolvable differences of opinion about the direction of a project; arguments over disparities in representation or lack of proper representation; inconsistencies in the performance of partner organizations; lack of willingness to collaborate in overall project-monitoring activities; mistakes in the collection

and management of data, especially qualitative data; and disagreements over instances that are considered to be reportable to authorities by one partner discipline, but not by others. A common disagreement is over which is more important: "service" in terms of running a program or intervention, or research on the intervention and the community. This disagreement, if not resolved, has the potential to distort, bias, and ultimately undermine studies that call for standardized approaches that should not be modified midstream to accommodate participants' unique needs and controlled assignment into intervention "services" that should not be interrupted because a participant is viewed as needing something more or something different in the way of service. In our experience, most of these situations can be resolved provided that project leadership sets an example of open and considerate communication and trust, is willing to share power and resources, to negotiate and accommodate, and to address issues as they arise.

Despite many challenges and frustrations, ethnographic teamwork and broad-based collaborations for interdisciplinary research and problem solving are highly rewarding enterprises. Researchers who venture into these realms and who love intellectual adventures and socially meaningful work are likely to learn more about new topics with new people in very brief periods of time. The experience of maintaining a strong disciplinary and value-based stance, while at the same time learning to negotiate different ideas and directions with others whose disciplines and beliefs are very different, can be highly satisfying. Further, these negotiation skills can be readily generalized to other activities and projects. Addressing health and educational disparities, toxic environments, or the local effects of economic globalization is overwhelming for the "lone researcher." But when ethnographers work with large interdisciplinary teams that have the capacity to draw upon social and cultural capital to bring about changes at multiple levels, better research and important changes are achievable over time.

9

Applying Ethnography

Introduction to Applying Ethnography

Ethnography can produce important research results that lead to the development of a testable theory, and at the same time, it can contribute to sharing research results in local communities, instrument development for large-scale surveys, intervention development, evaluation improvement, and policy change. In this chapter we discuss the variety of ways that ethnography can be used for practical ends and how practical ends can contribute to improvements in social science theory and methods.

Throughout Book 1, we have said that ethnography is best conducted in a specific community or "communitylike" social context. We have also said that access to information, improved understanding, and potential use of research results happen most effectively when ethnographers have established good working relationships and/or research partnerships with

key people in local communities and, at times, with policy makers. In this chapter, we discuss how ethnography and the ethnographic process can be translated into uses that stretch beyond the creation of local theory and interpretation to affect the lives of community partners and residents. These uses include:

- informing public audiences (dissemination)
- developing interventions
- improving quantitative instruments
- influencing teacher/educator practice
- democratizing ethnography through PAR
- improving process and outcome evaluations
- influencing policy
- supporting advocacy
- contributing to science

Products of Ethnography

To understand how we can apply ethnography to other activities, it's useful to consider what the products of ethnographic research are. We generally think of an "ethnography" as a product. Ethnographies vary in the type of data that are collected and triangulated and in the way the data are interpreted and represented. Ethnographies based mainly on participant observation depend primarily on the ethnographer for interpretation, although input may be sought from others in the site. Mixed methods ethnographies are based on a variety of qualitative and quantitative data sources. These data and results can be viewed, understood, and interpreted by many different people in the research setting. Some ethnographies consist only of the researcher's interpretation and presentation of the phenomena under study, though the interpretation may be supported by the responses of respondents, key informants, interviewees, and others who helped the researcher to produce the data. Other ethnographies include the interpretations of other actors as part of the "story"; they may be key informants, other writers or filmmakers, and public intellectuals and local experts who have shared the ethnographer's journey and who interpret study data from their own standpoint.

 **Definition: An ethnography consists of a theorized, organized, possibly modeled, and explained analysis of a social phenomenon, embedded in a detailed description**

For purposes of dissemination and other forms of use, we like to think of the products of ethnography as:

- the output derived from cultural performances
- respondents' insights extracted from interviews
- documentation of observed events, conversations, rituals, and other interactions
- audio, visual, and audiovisual displays of observed events, etc.
- topical summaries of important topics that emerge from the data
- diagrams, maps, organizational charts, and other cultural artifacts
- statistical charts and graphs that can be readily understood by various publics

- project reports, fliers, and handouts
- press releases, website materials, op-ed or substantive articles in local newspapers
- products derived from these data-based materials, including formal and informal theatrical and dance performances, visual graphics, interactive exhibits, animations, and musical interpretations

Plans for presentation and use of most of these products must be negotiated with various publics in order to render them meaningful, engaging, and useful. Different publics have very different needs and interests and time is required to discuss with each different audience the most relevant research results, formats, conveyors of information, and venues for dissemination or use. Furthermore, all the materials listed above are different and have different uses. Information and information sources required to construct better survey instruments are likely to be very different from that required for intervention planning. Policy makers are less likely to want detailed descriptions of events in the study community than a summary of study implications for policy formulation or action or testimony in the form of quotes, stories, or spokespersons that can defend their positions. Coming up with effective strategies for political action and intervention is of greatest concern to advocates.

Informing Public Audiences: Dissemination

Most funded research is expected to address a significant public sociocultural, health, educational, or other need. And most researchers would like to see the results of their hard work used to influence public opinion and to benefit the community of study. This means that the research results must be presented in ways that extend beyond the traditional dissemination strategies for research aimed at the world of science and published in books, book chapters, and articles in peer-reviewed journals. Ethnographers refer to many more publics than just scientists; they interact with policy makers, community residents experiencing disparities in treatment or desires that vary from how they currently live, many different types of cultural producers, the directors and staffs of service agencies, informal groups, and cultural producers of all types. When ethnographic research is conducted with partners, the partners are always involved in some way in the research process, and they are the most direct consumers of the study results. The wider the partnership, the more complex the audience, and the more challenging it is to think about and tailor study results and means or channels through which they are disseminated so that they will be well received by the audiences for which they are intended.

Audiences and Their Preferences

There are many potential audiences for the work of ethnographers. Typical audiences or “end users” of research results include communities engaged in the study, politicians, media specialists, and the general public.

The Study Community

Perhaps the most important form of "engagement" for ethnographers striving to disseminate the results of research is returning the results back to the communities and to the participants and their families who contributed to the research their time, information and personal histories, opinions and experiences. Returning results to the study community is different from member-checking, a practice intended to validate the interpretations of the data with reference to the community in question (Cresswell and Miller 2000; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Mays and Pope 2000). Making the effort to transform the results so that they are readily understood and potentially usable across a broad spectrum of community audiences (for example, teachers, security guards, and students in a school, or adolescents, parents, and community mobilizers in a community) facilitates the development of empowerment. To accomplish this task effectively, considerable thought must be given to *what results* should be disseminated, in *what formats*, *by whom*, *where*, and *how*. Techniques such as performance (street plays or skits, dances, many of which include study partners and participants), composed music or spoken word poetry, or presentations including quotations obtained from study participants, creative graphics, *fotonovelas*, animated booklets and films, and videos and photovoice complement and advance the delivery of research results beyond more conventional means such as PowerPoint presentations (Jones 2006). Locations should be convenient and comfortable. Presentations should accommodate people's time constraints. The language of the presentation should be familiar to viewers. And, people should be invited personally to a dissemination event. Guests should be greeted at the door, and if possible, served food as a universally recognized symbol of respect and welcome.

In three of the following examples, we illustrate several approaches to the dissemination of research results by research partners, such as interactive exhibits and performance, drawn mainly from the experiences of the Institute for Community Research. At the Institute for Community Research (ICR), gallery exhibits and public programs in the form of symposia, lectures, training sessions, and workshops bringing current research to broad and diverse audiences are among the principal ways in which ICR fulfills its mission of joining scholarship with community-based activities. The fourth example describes how street drama and interactive presentations were used in urban, low-income communities of Mumbai to disseminate data from an Indo–United States study of alcohol and HIV risk.

Example 9.1

Disseminating the results of ten years of research on youth and substance use in Hartford through a transportable, animated installation

In 1999, ICR began a ten-year program of research guided by Jean Schensul and funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse examining the relevance of different types of drug use to youth culture among young people aged sixteen to thirty in urban areas of central Connecticut. The first study concentrated on pathways to injection drug use, a topic stimulated by young

people concerned about it, and by the rising number of HIV positive younger adults in the Hartford, Connecticut, area. During the course of this study, young researchers recruiting respondents through clubs and bars discovered that the drug Ecstasy was being introduced to urban youth by suburban and club house dealers. This led to a second study that focused on so-called club drugs, including Ecstasy. The results of each study were different. The first study of polydrug users showed which "club drugs" were being used and in what combinations in the Hartford club scene. The second study representing the general population of young people showed that widespread polydrug use was not typical of most urban youth, that those who *were* polydrug users tended to be at higher risk of most social and sexual health problems and that polydrug use was more typical of suburban white youth than inner-city African American and Latino youth.

Working with a group of young people from the study population and other interns, the ICR research staff crafted a historical reconstruction of the complexities of drug use and drug selling, based on the study data for both studies. The result was a complex and interwoven story of the lives of six typical characters from the study community viewed through the lens of two popular drugs, Ecstasy and "dust"—a homemade product consisting of formaldehyde, leaves, and PCP. After generating the timeline for these two drugs, the research team, consisting of Schensul, the Principal Investigator, the study coordinator, field researchers, and youth researchers from the study community, identified six prototype characters based on actual interviews. A young local animator produced cartoons of the characters, which were integrated into 13 foot by 9 foot portable panels highlighting the results of each study. Each panel was designed to integrate local photographs and use both survey data and excerpts from interviews on Ecstasy and dust sources, effects, and consequences.

These panels formed the basis for an installation entitled "Rollin' and Dustin'" that included national videos on dust and Ecstasy, posters, club fliers, accoutrements of club attendance (glow sticks, lollypops, etc.), and graphic novels and texts (Campbell-Galman 2007) on related topics. The panels and components of the installation were shown in multiple community sites in Connecticut, reaching hundreds of people of all ages. It also traveled to Vancouver, Minneapolis, and several other cities in the country, serving as the basis for discussion of urban youth lifestyles, the implications of using these two drugs, and sexual risk associated with Ecstasy (http://www.incommunityresearch.org/news/newspressjan31_2006.htm).

Example 9.2

Disseminating AIDS research results through an interdisciplinary program of public events

AIDS research at the Institute for Community Research, Hartford, Connecticut, dates back to 1988. Dissemination of AIDS research results began with an interactive art exhibit in which people living with AIDS and AIDS activist artists showed their work in the ICR's Jean J. Schensul gallery along with an AIDS Altar where families who had lost members to HIV could

place their remembrances. The event, held in 2002, was inspired by the Mexican Day of the Dead and included testimony from family members about loved ones and a panel describing ICR's culturally targeted HIV prevention research with drug users at that time. A similar series of events was held in 2005, titled "Giving Women Power over AIDS" (http://www.incommunityresearch.org/news/pressreleases/pressapr07_2005.htm).

In 2009, nearly twenty years after the first AIDS art presentation, ICR linked its international work to its continuing local research on HIV prevention with a unique program that included an installation of South African beadwork, quilts, and dolls, all expressing without words the painful experiences of loss experienced by women in KwaZululand and their efforts to educate others about HIV. The exhibit, titled "Siyazama: Traditional Arts, Education, and AIDS in South Africa," was created by a folklorist and AIDS activist at the University of Michigan and brought to ICR through its Cultural Heritage Arts program directed by folklorist Lynne Williamson (http://www.flickr.com/photos/icr/sets/72157622073425303/). The exhibit was accompanied by a film created by ethnographer Sara Friedland, titled "The Thing with No Name,"1 documenting in detail the stories of two HIV-infected KwaZulu women, and, a week later, by a panel open to the public highlighting the experiences of physicians and prevention researchers working in South Africa and India and the HIV-related research of ICR and University of Connecticut researchers (Schensul et al. 2006; Weeks et al. 2007, 2009; Cornman et al. 2008).

Example 9.3

Disseminating the results of youth PAR to a public audience

On April 3, 2010, ICR hosted a "Stand Against Racism" event at its Hartford office from 2 to 5 p.m. as part of a citywide effort to address racism. The event featured exhibits, posters, slide shows, and videos based on ICR studies illustrating how research intersects with issues of race and can be used to promote social justice and equity. One important component of the event was a room-sized mural on racism that reflected findings from research that Hartford teens conducted with their peers and adults on personal experiences and social/structural perspectives on the causes of racism, titled "Race: The Lived Experience." The mural was conceptualized by youth involved in the research and drawn and painted by them in conjunction with three community activist artists. The mural was accompanied by a documentary that explored predictors of racism, "Docin' Da Beat," created and produced by youth. The film was based on a youth-generated research model that defined racism as structural discrimination and explored its hypothesized predictors using videoed in-depth interviews that youth carried out with their peers and a group of adult key informants. The mural, with embedded excerpts from the film, was shown at Hartford City Hall and at the state capital. It was exhibited in conjunction with the American Anthropological Association Exhibit on Race, titled "Race: Are We So Different?" (http://www.understandingrace.org/home.html), at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, Connecticut, accompanied by youth-led panel discussions.

Example 9.4

Disseminating the results of research through performance ethnography in India

In India, there is a long history of disseminating important messages in rural and more recently in urban areas of India through street drama. In recent years, street drama has turned from interpretations of religious mythology to civil and health activism. In 2006, the Institute for Community Research received a four-year grant to partner with the International Institute for Population Sciences Mumbai in the conduct of a study exploring the interaction of alcohol consumption and sexual risk. The study, titled "ASHRA: Alcohol and Sexual Health Research to Action," showed that alcohol was associated with higher levels of intramarital violence and abuse, multiple sexual partners, and noncondom use. In-depth interviews conducted with eighty-four men on their history of drinking and sexuality and recent events in which alcohol was used during sex with and without protection provided detailed information on situations in which drinking was associated with sex with a nonspousal partner or girlfriend and with the nonuse of condoms. Both IIPS and ICR consider it an ethical requirement to disseminate data back to study communities. To do so, Indian PIs contracted with an organization of young artists from similar low-income communities. They scripted three plays illustrating the complex and potentially negative effects of alcohol consumption, based on the study results. These plays were shown five times in different street locations in each of the three study communities, attracting the attention of hundreds of community residents of all ages and both sexes. In addition, in each community between 15 and 25 key informants attended a lunch sponsored by the project and viewed a PowerPoint presentation illustrating main results of the study. After viewing the presentation they discussed with the researchers the implications of the results for their own communities.

Cross Reference: Book 7, Ethnography In Practice: Using Collaborative Ethnograpy To Solve Social Problems

In Book 7 we describe approaches to dissemination of research results and provide additional examples of dissemination practice in greater detail.

Dissemination to Politicians

Politicians are elected officials at the national, state, and local level who create and pass legislation that leads to policies affecting the quality of life of their constituencies. The primary reason for approaching politicians is to influence them to consider ideas or suggestions about new legislation that affects, or to solicit their support on an issue of importance to, their constituents. However, politicians/legislators should only be approached if and when the

research produces results that can influence legislation or improve regulations.

Politicians respond to events that feature them and their policies to the public and can help them garner more financial support and political capital. They can be approached in a variety of ways—through letters, petitions, telephone calls, appointments, office visits, talks with their aides, and invitations to press releases and other public events. The most effective means of gaining the attention of politicians directly is by holding events in which the information—even uncomfortable information—can be presented directly, face to face, while at the same time, the politician can gain public attention. Events such as press conferences, opening ceremonies for large events, gallery openings, and organized protests are locations covered by the press that can work to the advantage of both politicians and researchers.

Dissemination to Media Representatives

Contemporary media outlets that offer opportunities for dissemination include private and public television stations, mainstream and alternative media, blogs, radio talk and news shows, and Internet news sites. These media outlets seek "news"—new information that will appeal to their listeners. To use these media resources, ethnographers should:

- cultivate relationships with media representatives, including editors and reporters, bloggers with specialized interests, radio show hosts and program people (for example National Public Radio or community radio and television news writers), and managers of local television stations.
- learn what stories and what approaches are appropriate for each outlet. What appeals to one may not appeal to another.
- learn to write press releases that are succinct, interesting, and include quotes from notable people including study participants, and send them out regularly to multiple media sources.
- learn about and provide information in the forms that are most likely to be accepted by these media. Often reporters and radio producers play a role in shaping the development of the information through requests, interview opportunities, and even joint programming.
- meet the media "experts" and brief them on current work results that are publicly available so that their interest can be assessed and support solicited from them in preparing information that they can use.

Media representatives often want to speak directly to participants in a study. Researchers must be sure to ask permission from participants before providing contact information. It's often best for the researcher to arrange an interview between a reporter and one or more study participants and then to be present at the interview. This ensures that the study participants are not required to answer detailed questions about the study and can express their opinions freely without being guided into a particular position or perspective by the reporter. The presence of the researcher can also prevent any violations of confidentiality, both personal and with respect to other study or program participants.

Increasingly the emphasis on engaged research has prompted social scientists to pay much more attention to making the results of their work known by working with the media. We provide more information and examples of ways to work with various forms of media in Book 7 of the **Toolkit**.

Cross Reference: Book 7, Ethnography In Practice: Using Collaborative Ethnograpy

Dissemination to the General Public

Engagement has been a "buzzword" in anthropology for the past decade. Engagement often means making the results of a study public through various forms of media. The American Anthropological Association has had a strong focus on promoting anthropology and important anthropological research in the media. The organizations that support most social science disciplines have organizational arms and committees that promote the discipline and research results to the public, especially to Congress. These organizations also pass resolutions based on important social or political issues, such as the security and protection of international researchers, the implications of regional wars, immigration policies, and the right to freedom of expression based on the research experience of their members that often involves communication to the press. From time to time as well, research conducted by anthropologists or sociologists finds its way to the local or national/international press, including the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and *Science* magazine. Recent examples include paleoanthropologist Tim White's reporting of the discovery and implications of the fossil remains of Ardipithecus ramidus (White et al. 2009), Helen Fisher's work with the online dating service, eHarmony (http://www.chemistry.com/drhelenfisher/)2, and Mimi Nichter's work on girls and body image (Nichter 2001).

Developing Interventions: Formative Research

Ethnographers are just beginning to become comfortable with the term *intervention* (Hahn and Inhorn 2009). Despite their discomfort it is impossible to avoid the idea that most of what applied ethnographers do involves intervening in communities or other social institutions, usually with selected partners, to move toward a desired change or "end state." One way of intervening is to take a program approach that has been both used elsewhere or by other social scientists and demonstrated to be effective and adapt it to a new setting. Ethnographers, however, generally prefer to avoid this "evidence-based" approach, which tends to assume generalizability. They prefer to develop their approaches in collaboration with their community-based partners and to tailor them the culture, lifestyles and needs of the community in which they have become involved. During the process of forming social networks, ethnographers learn what is important from the community perspective and make decisions about how to join or form alliances with selected sectors of the community without alienating others. In linking important topics with emerging alliances, an "intervention" focus or "hook" emerges. It then becomes the role of the ethnographer, along with other social scientists and community partners, to forge this intervention focus into a full-scale, theoretically driven, evaluatable program or approach designed to bring about desired changes.

In this context, ethnography has much to offer. It provides the tools for:

- identifying partners and allies at multiple levels
- generating major issues calling for intervention and community ideas about how to intervene
- identifying potential barriers and obstacles to a desired intervention approach
- identifying critical "cultural" foundations and components upon which to base an intervention, or those elements that have special cultural meaning to the community and those for whom it is intended
- clarifying what types of evaluation designs and which specific theoretical frameworks make sense in the community of interest and collaboration
- identifying potential community researchers and interventionists who can be trained, or are already trained, to carry out the desired intervention and its evaluation
- identifying the factors that can contribute to or undermine efforts to sustain the intervention over time

Cross Reference: Book 7, Ethnography In Practice: Using Collaborative Ethnograpy To Solve Social Problems

Interventions should always be surrounded by ethnographic data collection and interpretation. How to conduct formative research and transform it into programs of practice, service, and implementation are described more fully in Book 7 of **The Ethnographer's Toolkit**.

Example 9.5

Identifying cultural events for bringing together immigrant and local community constituencies in rural Colorado

Sheryl Ludwig, an education professor at Adams State College in rural Alamosa, Colorado, was supervising student teachers in the elementary schools when she heard many teachers complaining, "We've got Mexican students in the school who can't even speak Spanish, much less English. What's wrong with them?" Ludwig, who had spent five years in Guatemala studying Mayan women weavers for her doctoral dissertation, quickly recognized that these children were Guatemalan immigrants who spoke only their native Mayan language, Q'anjob'al. Because the white people in Alamosa did not know the Maya population existed, they assumed that all brown people were Mexicans. The Maya, especially the women, were isolated, because the women spoke neither English nor Spanish, and those who worked did so in one industry: the local mushroom farms. Over time, as Ludwig came to know the community better, she identified more than two hundred Mayan families in the area. She began to work with the leaders of the Mayan community to help them become less invisible and better understood by the white and Latino population in the town and to help the students do better in school. The white teachers, who already were having enough trouble with Spanish-dominant children, also asked for help teaching the Mayan children. Ludwig felt that if the deep cultural roots of the Mayan people were better understood by people in Alamosa, and if prestigious activities were linked to them, their invisibility might end. The same might be true for helping Mayan children succeed in the schools. With members of the school district, college, and the Mayan community, Ludwig helped plan how a Community Integration Grant, written by the Immigrant Resource Center (IRC) in Alamosa could help support celebratory cultural

activities that would catch the attention of other community sectors. Subsequently, the IRC supported an annual celebration of the Feast of Santa Eulalia, which had been initiated some years earlier by a local Maya elder. Santa Eulalia is the patron saint of the village of Santa Eulalia, Guatemala, from which the majority of the immigrants came. The grant also supported a folkloric dance group among Guatemalan high school students that performed in a variety of community events and participated in the annual Fourth of July Parade. To help the Alamosa teachers learn how to better instruct their Guatemalan students, Ludwig used her extensive contacts in Guatemala to organize staff development summer trips for Alamosa teachers and administrators to the Universidad del Valle, a teacher training institution in Guatemala, and to local Guatemalan schools. Other plans include working with other professors at the college to help establish a website for Q'anjob'al speakers, especially public school students, so that they could communicate across the United States and into Guatemala. Future agenda items include trying to create a sister-city program between Alamosa and the town of Santa Eulalia in Guatemala that could bring the mayors of the two towns together, and projects that would end the isolation of the Maya women who spoke neither Spanish nor English. With her knowledge of Mayan weaving, Ludwig hopes to help the community organize Mayan women weaving groups to celebrate their artistry, remove them from the isolation of their homes, and thus improve their overall mental health. All of these activities capitalized on the cultural strengths of the Mayan immigrants, and at the same time, created prestigious activities from which other groups in Alamosa benefitted (Ludwig 2008).

Improving Quantitative Instruments

Ethnographers who want to use survey methods to verify what they have learned through qualitative/ethnographic approaches are faced with three options. They may borrow instruments (usually **scales**), translate them into local language, and pilot test them for comprehension and association with other variables. They may adapt them by changing, adding, or eliminating variables, or they may construct new scales based on concepts and constructs more closely associated with local cultural beliefs and practices. The first approach requires that the translation identify concepts in the local language with the same or nearly the same meaning as those in the original scale. This can only be effective when there is close conceptual overlap between the original scale and its items and the terms used in the local culture. This is by no means always the case. Thus, ethnographers are generally careful about simply translating a scale, regardless of how well known it is, into a local and different language for fear of mis-measurement.

Definition: A scale is an operationalized measure of a concept and usually includes between four and ten items related to or "indicating" the presence of the concept

The second approach calls for conducting community observations and interviews in the local language to assess congruency between the original construct and the way it is operationalized or discussed in the research setting. For example, a scale that measured gender inequity among young, low-income men in Brazil, the GEM scale (Barker 2003), was adapted for use with young, low-income men in India. The team that adapted the scale had had years of experience working with this group of young men in India, including ethnographic research on gender roles and gender inequity, and had constructed its own masculinity scale (Pulerwitz and Barker 2008). To adapt the GEM scale to India, the research team included young men from the low-income study communities in Mumbai and also brought young men from several Mumbai communities together to discuss the cross-cultural applicability and sufficiency of the gender inequity indicators (Verma et al. 2006). The team then translated the items that had social validity in the new setting and added new items not in the original GEM instrument, including the following:

- A married woman should not need to ask her husband for permission to visit her parents/family.
- A real man produces a male child.
- A man is happily married only if his wife brings a big dowry.
- A real man is one who can have sex with a woman for a long time. (http://www.popcouncil.org/Horizons/ORToolkit/toolkit/gem1.htm)

The third approach involves the construction of new scales that are culturally congruent with and measure local constructs. Formative research is critical in identifying the scale items for new scales. The procedure involves formulating the concept and the construct (for example, “occupational mobility” or sexual health problems) and interviewing between twenty and forty respondents on these topics, based on a taxonomy of subdomains or topics. For example, sexual health problems among men in India might include a list of such problems that respondents might group into subcategories based on type of symptom. Subcategories have culturally specific designations; for example, “kamjori,” which refers to difficulties associated with getting an erection; and “garmi,” which refers to the products of excessive heat in the body and is manifested in boils, rashes, and other problems that resemble symptoms of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) but are not actually associated with STIs. “Dhat” refers to problems associated with inappropriate forms of semen loss including masturbation and early ejaculation. These subdomains are culturally specific to the Indian context and are rooted in Ayurvedic beliefs, including concepts of heat and cold and spiritual energy. An index or scale of sexual health problems would include symptoms in all of these subcategories, identified through interviewing. No existing sexual health scale captured these indigenous notions; thus, a new scale had to be developed, piloted, analyzed, and evaluated before wider use (Verma, Sharma, Singh, Rangaiyan, and Pelto 2003).

Another such example is the development of a scale measuring “ataques de nervios,” a culturally specific mental health syndrome important among Puerto Ricans and found in other Latino populations in the United States and Latin America. Various researchers have identified the psychosomatic and behavioral symptoms associated with “ataques de nervios” based on observations and interviews with those who have experienced such ataques. The resulting

scale overlaps with but is not the same as situational anxiety, PTSD, somatization of mental health problems, or depression. The scale correlates with mental health problems such as depression but is widely recognized as indicating a culturally specific mental health syndrome (Guarnaccia, Rubio-Stipec, and Canino 1989). Most good ethnographers construct scales unique to the study setting in addition to using or adapting scales from other studies with similar communities or populations. All such culturally created measures must be analyzed for stability, reliability, generalizability, and construct and social validity.

 **Cross Reference: The development construction of scales and their application to research and evaluation are described in Book 3, chapter 10, Book 5, chapter 8, and Book 7**

Influencing Teacher/Educator Practice

There are four main ways that ethnography can influence teacher education and practice. The first is description, interpretation, and ongoing communication of ethnographic findings. In these instances, ethnographers forge relationships with schools and teachers or with informal teachers, such as youth workers or after-school program personnel. These individuals can help the ethnographer generate research questions, but the primary responsibility for developing the study is the ethnographer's. The ethnographer then arranges to communicate the results to educators, who may or may not translate these results into action.

The second involves direct engagement between ethnographers and teachers in the form of a feedback loop, where the ethnographer observes, comments, provides feedback, and the teacher adjusts accordingly. In this model they work as a team, sharing similar goals and objectives with respect to student outcome. One good example is the work of Michele Foster, who pairs expert African American teachers with teachers inexperienced in teaching African American children. These teacher pairs work together to improve the cultural understandings, relationships, response styles, and other instructional dimensions of the less experienced teachers (Foster, M. J. Lewis, and L. Onafowora 2005) so that they can relate more effectively to their African American students. Of course this approach recognizes that class, gender, community, geography, school, and other factors affect the instructional process. But overall the most important dimension for successful teaching is the relationship between the students and the teacher, which depends on informed cultural knowledge and practice as well as commitment.

The third involves the teacher as researcher. There are many ways that teachers can be researchers. A typical educational action research approach brings teachers into their own classrooms or schools to observe students' behaviors using ethnographic techniques. The intent of their research is to improve pedagogy; they focus on learning strategies, responses to classroom organization, or instructional pedagogy. Teacher research can focus on a variety of other topics outside the classroom, including student behaviors, relationships and motivations, administrative structures and practices, and parents' views about their children's learning and

educational beliefs and hopes for the future. Another form of teacher-led research that uses ethnographic methods is Participatory Action Research (PAR), or action research with students. This approach, less common than educational action research for pedagogical improvement, involves teachers in training students to do their own mixed methods ethnographic research on issues of importance to them and to use the results to bring about a desired change in the school environment. PAR can capitalize on the fact that most students, even in elementary school, are required to conduct some form of research, mainly using library resources and secondary data. However, going further and teaching students to conceptualize an entire project and to collect primary ethnographic data introduces them to scientific principles, builds their cognitive, math, and social skills, and improves their communication skills as they explain their results to others. Teacher researchers who use forms of PAR in their classrooms can do so for discovery purposes and at the same time to help students gain evidence that can be used to transform their environment and improve their educational experiences and outcomes.

The fourth way to influence teacher practice involves building educational environments by using ethnographic principles. There are many "educational" anthropologists working in higher education as administrators—deans, provosts, university and college presidents, and, sometimes, as heads of research centers. These administrators can use ethnographic principles to learn about and mobilize resources and cultural elements to create a diversity of learning environments in universities and colleges. A number of social scientists have been drawn into efforts to create "engaged" pedagogy on their campuses with foundation funding. These efforts require various structural realignments to create interdisciplinary curricula, new approaches to instruction, and ways of involving students and faculty in the solution of community or public social-, environmental-, or policy-related issues (Barker, D. 2004; Gamson 1997; Lamphere 2003; Schensul 2010).

The application of ethnography to the creation of new schools and to school change efforts is somewhat less common. In those few examples that are readily identified over the past two decades, ethnographers have tried to build curricula, schools, or classrooms that reduce the gaps between the schools and socialization practices and cultural beliefs in students' communities of origin. These approaches call for ethnography in the community to learn about the formal and informal content learning that takes place in the home and neighborhood (see Gonzalez, Moll et al. 2005; Moll and Greenberg 1990; Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg 1984) as well as cultural values surrounding education, instruction, achievement, and family–school relationships in the community. Some have followed the lead of John Dewey (1916, 1934, 1938), trying to create experiential or authentic learning communities in which students work as individuals, groups, or entire communities in self-guided or facilitated learning programs. One such imaginary community, "Sweet Cakes Town," established in a fifth-grade classroom in the inner city, mirrored agencies and organizations—a bank, restaurant, beauty parlor, nail salon, municipal court, pet shop, grocery store—found in the community in which the school was located. Children interviewed the proprietors of these establishments to learn how they worked, chose classmates to run them, and then established a real money economy to make use

of their goods and services throughout the year (Skilton-Sylvester 1994). These approaches usually involve careful prior study of both community and classroom processes and student learning, the results of which contribute to further innovations and instructional improvements. Most educational ethnographers study or evaluate these processes but do not necessarily play a central role in facilitating them or making them happen. More research is needed to understand the ways in which ethnography is used to change or improve these forms of educational practice and the ways that ethnographers as organizational innovators shape educational environments.

Democratizing Ethnography through Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research is a term that is generally used to refer to the integration of research and action, in which the researchers join forces with or are the participants in the change strategies toward which the research is directed. There are many different forms of participatory action research, some weighing in more heavily on the "research end" and others focusing on the action. The form of PAR that we want to focus on here engages community activists in the conduct of ethnography to bring about changes that they themselves desire. The communities may be schools, after-school programs, or the wider communities in which PAR activists live and perform their work. The emphasis is on uncovering, understanding, and addressing the sources of inequity or disparity in participants' environment, beginning their own identification of the socioeconomic, political, or cultural issue they themselves want to address. Thus this form of PAR has an explicitly political goal. Instructors, usually ethnographers themselves, teach PAR activists to do ethnography and at the same time learn from them what issues they are concerned with, how they view those issues, and, as they go about collecting and analyzing their data, what they themselves learn and how they want to transform their knowledge into action. This approach is intended to be transformative. By this we mean that it should transform the way instructors and learners view the world, relate to each other, and reflect on and change their own lives. At the same time, it should be directed to understanding and transforming the structures that are responsible for the issues identified by the PAR activists (Berg 2004; Schensul 1998; Cammarota and Fine, 2008; Schensul, Berg, Schensul, and Ward 2004; Sydlo et al. 2000).

Steps in the PAR teaching/learning process are similar to those in any ethnographic research process. The primary difference is that the facilitating ethnographer works jointly with the PAR participants to design and conduct all aspects of the research and joins forces with them to use the research results for intentional or planned change purposes. During the process, the facilitating ethnographer learns many things, such as:

- what questions are important to the participants
- whether and how they understand and explain the reasons for the particular problem they want to understand and address in their community
- what kinds of information they would like to collect
- what methods and sampling procedures they think are appropriate for use in their community
- which approaches to sampling or data collection might not work because they are too invasive or might take too much

time
- what they learn and how to interpret their information as they collect it

At the same time, the PAR-facilitating ethnographer introduces ethnographic research concepts, design, and ethics while responding to participants' reflections, responses, questions, and concerns. Thus the process becomes a learning exchange where participants learn and interrogate the research process and the facilitator gains insight into ways of using and improving upon ethnographic methods while learning with the participants about the community and issues in question. This process can be viewed as the democratization of research. By this we mean making the tools and the results of research available to those marginalized from or subjected to the research process so that they can join research-based political or policy-related debates. Engagement in the research enhances the knowledge base of participants whose voices have gone unheard and creates a space for them to express their views in the policy dialogue, with conviction based solidly on carefully collected and analyzed information.

Cross Reference: Methods and skills required to be successful in participatory action research with different groups and ages are described in Book 7, chapter 9

Improving Process and Outcome Evaluations

We refer to evaluation as the scientifically designed approach to the collection of evidence to determine the effectiveness of an "experiment." The term *experiment* is generally thought of as a set of intentional, planned, and often theoretically guided actions introduced by either social scientists or change agents (educational administrations, teachers, international aid agencies, development personnel, youth services directors, etc.), with a desired goal or outcome in mind. Many evaluations in the fields of education, health and illness, agriculture and microeconomic development, and environmental change depend on baseline and outcome measures and comparison. Using the "gold standard" experimental design, or the next best comparative design (Cook and Shadish 1986; Shadish, Cook, and Campbell 2002; Shadish, Cook, and Leviton 1991), intervention researchers compare an intervention group against a control or comparison group, using measures taken prior to and those taken after completion of the intervention. The expectation is that the intervention will produce more positive or anticipated results than the control or comparison group. What happened in the process of delivering the intervention is often viewed as important only if the anticipated positive results do not ensue. Only then do researchers and practitioners call for deeper investigation into the reasons for the lack of results. Occasionally there are unexpected results—for example, in one instance, examination of variations within classrooms in a successful curriculum intervention showed that the apparent success was accounted for by a subset of some of the classrooms. Other classrooms showed no change. Ethnographic data showed that the instructional process was far more interactive in the successful classrooms, raising important questions about

whether the change was caused by the instructional technique or the curriculum or both. Now many evaluation efforts recognize the importance of understanding the process of conducting interventions and using this information to guide more refined outcome analyses.

There is a long history of ethnography in evaluation. The earliest "intervention" studies conducted by anthropologists called for evaluation. They include those done by physical anthropologist Maria Montessori and interdisciplinary social scientists involved in the large-scale economic development programs of the 1950s, such as the Vicos experiment, an exercise in which a university purchased a hacienda in highland Peru and then intervened to shift control over its management to the workers. The research involved studying the process by which this occurred. Montessori followed children and used continuous observational techniques to determine whether and how children with cognitive disabilities were improving in an interactive educational environment that taught basic skills using innovative, multisensory instructional modalities (Montessori 1913). Many social scientists in the Vicos experiment were involved in the ongoing collection of data to assess the overall experimental question —"Could oppressed hacienda workers gain sufficient power, knowledge, and political control to take over and manage the hacienda in which they were workers?"—under a planned government program to return hacienda land to workers (Dobyns, Doughty, and Lasswell 1971; Doughty 1987). Within this larger question were specific questions regarding agricultural development, changes in social organization, the effects of educational programs, and other topics. Social scientists used a variety of tools to address these questions over time.

The field of ethnographic evaluation has blossomed since the 1980s as clinical, educational, and prevention interventionists have asked serious questions about what actually happens in an intervention and whether and how planned curricular, treatment, or prevention interventions have contributed to desired outcomes. Ethnography is used to answer these questions in the following ways.

Exploration/Finding the Intervention

Ethnographers can dispense with the intervention altogether and study the setting in which it occurs to learn more about the intervention context and what could be important in evaluating the significance of outcomes. This approach is referred to as fourth-generation evaluation (Guba and Lincoln 1989). LeCompte's evaluation of The Learning Circle Program for language development among urban Native American students uncovered one of the main reasons for parental involvement in the program in contrast to their general discomfort with the overall school: parents' view that the program respected Native American culture by incorporating important cultural elements into the curriculum, their view that teachers' willingness to talk with them was "respectful," and the program's demonstration of central elements of Native American hospitality (LeCompte and Aguilera 1996; LeCompte, Aguilera, Fordemwalt, and Wilks 2000).

Formative Research

Ethnographers can study the context and setting of a planned intervention and advise intervention researchers on the most compatible ways of choosing partners, recruiting, sampling, and assigning people to different interventions, and any potential organizational obstacles that might impede the intervention from the beginning, such as high staff turnover, negative attitudes, rigid or disorganized classroom structures, etc. In this capacity they act as consultants to the interventionists. This role is especially important in "translational research," a form of research in which interventions shown to be effective in one location are tested repeatedly in similar settings or other very different settings, or disseminated to onsite personnel to implement with proper training. Several such examples can be found in the attempted transfer of language and literacy programs that worked well with Native Hawaiian children but were not so effective with Navajo and Zuni children (Jordan 1985; Tharp and Yamauchi 1994; Vogt 1987). In such cases, advance ethnography is very important in identifying and remedying problems both before and during the intervention. In all of these approaches, the ethnographer is both an observer and documenter of formative and early phases of the intervention program and contributes directly to the potential for success by providing ongoing information to those who are implementing the program.

Participatory and Empowerment Evaluation

Ethnographers can work as members of an intervention group made up of organizational or community personnel involved in the intervention by providing ongoing feedback and assisting in keeping the intervention on track. This approach by definition engages the implementers in the evaluation format and instruments and helps them to use the results to monitor their own performance. David Fetterman refers to this form of evaluation as empowerment evaluation, since its primary goal is to empower the actors to conduct the intervention better by working with them in a partnership rather than by taking an observational stance and reporting on results at designated intervals (for example, yearly) or only at the end of the approach (Fetterman 1994). This approach resembles Total Quality Management and other organizational and individualized, titrated, or tailored designs for continuous improvement, which community psychologists Rapkin and Trickett have referred to as "comprehensive dynamic trials." (Rapkin and Trickett 2005).

Developing Multilevel Community Interventions

Ethnographers can guide or support the evaluation of multilevel interventions in communities. The term *multilevel* refers to different structural and organizational domains that converge to bring about an undesirable situation such as impoverishment, HIV infection, or poor school performance in an urban neighborhood. In such situations, ethnographers play an important role in understanding the individual level experiences of individuals who are impoverished, HIV infected, or doing poorly at school. Through such research they can identify both the institutions and policies that affect these individuals. At the same time, they can

examine selectively the ways that institutions and policies have an effect on people's lives, decisions, options and opportunities, and services and service delivery. Schensul refers to this as the "systems" model. The systems model calls for an examination of the factors influencing the primary systemic or structural factor(s) contributing to the problem (policies, funding, staffing, media, religious influence, etc.) and the primary factors affecting the individual's inability to obtain resources, services, or educational advancement. Once ethnographers have "tested" the components of the model by conducting ethnography focused on both individual and systemic problems, the data can be transformed into intervention approaches that address both. Since the primary "causes" are likely to be complex, a complex "multilevel" intervention is called for with different components tailored for each level. Evaluating interventions as they are introduced into ongoing complex "systems" requires ethnography to determine how each "level" in the intervention is functioning in relation to the design, how they are interacting in relation to the problem, and how they might be affected by factors external to the setting (Schensul, 2009).

Influencing Policy

The term *policy* generally refers to rules and regulations that guide institutional behavior and that result from the interpretation of legislation at the city, state, or national level. Thus, when social science researchers refer to research to affect policy, they are usually speaking about legislatively derived policy. We expand the definition of policy to refer to any set of institutional rules that have actual or perceived power and influence over people's lives. Every school, service organization, housing bureau, business, and nonprofit organization has policies that are both internally generated and derive from, interpret, and respond to external requirements of legislated policies.

When ethnographers become involved in policy-related research, they generally do not conduct comparative policy analysis. More often, they are curious about how policies are translated and put into practice at various levels and how these sometimes contradictory practices affect the lives of individuals. For example, in a recent study, anthropologist Julia Dickson-Gomez examined the effects of housing policies on injection drug users. Other policy researchers had shown that where housing policies provided for stable housing for drug users, along with comprehensive services on site, drug users were much more likely to reorganize their lives and to improve their chances of successful treatment outcomes. Dr. Dickson-Gomez received funding to carry out research on the policies affecting housing and service provision to injection drug users in Connecticut and to discover how managers and service staff interpreted these policies to the benefit or detriment of individual clients (Dickson-Gomez et al., 2009). Other researchers consider the effects of changing environmental, military, or other government policies on the location and distribution of various forms of industrial or nuclear waste, or the lifestyles of northern Alaskan indigenous people in areas where the fragile environment is affected by the oil industry, the international fishing industry, or policies related to hunting endangered animals.

While many ethnographers conduct research that has implications for policy formulation or policy change, most of that research is published in scientific journals, which except for rare circumstances have little effect on policy. Though some would argue that changing the formats for making the results of research "useful" to policy makers might improve use, the best way to influence policy is to become part of the policy-making process. This could involve joining alliances and organizations whose mission it is to influence policy and policy makers on specific topics, speaking in national and international arenas that attract the press, proposing legislative positions, holding press conferences to which legislators and other elected officials are invited, or speaking to legislators and their aides directly in meetings or indirectly by presenting testimony in public legislative sessions on a bill. The media also provide some opportunity to influence public opinion on an issue, which in turn, may have an indirect influence on policy makers. The two most important messages for those who wish to influence policy are the value of face-to-face efforts to convince policy makers and including research partners and broader public voices in the effort. Finally, ethnographers conducting their research under a nonprofit 501C33 umbrella are not allowed to participate in lobbying activities. Thus, engagement in the promotion of policy change or other forms of advocacy is usually thought of as an educational activity in which information is provided to legislators regarding specific issues or bills.

Supporting Advocacy

Applied research is conducted in a value-specific context in which researchers have developed partnerships, and together with partners have determined which social issue or disparity needs to be addressed and from which standpoint. Once the data have been collected and analyzed using rigorous and well-described procedures, the results will point to the need for specific action steps. Among the choices available to ethnographers are joining forces with local, national, or international advocacy groups to promote a specific transformational agenda. Examples of such agendas might include advocating:

- more equitable gender norms
- the charter school movement
- antiglobalization or proglobalization economic policies
- sanctions against countries enacting genocide
- the right to same-sex marriage
- taking action against genocide
- health care reform

The choice of research partners is very important in determining the direction of a study and the ways in which the results may be used. When ethnographers choose partners with agendas such as these, the ethnographers usually are expected to join in the effort. The advantage for ethnographers is that the infrastructure for advocacy is already in place; the challenge is in persuading partners such as these that while guiding theories may be sympathetic to the goals of the advocacy organization, the research methodologies used to

conduct the research and the interpretation of the data must be carried out systematically and by examining differing perspectives rather than being subject to hasty review or misuse in the interest of furthering the organizational (or ethnographer's) agenda.

Example 9.6

Confusing research with advocacy

A student researcher on a large university campus worked with an American Indian student organization to study discrimination against American Indian students, a visible minority, on the campus. His design called for asking *only* about their experiences of discrimination and not about any other experiences. The ethnographer then eliminated the results of those respondents who indicated that they had had some very positive teaching/learning experiences and presented a picture that reflected a high degree of discrimination against a select group of American Indian students. This is an example of using a poor research design in the interest of generating goals favorable only to the researcher's and organizational partner's interests. It is misleading and could result in inappropriate though well-intentioned decisions and actions.

Some ethnographers frame their advocacy in the form of working in marginalized, silenced, or invisible communities to build or enhance organizations that promote the presence of those silenced or invisible groups, build leadership, preserve culture, or advocate for specific policy and practice changes that are important to the community. Ethnographer Sheryl Ludwig's work with Colorado Mayan communities falls into this category. Ethnographer Stephen Pavey expresses his social justice agenda by organizing African American youth in community analysis and protest art. Educational ethnographer Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade similarly works with Latino youth in the San Francisco area. The Hispanic Health Council, an organization formed to reverse inequities and improve health in Latino communities, was founded by an anthropologist/Puerto Rican activist team that included Maria Borrero, a lawyer, and an anthropologist, Stephen Schensul, and later, anthropologists Jean Schensul and Merrill Singer. The Institute for Community Research was founded by an anthropologist, Jean Schensul, and was heavily influenced by other anthropologists, including Margaret Weeks, Marlene Berg, Rebecca Joseph, and archeologist and curator Lynne Williamson.

Contributing To Science

As noted in chapters 1, 2, and 3 of this book, we take the position that ethnographic research is scientific; that is, it is research that is defined by research questions, in a specific setting or context, using replicable research designs and including sampling procedures, clearly described data collection tools and procedures, defined measures, and specified data analysis procedures. Ethnographers as social scientists have an ethical and social obligation to make the results of their research available to the scientific community. There are several strategies

for presenting ethnographic research to the scientific community. These include:

- publishing in non-peer-reviewed journals or magazines such as *Practicing Anthropology*
- publishing in peer-reviewed journals such as the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography Theory in Action*. These may be regular journals published in hard copy and available electronically through libraries and literature search engines, e-journals, and open source journals in which publication costs are covered by the author rather than the journal subscribers
- presenting the results of research at local, regional, national, and international conferences
- publishing research results in invited chapters in edited books
- writing books on the topic of the study that are published by publishers selected because they market to the science publics likely to be most interested in the research

Most ethnographers prefer to communicate to the public through these traditional means, or must do so because of the requirements of their universities. Various national advocacy agencies that address campus community relationships have been calling for revisions in criteria for promotion and tenure in order to allow for the time and relationships required to disseminate data through the additional public-oriented means outlined in prior sections of this chapter. More such efforts are required, especially for university-based researchers, in order to ensure that the ethical requirements of public dissemination are being met appropriately. Finally, better means are needed for describing and publishing work about nonacademically based innovative multimedia dissemination programs.

Summary

Social scientists apply ethnography in a number of different ways that include presenting data to politicians and policy makers, working collaboratively with decision makers, contributing to the improvement of community interventions and measurements, and engagement in various advocacy efforts. A significant challenge that social scientists face is how to balance conflicting demands for research development, scientific publications, staff training, research administration, and public dissemination. These challenges face all ethnographers, regardless of their organizational base, and the ability to address them varies with the university, department, community research organization, or other locations from which applied ethnographers do their work. Applying ethnography requires persistence, commitment, and the ability to work collaboratively with other disciplines and with many private and public collaborators while at the same time meeting the demands for scientific productivity. These challenges will be addressed more directly in Book 7: Ethnography in Practice: Using Collaborative Ethnography to Solve Social Problems.

Notes

1. Sarah Friedland is a videographer, filmmaker, and activist who produced this film to highlight KwaZululand women's courageous struggles to cope with the ravages of HIV in their communities, their families, and their own lives in an area of South Africa where one in six people is infected with HIV. The film is available for purchase or viewing on the Internet, and all

proceeds go to support medications for HIV-infected people in South Africa. The film, which was shown at the Denver Film Festival, has won many awards.

2. Chemistry.com cites Dr. Fisher as its chief scientific advisor and an authority on matchmaking on its website, with the following: “She’s a world-renowned biological anthropologist, author and expert in the science of human attraction. She spent the last 3 decades figuring out why love makes us go weak in the knees and causes our hearts to skip a beat. Her research has shown that we are searching for someone to complement us. And, that’s why we recruited her as the brains behind our personality profile.”

3. In the United States, categories of organizations exist for tax purposes. Nonprofit organizations that are essentially not political pay lower taxes than those that might engage in political organization, lobbying, or other activities deemed inappropriate for their tax category. Ethnographers should check with the rules in other countries to make sure that their activities are within the range permitted.

10

Protection of Risk to Human Subjects and the Ethics of Ethnographic Fieldwork

Researcher responsibilities do not end with the design of a competently executed study. During the design and conduct of their research, ethnographers must also take into consideration ethical considerations dictating how to protect the people they are studying against risk, including social, physical, financial, and emotional harm or damage to their reputation.1 While this does not mean that researchers cannot investigate sensitive topics that have the potential for incurring personal or communal risk, it does mean that if risks do exist, potential research participants must fully understand what those risks are and be able to volunteer freely to incur them. Further, the benefits of the study should outweigh the risks, both to the individual participants in the study and to the community with which the study is being conducted, whether they are being represented by official gatekeepers, formal partners, and key informants or by long-time fieldwork and data gathering from many members of the community.

Cross Reference: See Book 1, chapter 8 on partnerships; Book 3, chapter 4 on gatekeepers and key informants; and Book 7, chapters 1–4 on building research partnerships

Contemporary social science disciplines all have their own codes of ethics, which refer to the specifics of how research should be conducted in that discipline. Sociologists and anthropologists tend to focus on protection of research sites and peoples as well as individuals; psychologists focus more on protection of individuals, especially in experimental,

clinical, or prevention trials. Both anthropology and sociology have public or applied branches and associations that add to basic disciplinary guidelines new concepts related to structural research and intervention protocols. Regardless of the discipline, it is important to note that risks can be incurred both by individuals and groups, though most ethical guidelines focus primarily on individuals and do not address the issue of who actually can legitimately give consent for a group to be studied. Ethnographers must make sure that the individuals who are speaking on behalf of a group of potential research participants actually have the right to do so and are representative of all factions within the community. Further, risks must be assessed in terms not only of harm to individuals but also to whether or not the results might stigmatize an entire group were it to be identified.

A Brief History of Concern for the Ethical Treatment of Research Participants

Ethical concerns related to research are rooted in part in some of the barbarities of experimental research conducted in the World War II Nazi concentration camps. The Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal following World War II focused attention on the horrific and sadistic treatment that Nazi doctors inflicted on concentration camp prisoners in the name of science. Not only did the experiments contribute little, if anything, to scientific knowledge, but they were carried out on incarcerated people who had no power to refuse participation and who had no way of knowing what the consequences of participation would be. Unfortunately, Nazi doctors are not the only researchers who have disregarded the rights of research participants. After the War Crimes trials, an increased awareness of the risks to human subjects of research led to revelations about other ethical breaches by both medical and social science researchers.

In the United States research also was done on people without their consent. Some of these studies involved people who did not know they were research subjects; others were done with illiterate or mentally retarded individuals who could not understand what was being done to them or prisoners who could not refuse participation. Still others were conducted with orphaned children who had no one to speak on their behalf or poor pregnant women attending a nutritional clinic. These subjects were injected with hepatitis, fed radioactive iron, not treated with known cures for their ailments, and in the case of the Nazi experiments, simply tortured without their consent. Harm to research participants came not only from medical experiments but also from social science research that, in efforts to understand why the German people colluded in the extermination of Jews and Romanies, experimented without consent on study volunteers to explore why and how people in authority could induce everyday citizens to inflict heinous punishment on other human beings (Milgram 1973; Hagstrom et al. 1969; Haney et al. 1973; Rothman 1982; Krugman and Ward 1961).

Cross Reference: Book 6, *Ethics in Ethnography: Fieldwork, Researcher Roles, and Institutional Relationships*, details these experiments and how they generated guidelines

for ethical research.

In response, in 1978 the U.S. government embraced principles mandating that people who participate in research must be treated with respect, beneficence, and equity. Called the Belmont Principles after the report in which they were first articulated (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, retrieved from http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/guidelines/belmont.html), these principles now are embodied in the United States Code of Federal Regulations2 (United States Office of Health and Human Services 2001) and enforced by the Office of Human Research Protection (see http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/), a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. These principles apply to the protection of individual study participants, but they were not intended to apply directly to ethnographic partnerships. Because good ethnography involves continuing partnerships, we will discuss the Belmont Principles and their consequences with respect to both individual study participants and participant communities.

Several international statements followed regarding how to conduct research involving human subjects in medical research, including the Nuremburg Code, the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association 1997), and the International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research Involving Human Subjects. Guidelines for social scientists that addressed risks other than that of physical harm also have been developed. All of these have provoked individual countries to establish their own guidelines for the ethical conduct of research to protect their citizens from exploitation and undue risk or harm.

Researcher Responsibilities, the Belmont Principles, and Their Corollaries

Justice

The first Belmont Principle, *justice*, has to do with equity or fair treatment. It requires that no group be studied to excess simply because it is convenient, is not in a position to refuse being studied, or is simply exotic and interesting. Justice means that the burdens of participation in research must be distributed equitably throughout the population so that no one group of people or community will either disproportionately incur the risks or reap the benefits of research. Book 6 describes violations of this principle in projects that involved poor school children, orphans, African American prisoners, and pregnant women who were not chosen for good theoretical or practical reasons; they were studied primarily because they were not in a position to refuse participation. As such, they were unethically subject to the burdens of research, even if not its risks. Studies such as these, and others which involve embarrassing, harmful, or potentially risky effects, would be less likely to be undertaken with more affluent and well-educated people from dominant cultural or economic groups who, because they could understand the negative aspects of the proposed study, would be more likely to refuse to participate.

Beneficence

The second Belmont Principle, *beneficence,* involves the risks and benefits of participating in research studies. Researchers must seek to minimize the risks to research participants and to their communities and balance those risks against benefits. It is important to realize that risks are not just physical. Most social and behavioral science research, in fact, involves little risk of physical harm; however, it can result in great financial, social, or emotional harm to participants if activities or traits that the individual would not want known by others in the community are disclosed. In addition, unless there are sound theoretical, public health, or educational reasons not to do so, it is crucial to identify and seek to mitigate risks associated with research results that highlight or stigmatize geographically identifiable communities or entire ethnic groups by concentrating sensitive research only on them. This is why protection of participants' and communities' identities and the privacy of the information they provide is so important. It also is why researchers must make sure that adequate procedures for confidentiality and/or anonymity are in place.

In describing the risks and benefits of research participation, investigators are required to avoid both unduly minimizing the risks of research and exaggerating its benefits. Doing so assures that potential participants can make a well-informed decision about participation. However, researchers *can* tell potential participants that they will not benefit directly from participation in a study if its benefits to a larger group or body of knowledge are stated.

Respect for Persons

The third Belmont Principle, *respect for persons,* has to do with

- Voluntary participation of the respondent (or community)
- Informed consent of respondent and when relevant, the community
- Full disclosure by the researcher of the study's purpose, its possible risks, and what will happen to participants if they participate
- Participants' capacity to comprehend the study sufficiently well to ensure that their consent is truly voluntary
- Recognition and specific protections for certain classes of individuals who are deemed vulnerable because their capacity to consent to and comprehend a study is compromised or constrained (for example, prisoners; people with serious mental illness; patients receiving treatment from a hospital; children under the age of eighteen)

The concepts of **voluntarism** and **informed consent** go hand in hand. All participants in research must be able to freely choose to participate or not without any form of coercion. For example, they must not be placed in situations where failure to participate would subject them to retaliation, harm, or fear of losing benefits they need or want. It also means that incentives to participate must be modest so that participants can easily turn them down if they do not wish to participate in the study. They also must be able to withdraw from a study without penalty whenever they wish. Further, voluntarism is meaningless unless participants can understand completely what they will encounter during the research process and what the long-term benefits, risks, or other possible consequences of their participation might be. This means that the researcher must explain fully to potential participants what will happen to them if they

agree to participate, what the anticipated risks and benefits will be, how risks will be addressed and minimized, and how the participants' privacy will be protected.

Definition: Voluntarism requires that participants in research can choose freely whether or not to participate in a study. Informed consent means that participants in a research study must be able to understand completely both what they will encounter during the research process and the consequences of their participation

Vulnerable Subjects

The United States Code of Federal Regulations designates several categories of potential research participants as **vulnerable populations**. Vulnerable participants consist of certain "protected" classes of people. Federal research guidelines list as vulnerable:

- ALL children under the age of eighteen or below the age of legal consent in the community under study
- Anyone with a mental health or cognitive disability (e.g., severe mental illness) or cognitive impairment (e.g., various forms of retardation, dementia, or impairment because of excessive drug use), or someone with a physical disability who requires a legal guardian
- People who are ill if the research focuses on their illness
- Women who are pregnant if their physical condition is related to the topic of the study
- People who are in treatment centers, prisons, probationary systems, mental institutions, or other custodial institutions
- Individuals whose participation in a study, if known, might subject them to civil or criminal prosecution —such as users of illegal drugs or people without documents that permit them to reside legally in the country

Definition: A vulnerable population is a category of persons who either by reason of mental incapacity, legal minority, or custodial status cannot legally give consent to participate in research. Vulnerable persons also may be defined by situational issues, such as specific physical conditions, language capacity, participation in tabooed or illegal activities, or subordinate authority relationships with respect to researchers

Vulnerable status requires that researchers take additional care to ensure that informed consent is given with proper safeguards for individuals who are impaired in their ability to fully understand what the researcher is proposing or whose personal situation might make it difficult for them to participate without fear of coercion or subject them to special risks. The first category includes people who always are considered vulnerable by definition; they must have a custodian or guardian give consent for them. While researchers still must explain research procedures to many of these individuals and gain their **assent**, assent alone is insufficient. Researchers also must obtain **consent** of the legal guardians of such persons (which, in the case of children, may be one or both parents) before they can be participants in research.

Definition: Assent is agreement to participate in the study given by minors and others who are under guardianship. Assent is required from those who can provide it, but alone, it is insufficient for participation in a research study

Definition: Consent to participate in research must be given by any competent adult participant in research and as well, the parent or legal guardian of a person who is a minor, in custody, or in a state of diminished legal capacity

Persons who are incarcerated or institutionalized, as in prisons, probationary systems, and mental institutions, are a second category requiring special consideration. Federal regulations define such individuals as vulnerable; they need a guarantee from the institution that there will be no penalty from the institution or researcher for either participating or not in the study, and they must receive institutional assurance that they can give informed consent or refuse to consent voluntarily, without coercion. Institutional Review Boards that evaluate the ethical nature of research proposals must include as members prisoner advocates and/or former prisoners to assure that their rights are appropriately protected.

Another category of potentially vulnerable individuals includes those who are not legally incapacitated but who are considered at risk because the research is concerned with their physical condition. These include people who are ill, physically handicapped, or women who are pregnant (if the research has to do with their physical condition) and/or the potential participants feel they would be denied treatment that they need or want and cannot otherwise obtain if they refuse.

Informed consent also can be compromised in situations where individuals cannot understand what the research is all about or if participating in the research could subject them to special risks. These include:

- Persons who are illiterate and cannot read consent documents
- People who do not speak the language of the researcher and cannot fully understand an explanation of the study
- People who are unfamiliar with the nature of research and its obligations. In these situations, researchers have an especially strong obligation to make sure that their consent procedures adequately inform potential participants about the project
- Studies in which the researcher may not fully understand the risks of the proposed study because of his or her lack of familiarity with the culture where the study is to be conducted
- People whose own illegal status or activities might or would be exposed, making them subject to risk of arrest and imprisonment
- People whose participation in culturally tabooed activities could cause them to be shamed, ostracized, or bewitched—in accordance with consequences attendant to violations of taboos—if the community were to learn about it

In cases such as these, special efforts must be made to explain details of the procedures and translate information to assure that potential respondents understand what they will be expected to do or experience. They also must understand and be comfortable with how confidentiality and privacy of information will be protected. Researchers may even choose to modify the ways that consent is documented to protect the identity of potential participants.

And the committees that review research proposals for protection of human subjects must include representation from such groups in order to ensure that proposals are modified to enable these problems to be avoided.

Finally, the principle of voluntarism is compromised if

- People feel coerced to participate in the research project because they hope for some benefit, either at the time of participation or in the future, even if it is not offered.
- They are promised or offered excessive rewards that make it difficult for them to refuse participation.
- They are threatened with punishment, withholding of privileges, loss of health or social services, loss of status, or deprivation of other benefits if they do not participate.
- An authority figure or significant other exercises actual or perceived "undue influence" on the potential participants.

The issue of coercion is particularly important in educational and medical research, where practitioners may wish to study their own students or patients to see if innovations actually worked as hoped. This is because educators and physicians hold special power over the lives and educational or health outcomes of their clients. For example, students may hope for better grades if they participate in their teacher's research; clients may fear exclusion from needed treatment if they refuse to participate in their health provider's project. Consent in custodial institutions also is problematic, given that prisoners may agree to participate in a research project to earn "good time" or a reduced sentence, even when the researchers cannot affect sentences at all. In these cases, ways must be found to eliminate even the appearance of coercion before a study can begin.

Sensitive Topics

One further area of concern involves topics that are difficult or sensitive. Risks to participants include not only the distress caused by recollecting hurtful events but also the danger to participants should others discover what they have disclosed. Participants who have had experiences of violence, abuse, rape, trauma of any kind, or illness, who have engaged in illegal, stigmatized, politically sensitive, or taboo activities, or who possess information about such activities engaged in by others may experience emotional disturbance or mental distress when recounting or remembering such experiences. In addition, they could experience embarrassment, physical harm, financial loss, social ostracism, or even imprisonment if their engagement in such activities became known. These are cases in which not only must the topics and risks of the research be made very clear to potential participants but also rigorous procedures for protecting the privacy of the information and the identity of research participation from others must be established and explained fully and convincingly to participants as well as other interested parties in the study community.

Summary

The general areas of concern with respect to the protection of research participants involve:

- **Voluntary involvement:** whether or not the people who are being studied have consented to be a part of the study
- **Understanding risks and benefits:** whether participants understand what will happen to them and the risks involved as a consequence of the study
- **Informed consent:** whether participants understand the study sufficiently well to be able to give informed consent and whether they are in a position to do so
- **Privacy/confidentiality:** whether participants' rights to privacy, confidentiality, or anonymity are adequately protected whether or not they have consented to participate

In the pages that follow, we discuss how researchers, especially ethnographers, must address these ethical considerations. We do so because it is clear that continued vigilance is necessary to protect human subjects. While many researchers may think that the existing guidelines are sufficient and that the egregious violations of the past are, in fact, a thing of the past, many researchers still either do not know or care about implementing proper care for human subjects, or believe that the value to science of their work outweighs the damage done to research participants. Examples 10.1 and 10.2 illustrate the lengths to which contemporary researchers have gone to evade federal and disciplinary ethical codes.

Example 10.1

Unethical use of a control group research design for evaluating HIV/AIDS treatment for women and infants in Africa

In 1997, a group of researchers initiated a study of ways to slow the spread of HIV/AIDS among women of childbearing age and their children. They reasoned that good health and nutrition, information about prevention and transmission of HIV/AIDS, and adequate prenatal and postnatal care might well help many at-risk or already HIV-infected women survive longer and also might help their babies remain uninfected. They also wanted to determine if less-than-heroic treatment with existing anti-AIDS drugs would be helpful in cases where the kind of multiple drug treatments currently used by more affluent AIDS patients in the United States was prohibitively expensive. Their design called for a study much like the Tuskegee Syphilis Study (Rothman 1982): They would set up a number of treatment groups and one control group. All groups would receive information about health, nutrition, and HIV/AIDS prevention as well and prenatal and postnatal care. The treatment groups would receive varying types and amounts of drugs—particularly AZT—known to be effective against HIV/AIDS. Of particular interest was the role of varying amounts of AZT in limiting the transmission of AIDS from mothers to their newborn children—if it were administered during the woman's pregnancy. The control group would receive a placebo but no real drug treatment.

Such a design could not be carried out in the United States for ethical reasons; it is unethical to withhold treatment from a participant if a known cure or helpful treatment exists. This was one of the problems with the Tuskeegee study; penicillin, which cures syphilis, was not administered to the research subjects even when it became available. So the HIV/AIDS

researchers moved their study to Africa, where HIV/AIDS has become epidemic, where the costly AZT treatment available in the United States cannot be provided widely, and where the research would not be subject to United States' regulations protecting human subjects. Researchers recruited subjects by asking women who had just been tested for both pregnancy and HIV infection if they wanted to participate in a study that "could help their baby remain healthy." Most of the women who consented to participate indicated later on that they were too confused and frightened at simultaneously learning their diagnosis and finding out that they were to become mothers to understand clearly what the study was about. Most—even those in the control group—believed that they were receiving real drug therapy. Despite the vulnerability of the research participants and the lack of full disclosure about the nature of the study, the researchers argued that even the women in the control group were better off for participating in the program because they were getting better prenatal care. The researchers were, however, heavily criticized on two accounts: for implementing in a poor, nonwhite country a study that they could not have done in their own country and for not obtaining truly "informed" consent from the participants (Levine 1998; Lurie and Wolfe 1997).

Studies like these have led to the tightening of constraints on medical, social science, and natural science research on human beings. The study above violated special concerns for populations who are vulnerable because they are under stress, feel coerced, are ill or illiterate, are minor children, or are not well informed about research. This principle holds for any population, regardless of its location in the United States or elsewhere in the world. Second, researchers cannot circumvent the standards existing in their own institution or country by doing research in another site. Researchers now are legally required to conform to the standards applicable within their own institution or country, regardless of where the research is carried out.

Holding Everyone Accountable for Protecting Research Participants: The Havasupai Indian DNA Study

Example 10.2 demonstrates the degree of surveillance that must be exercised over every step of the research process to prevent human research participants from being exploited. It especially illustrates the control that must be imposed on individuals who have access to confidential data and how risk can accrue not only to individuals but also to entire groups.

Example 10.2

Genetic piracy: Unauthorized use of biological data from a Native American tribe

In 2005, the Havasupai tribe, a small Native American group living in the depths of the Grand Canyon, agreed to participate in a study of their diet that included DNA testing in hopes that they could find ways to reduce the very high incidence of diabetes from which tribal members

suffered. They did so through contacts with a trusted anthropologist; the study was carried out by other scientists from the University of Arizona for whom the anthropologist vouched. DNA data, of course, is highly personal; when drawn from a very small group, the identities of individual people can be known. That is why the original researchers took great care to make sure that a highly restrictive research protocol with strict controls over the use and dissemination of the data was followed and that it only correlated the DNA data with dietary information. This proposal was approved by the University IRB. However, not long after the original study was completed, other research began to emerge that clearly was using the Havasupai's DNA data to examine relationships between genetic markers and measures of schizophrenia, inbreeding, and human migration patterns—research to which the Havasupai had not agreed. Thinking that they had been betrayed by the University of Arizona researchers, the tribe sued the original researchers, the University's Institutional Review Board, and the university itself for unauthorized use of their DNA information. Investigations soon cleared both the ASU researchers and the university IRB of wrongdoing. It turned out that personnel from the laboratory that did the original DNA assays had made the information available to an entirely different group of researchers, who then used it for investigations completely outside of the original purposes for which it was collected (Noe et al. 2006; Trimble and Fisher 2005).

Enforcing Ethical Standards

What guidance, then, exists for researchers to help them protect their research participants from harm? While we briefly discuss the ethics codes of professional associations and the procedures set in place by the United States government in the pages that follow, we place primary responsibility on individual researchers for understanding legal and ethical mandates concerning protection of human subjects of research. These include not only familiarity with the relevant U.S. federal guidelines, or the guidelines in the country or community where the study is undertaken, but also understanding the special nature of their own relationships with research participants and the kinds of obligations that institutional interrelationships can impose on research projects.

Professional Codes of Ethics

All professional associations have general and informational codes of ethics that describe the standards of care to which members of its discipline are held in regard to the people they study. Such organizations include groups such as such as the American Psychological Association, the American Medical Association, the Society for Applied Anthropology, and the American Anthropological Association.3 Professional codes of ethics cannot mandate behavior. However, most professional research organizations also have ethics committees that

review ethical issues as they arise in the course of research as well as publications that portray ethical dilemmas and ways in which they are resolved in the field. Neither the ethics committees nor the publications, however, have much authority to stop unethical research.

Stricter controls than those possible under guidance by codes of professional ethics are exercised by the United States federal government, through policies that are established by the Office of Human Research Protection, an administrative branch of the Department of Health and Human Services, and by the Institutional Review Boards at most institutions that sponsor research.

Institutional Review Boards

Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) are set up and operate under the jurisdiction of the federal Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP) at every institution in the United States that receives federal funds in any way (http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/). The OHRP is a division of the Department of Health and Human Services. IRBs are required to review every research project carried out on human subjects and to approve the researchers' plans for protecting their participants. Thus, virtually every organization that carries out research that obtains personally identifiable information from human beings must be scrutinized for ethical content and approved by an IRB before it can begin. Further, strong sanctions exist for failing to obtain approval from the IRB, or for deviating from what was approved once a study has been implemented. The sanctions range from stopping projects and withholding degrees from individual researchers and grants from research teams to disbanding an institution's IRB and shutting down all the research at that institution until ethical procedures are reinstated.

Definition: An Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a committee set up by an organization to review, approve, and regulate research conducted by its members, on its premises, or under its sponsorship

Most commonly, IRBs are found in universities. However, many other kinds of institutions have IRBs, including hospitals, social service agencies, school districts, Native American tribal groups, and independent research organizations. Even if an organization does not have its own IRB, scrutiny of research projects for conformity to ethical guidelines can be obtained through agreements with other institutions that do have IRBs. If partner agencies do not have IRBs, they can waive rights to review to the grantee organization, which then has the overall responsibility for ensuring the protection of human subjects across all the study sites. In international work, reviews and approvals are required from the grantee organization, the international partner sites, and the country government institutions that approve the receipt of the funds from a U.S. funder. For example, in a federally funded study of high-risk drug use among adolescents in Hartford, Schensul had to obtain **assurances** from three subcontracting institutions guaranteeing that they did agree to perform in accordance with Institute for Community Research IRB requirements. For this study, even though the only responsibility one

of the subcontractors had was to help Hartford researchers analyze data, the mere possibility that he might come into contact with the data required a special assurance. In other recent studies that are partnerships with institutions in India, ICR conducted ethical reviews, as did the partner agencies, the International Institute for Population Sciences (an NIAAA study), and the National Institute for Research on Reproductive Health (a Fogarty Center/NCI study). Once these reviews were conducted, the appropriate Indian government agency had to approve them. Here, we simply urge researchers to be aware of the need to obtain such approvals and to secure the guidelines for doing so from both the funders and the individual institutions involved. Failure to obtain approval and to follow the rules for ethical treatment of human subjects can delay the study and will prevent funding agencies from supporting it; it also can cause an IRB to stop a research project in its tracks.

Definition: Assurances are documents produced by IRBs to describe their procedures for assuring that researchers in their institution will conform to regulations concerning protection of human subjects from research risk. Assurances are required by the Federal Office of Protection from Research Risk (OPRR)

Cross Reference: Book 6 of The Ethnographer's Toolkit is devoted to details of interinstitutional collaborations and of the intricacies of obtaining agreement on research procedures

Example 10.3

Delays caused by failure to obtain all necessary IRB approvals

William Foster, an enrolled member of the Native American group whose school he had attended and which he had planned to use as a site for exploring the extent to which cultural knowledge was used in K–12 instruction, had completed his dissertation proposal, defended it successfully, and obtained approval for his study from the university's IRB. He had begun observations at the school and was about to begin interviews with elders in the community when the principal of the school told him that he had to cease collecting data because the tribal IRB did not know about his project and expressed concerns about it. Even though Foster was himself a member of the tribe, the tribal IRB still was concerned that Foster's work might be an exposé of negative conditions in the school. While Foster's project ultimately was approved by the tribe without problems, his dissertation timeline was significantly extended.

Similarly, for her thesis Emily Benson (2010), an MA student who also taught in an inner-city middle school, planned to study the morale of teachers in a large metropolitan district whose schools were being closed because of low achievement by their students. Because her own school was being closed, she chose it as a site and obtained permission from the principal to proceed. Not knowing that the school district had an IRB or that its procedures required lengthy negotiation, she assumed she could begin collecting data as soon as she had obtained approval from the University IRB and the principal. However, she quickly learned that she had

another lengthy step: obtaining clearance from the school district IRB. Her project was delayed long after her planned graduation date because of the time needed for the school district IRB, which had undergone staff changes, to reorganize its schedule, hire staff, and consider her study.

Ethnographers often face difficulty in obtaining approval from members of the IRBs with whom they must work. The first IRBs were constituted primarily of medical researchers and people from the biological sciences, since the harm first identified for research participants came from studies in these fields. Many IRBs still are so constituted. Such investigators are accustomed to quantitative and experimental research designs and protocols from clinical trials; they understand neither the procedures used by ethnographers nor the special ethical considerations that ethnographers face in the field. Ethnographers, therefore, cannot assume that the IRB members will understand what they are doing, why it is important, or even how it is credible and rigorous. Here, however, we simply suggest that individual ethnographers should take care to explain their research methods and data collection in exhaustive detail. Since IRBs are required by law to represent the interests of all manner of potential research participants—prisoners, children, students, people with medical conditions, and the community at large—and since IRBs can do their work more effectively if their members include representatives from the multitude of disciplines engaged in research on human beings, we argue that ethnographers also should encourage their own IRBs to include as members qualitative researchers, ethnographers, and representatives from disciplines such as anthropology and field sociology. Doing so can assure that ethnographic research will receive a fair hearing. Ethnographers who work in other settings such as research institutes, schools, or nonprofit organizations may be in the position of constituting and supporting their own IRBs. Influence over membership, however, does not preclude proper training of all IRB members to understand their roles and responsibilities toward the research, the research community, and the research personnel.

Cross Reference: In Book 6 of The Ethnographer's Toolkit, we present more details on how ethnographers can work effectively with their IRBs

Going Beyond the IRB: The Role of the Investigator

While IRBs constitute the principal *institutional* safeguard for human subjects, true respect for human research participants can best be achieved if researchers are aware of their *own* situatedness and responsibilities with regard to the research site and its participants. If they take care to address issues related to how individuals interact with the institutions that have control over research projects and are involved in them, and if they internalize and conform to the Belmont Principles of justice, beneficence, and respect for persons in the execution of their investigations, then violations of the sort documented in this chapter are less

likely to occur.

Ethics and the Individual Researcher

In chapter 1 of this book, we discussed the extent to which researchers typically have occupied a position of power over participants in their studies, if only because researchers have had the last word as to the story that was published and disseminated. However, contemporary participatory and collaborative action research of the type advocated in **The Ethnographer's Toolkit** is not so one-sided. By means of member checks, collaborations, constant consultation, and joint problem posing and problem solving, contemporary collaborative researchers often co-construct their interpretations with participants. Nonetheless, care must be taken to recognize nuances of the power asymmetries between researchers and those studied.

Researcher Knowledge and Situatedness

First of all, researchers themselves are potentially the greatest source of leaks of information about participants. Qualitative and ethnographic researchers in particular become privy to all manner of private information, sometimes because friends in the field disclose it and other times because researchers stumble upon, are told about, or observe behavior and activities that are secret. These may or may not be relevant to the research topic. In any case, researchers are bound by their own ethical standards to maintain confidentiality sufficient to protect respondents from disclosures that are irrelevant to the study and harmful—even though telling "tales from the field" about interesting and shocking events and even acts of personal bravery is tempting for researchers.

Researchers also must recognize that their own personal characteristics will affect, and often limit, what they can learn and will be told in the field. Not only does this affect the comprehensiveness and credibility of what researchers learn but it also can adversely affect researchers' ability to understand potential risks, hazards, and other issues that could endanger participants and the researchers themselves. For example, if researchers are not aware of cultural customs and taboos to which participants adhere, they may inadvertently request participants to engage in activities that are culturally and socially risky.

Example 10.4

When visiting specific sites is tabooed

On a trip to the Four Corners area with graduate student assistants and members of the Navajo community she was studying, LeCompte learned of a recently discovered archeological site in the vicinity that dated to long before humans had been known to occupy the area. Both LeCompte and the members of her team wanted to visit the site, but her Navajo collaborators discouraged them, saying that if the research team did go, they would have to go alone. Navajos, they explained, avoided places where the remains of the dead might be buried, since

skinwalkers, or the spirits of the dead, could still be present and do harm to the living. Archeological sites often contained burials, or even trash heaps and middens, where the bones of the dead were entombed; even as old as this site seemed to be, visiting it still involved violation of a strongly held cultural taboo. Now cognizant of these beliefs, LeCompte avoided putting Navajo colleagues in difficulty by visiting such places only with licensed archeologists. That way, she could be assured that her guides had reconciled themselves to the cultural taboos, even if they were Navajo.

Researcher naiveté also can be dangerous if investigators are unaware of the political and social conflicts extant in a community. Responding to what appear to be simple questions about religion, the degree of support enjoyed by government leaders, political organizations to which a person belongs, support for women's rights, or any number of issues can be sufficiently sensitive to get respondents in serious trouble. Even being seen talking to a researcher can, at times, endanger the lives of potential respondents. Only the researcher's commitment to being fully informed can enable him or her to act in an ethical and responsible manner toward potential research participants.

Yet another issue involves how data are used. As Example 10.2 indicates, even scrupulous care cannot guarantee against mishaps. However, researchers can take care to negotiate ethical use of data. This involves determining which audiences may wish to have access to the data and to which of the various "communities" that the ethnographic researcher owes allegiance should information be disseminated. These communities include the people in the settings in which the research is conducted and those who are involved as participants, respondents, informants, and partners in the research. They may also include other professional colleagues, funders, institutions in which the researchers are based (e.g., universities, research institutes, and nonprofit organizations), other institutions and policy makers, and the public at large. What results these audiences will need and how they will use them should be considered before and during the conduct of the research, as well as once the research is completed. In this way, safeguards can be instituted regarding ethical considerations about who gets what kind of data for what uses. Example 10.5 describes the special care that must be taken to guard the identity of participants for whom qualitative data have been obtained; Book 6 of **The Ethnographer's Toolkit** provides more detail on these processes.

Cross Reference: See Book 6 of the Toolkit

Example 10.5

Ethical considerations in the sharing of mixed methods data

While quantitative data can be deidentified fairly easily, qualitative data are more difficult to deidentify because field notes describe specific incidents in specific communities and because

descriptions of individuals and individual behavior can be identified by knowledgeable readers. To guard against disclosure of private information in a mixed methods study of exposure to HIV risk among older adults in senior housing, all survey data were deidentified. Respondents were given unique identifiers, and researchers in Chicago and Hartford were given combined databases in which respondents could only be identified by city and building. However, researchers also conducted in-depth interviews with building residents. These interviews included participants' personal histories of drug use, sexual relationships, and current interactions with building residents and sex partners. To protect the identities of residents, in-depth interviews were screened for any references to the names of personal contacts, especially in buildings. These names were coded. All respondents were given new unique identifiers so they could not be linked to the list of building residents, except by the project director, who maintained lists by name, city, and address in hard copy in a locked file for which only she had the key. Finally, only quantitative data from both cities were made available to the public. Qualitative data were retained by both sites for use only by site-specific investigators (Radda et al. 2003; Schensul et al. 2003).

Ethics and Institutional Issues

Researchers also are bound by institutional requirements for ethical behavior. We already have mentioned the Belmont Report, which codified obligations of researchers under three basic principles: justice, beneficence, and respect for persons. These are the principles that are enforced by the federal Office of Human Research Protection and which guide the review processes of Institutional Review Boards; researchers are well advised to build their projects around these principles and their implications. In the pages that follow, we discuss briefly how researchers work with IRBs and other institutions involved in their work.

Working with Institutional Review Boards

We already have noted that all universities, public schools, hospitals and medical centers, and nonprofit organizations conducting research or evaluation studies have Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) that review any proposal involving human clients, constituencies, participants, subjects, or members. Institutional Review Boards have the authority to approve or reject, call for changes in, suspend, or terminate research that is deemed harmful to participants, careless, or unethical. They also can oversee research projects and withdraw their approval, stopping a study if the researcher deviates from approved practice in ways harmful to subjects or from the procedures approved by the IRB, or if the study or its results have unintended and deleterious impact on its participants.

All research with human subjects must obtain approval or **certification** from an IRB. This requires submitting a detailed proposal to an IRB for the study. Typically, this involves first

undergoing some training in the principles and practicalities of human research protection. In fact, all researchers working with human subjects must take ethics training, either as mandated by their university or provided by OHRP, the federal organization that provides oversight for research ethics and human subjects research for all federally funded research projects in the United States (for more information, see http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/). Researchers then construct a proposal for approval by their institution's IRB. Proposals usually include the following:

Definition: Certification of a research study means that it has been approved by an IRB

- A description of the study and its purpose
- A description of the population to be studied and how its members will be recruited and selected for the study
- Information about how proposed subjects will be informed about the study and what will happen to them if they agree to participate
- A description of the interventions, if any, that researchers plan to implement
- Enumeration and description of the data collection methods to be used, how long they will take, and where they will be located
- Assessment of the risks and benefits of the studies to participants and to the general population
- Description of how the researcher intends to protect the identity of participants and the privacy of their information and how they plan to disseminate or use the data
- A statement assuring participants of their right to refuse to participate or withdraw at any point without consequence to themselves or their families
- Addresses and phone numbers of the researchers and of the responsible persons in the researchers' institutions
- Copies of consent forms (and assent forms if needed) that respondents will be asked to sign, confirming their willingness to participate. Consent forms explain to potential participants why they were recruited for the study and must include all of the information listed above, written in lay language. Assent forms can be simpler and written at a level that the participants will understand

All of the above listed components must be described with sufficient clarity that research subjects can reasonably consent to participation—or decide to withhold their consent. In most cases, researchers will be required to obtain written consent to participate from the potential participants, as well as from the participants' legal guardian, if the participants are children, are incapacitated, have reduced mental capability, or are in custody. In general, researchers are asked to guarantee confidentiality or anonymity. **Key point** ***Ethnographers seldom can promise anonymity,*** since so much of their data involve observations of individuals and interviews that identify the participants, at least to the ethnographer. Anonymity is fully possible only when even the researchers themselves cannot connect a specific individual to the data collected from that individual—as in the case of questionnaires that are mailed out by the researcher without any identifying markers and returned unsigned by the respondent. In survey research, where interviewers actually interview respondents in face-to-face encounters, confidentiality is usually ensured by removing names and other identifiers from the database and analyzing the data in aggregate form. Ethnographers must provide pseudonyms and often should alter biographies and key identifying information to protect their participants.

Obtaining Approvals When Multiple Institutions Are Involved

IRBs usually require that researchers provide assurance from gatekeepers at the research site that the research project has been approved. However, as Examples 10.2 and 10.3 demonstrate, researchers may have to consult with and seek agreements from a number of institutions and organizations involved with the research or handling of data in order to assure that participants are fully protected. For much federally funded research, researchers must seek approval from the IRB or equivalent of the site in which the research is to be conducted, in addition to their own supervising institution, before the grant is funded.

If federal grant reviewers believe that there are unanswered human subjects issues, they will block the grant with a "comment" or "concern." This calls for the researcher to submit materials that respond to the "comment" or "concern," which is then reviewed by the federal agency that is responsible for human subject issues and either approved or disapproved. The funder (for example, the National Institute of Mental Health) can lift the block if the agency approves the researcher's response, and then fund the study.

The Special Concerns and Ethical Responsibilities of Ethnographers

Ethnographers are not usually involved in risky clinical experiments or medical studies. They do, however, have unique opportunities to acquire sensitive information about people. Further, ethnographers cannot assure participants of anonymity because ethnographic researchers know who their informants are, see them repeatedly, and are seen by others in the community while conducting interviews and observing with community members. Field notes also may contain descriptions of individuals or situations that, when read by other members of the research team or community, can reveal the identities of respondents. This means that ethnographers must make special efforts to keep confidential the identity of specific individuals. This can be done by using pseudonyms, altering certain biographical data, and even disguising the site or time period in which data are collected.

Ethnography's unique practice of interacting in a community or other setting for long periods of time also gives ethnographers considerable opportunity to learn secrets and intimate details of people's lives. Many of these details may not be relevant to the research study, but they are precisely the kind of information that could cause harm to people in their communities if it were disclosed. The long-term presence of ethnographers in the field also may be confusing to study participants because the boundaries between friendship and professional research conduct become blurred. In such situations, ethical conduct in research interacts with ethical conduct in the context of personal relationships. Ethnographers may observe or hear about illegal, dangerous, or potentially abusive activities in the course of fieldwork. In some cases, such as abuse of a child, observations may invoke legal requirements to report the incident or behavior to authorities.

We believe that honesty and openness in relationships with research partners and participants leads to better ethnography; honest and open relationships make people willing to

give researchers access to better, more valid, and more copious data. Further, long-term interaction with their subjects makes it as difficult for ethnographers to hide secrets as it is for their research participants. Thus, attempts to engage in covert research or subterfuge of any kind are made more difficult in field ethnography. Nevertheless, study participants can forget that the ethnographer is there to do research. Researchers should feel obliged to explain the study repeatedly, especially when entering a new situation where those present may not be aware that research is being conducted in their setting or community.

Example 10.6

Repeating a cover story to assure that participants know research is being conducted

Even though LeCompte and her research assistants had been working with the Arts Focus program at Highline Middle School for more than two years, they still had to remind participants of the purpose of their study and identify themselves in every meeting and interview as those "researchers from the University who are studying the Arts Program." New teachers, as well as students new to the building and their parents who had not been present at the initial meetings when LeCompte and the research team were introduced, needed to be familiarized with the researchers' roles; the students also tended to forget the role and identity of any adult in the school who wasn't their own immediate or former teacher.

Example 10.7

A protocol for verbal consent for ICR field research

The IRB of the Institute for Community Research includes a number of ethnographers or qualitative researchers sensitive to the requirements of ongoing field research. IRB members understood that obtaining signed consent forms during field observations in social settings often was intrusive, not realistic, and made no sense. Nevertheless, the IRB wanted assurance that field researchers who were conducting observations in public settings, high-risk drug-using sites, and concerts and clubs made sure to inform people that they were there as researchers. The IRB asked the ethics committee of the Institute to construct a verbal consent protocol that provided a script enabling ethnographers, especially novices, to describe their work in the field on an ongoing basis. The script they approved was the following:

ICR Verbal Consent Script

The verbal consent script for use in ethnographic observations of drug-use sites will include the following components:

1. Salutation and introduction of the researcher's name and place of work.
2. Name of the project and the researcher's role in the project.
3. A brief explanation of the purpose of the study.
4. The reason for the researcher's presence at the site.

5. What to expect of the researcher and what the researcher needs during the observation.

6. What will happen with the data and information about how to contact the researcher.

Sample script for verbal consent. Adapt the script as necessary to reflect the specifics of your research project.

#1) Hi. I'm Peg, I'm an ethnographer on the RAP Project.

#2) RAP is the Risk Avoidance Partnership and is a study that partners with people from the community to bring HIV prevention and health advocacy to the places where they are and the people who need it.

#3) Part of what we need to learn is how this program works in places where people use drugs and if it works for them. That means we need to be able to talk to people in these places and spend some time there to see if it can work in real situations.

#4) I'd like to be able to stay here for a while and talk to you and other people who come here about what's going on and other things related to using drugs and HIV or other health concerns people have. I will be sure to let anyone who comes here know who I am, and I will leave if anyone feels uncomfortable about my being here. Anything that happens here and anything anyone says I'll keep confidential.

#5, 6) After I leave, I will write up some notes about what we talked about or what happened here to help with our study. If you have any questions about what I plan to write about or about anything else, you can call me [provide business card] or you can call the Project Director at ICR at the same phone number without the extension.

Instructions to Ethnographers: As new people enter the site, the researcher will repeat at least #1-3, and as soon as the opportunity arises, #4-6.

This brief script or a modification thereof appropriate for each study is part of the training and field repertoire of every ICR researcher working in public or private observational settings where written consent is not feasible, practical, or appropriate.

Ethical considerations, then, come into play during the design phase of the research process as the researcher seeks relevant approvals and consent from individuals and institutions. They continue as researchers enter the field, establish relationships with people, and begin to collect data. Researchers are, in fact, "special friends" with research participants; the specialness of these relationships has to do not only with the fact that such friendships were initiated for the purpose of gathering information (Agar 1980; Powdermaker 1966; Spradley 1979) but also with the fact that, unlike ordinary friendships, they should be governed by quite specific and codified standards of care for privacy and for protection from harm. Friendships formed during ethnographic research differ from other friendships in other ways as well. Because ethnographers need to hear from all voices in a setting and to learn about issues on all sides of problems, their friendships must span boundaries of groups that may be in conflict.

The reports ethnographers write at the end of their studies and even the feedback they give during the course of a study often involve telling people things they don't want to hear (LeCompte 1994; McDade 1987). Certain members of groups within the setting may view such

disclosures as harmful to them. This is especially likely to occur when the setting is complex and when many constituencies participate, or have interests, in the results of the research. Sometimes, researchers may be accused of "taking sides" if they disclose incompetence, inconsistencies, noncompliance, malfeasance or misfeasance, or just plain ignorance of issues on the part of participants—even if the foregoing are key to the solution of problems the ethnographer was hired to explore and clarify. All of these circumstances require delicate and careful negotiations regarding disclosure and audiences.

Reciprocity

Ethnographic fieldworkers also face problems of reciprocity. Providing information to researchers is not a one-way street; more and more, those who provide information want to receive something in return, even if that something involves no more than the good will and attention of the researcher. Quite often, however, reciprocity involves exchange of far more tangible goods, services, or information. Traditionally, ethnographers tried hard to build their reports primarily on "volunteered" information, on the grounds that information that was paid for in any way could be tainted by the self-interest of the informant. While this degree of purism now is recognized as unnecessary and probably unfeasible, questions do arise about the degree to which the kind of exchange affects the kind of information proffered to researchers. Further, payment can raise issues of coercion when the payment offered exceeds the normal rates expected for time and services within the community. Generally, the decision to pay respondents is based on whether or not they lose financial resources by agreeing to be interviewed (for example, if they are paid or earn income on an hourly basis) and whether or not such reciprocity is possible.

Example 10.8

Token remuneration for participants in an ethnography

The study of children's activity levels carried out by researchers at the Institute for Community Research with first graders and their parents required nightly involvement of parents and children in taking measurements of energy outputs. Mothers were given a modest gift certificate and children were given a gift (a baseball hat or hair ribbon) after the data were collected. Similarly, in a school-based intervention with a longitudinal outcome evaluation design in which mother and daughter pairs were asked to fill out and return assessment instruments three times over three years, each pair received a small payment of $10.00 per visit or interview and a "party" celebration with food and entertainment.

In many applied or collaborative ethnographic projects, the researchers can provide research services or conduct studies for participants that participants would like to have done but for which they have no time themselves.

Example 10.9

Exchanging research and consulting not related to the study for participants' information

Margaret LeCompte routinely helped teachers and administrators in Pinnacle School District, in The Learning Circle Program, and at Arts Focus in Highline Middle School to design surveys and assessment instruments to collect data in which they were interested. She did library searches for busy teachers and conducted interviews with them to preserve their recollections of how programs were developing. The latter served two purposes: They constituted data for LeCompte's monitoring of the program, but they also created a journal for the teachers of their year's work—a journal that they did not have time to keep themselves. She also photographed program activities, giving copies of the photos to the schools. Again, the photos were part of LeCompte's database, but they also created a scrapbook for the school.

Exploitation

One of the most delicate issues in fieldwork is that of exploitation. In traditional ethnographic fieldwork, the local community studied benefited little from the fact that their lives had been studied and written about. By contrast, the researcher benefited greatly in terms of publications, research grants, and tenured positions in universities and research institutions. To forestall this accusation, researchers can work with community or institutional partners to find public ways of making data available and usable and giving participants credit for their assistance.

In addition to issues that are relevant during the study, ethical considerations extend beyond the actual study itself. Traditional ethnographers worried about saying goodbye to people in the field and about how participants might react to the loss of the friendship, good fellowship, jobs, material, and emotional support and attention that the researcher provided while resident in the community. Contemporary ethnographers also have to be worried about the impact of their research results once they have left. They have an ethical responsibility to come up with the best and most truthful interpretation of data possible; doing so is aided by inducing research partners to share in the interpretations. Sharing in interpretations, however, can be complicated when research partners cannot agree among themselves or when they give interpretations that would violate assurances of confidentiality given in exchange for disclosure of critical information. Further complications can arise when research participants and partners expect ongoing commitments from researchers to help solve problems identified in the research—long after the actual study has been concluded. All of these issues must be handled with care, diplomacy, and respect for all. To avoid misunderstandings, it certainly is best for the researcher to explain beforehand what constraints to implementation might arise following the study and to review these at the end to avoid disappointments. Sometimes this

may entail continuing to work on a reduced, but voluntary, basis in order to maintain critical relationships with research partners.

Conclusion

We have now presented an overview of the ethnographic research process, from its design and implementation through dissemination and utilization of research results. We hope that the preceding pages have both intrigued you and stimulated your desire to put ethnography to work in your own projects and institutions. As this single volume is not intended to tell the complete story, we now urge you to continue exploring how to "do ethnography" in the other books of **The Ethnographer's Toolkit**. They are:

- Book 2: Initiating Ethnographic Research: Models, Methods, and Measurement
- Book 3: Essential Ethnographic Data Collection Methods: Observations, Interviews, and Ethnographic Surveys
- Book 4: Specialized Ethnographic Methods: Cultural Artifacts, Secondary Data, Mapping Culture, Spatial Data, Hidden Populations, Multimedia, Photovoice, and Digital Data
- Book 5: Analysis and Interpretation of Ethnographic Data
- Book 6: Ethics in Ethnography: Fieldwork, Researcher Roles, and Institutional Relationships
- Book 7: Ethnography in Practice: Using Collaborative Ethnography to Solve Social Problems

We hope that your excursion into ethnography will be an adventure!

Notes

1. For a review of the way different philosophical approaches to ethics are applied to ethnographic and qualitative research, see Deyhle, Hess, and LeCompte (1992), "Approaching Ethical Issues for Qualitative Researchers in Education." *The Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education*, Orlando, FL: Academic Press, 597–641.

2. Title 45, Part 46 Protection of Human Subjects (45CFR 46), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001.

3. For a review of codes of ethics in several of the social sciences that include ethnographic or other forms of qualitative work, see the following website addresses: http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/ethstmnt.htm; http://www.sfaa.net/sfaaethic.html; http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/ethstmnt.htm; http://www.apa.org/ethics/code2002.html.

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About the Authors

Dr. Margaret LeCompte received her BA from Northwestern University in political science, and after serving as a civil rights worker in Mississippi and a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Somali Republic, earned her MA and PhD from the University of Chicago. She then taught at the Universities of Houston and Cincinnati, with visiting appointments at the University of North Dakota and the Universidad de Monterrey, Mexico, before moving to the School of Education at the University of Colorado-Boulder in 1990. She also served for five years as executive director for research and evaluation for the Houston Independent School District. She is internationally known as a pioneer in the use of qualitative and ethnographic research and evaluation in education. Given her fluency in Spanish, she has consulted throughout Latin America on educational research issues. Her publications include many articles and book chapters on research methods in the social sciences, as well as her co-written (with Judith Preissle) *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research* (1984; 1993) and co-edited (with Wendy Millroy and Judith Preissle) *The Handbook of QualitativeResearch in Education* (1992), the first textbook and handbook published on ethnographic and qualitative methods in education. Her collaborative work in research methodology continues with this second edition of *The Ethnographer's Toolkit*. Dr. LeCompte is deeply interested in the educational success of linguistically and culturally different students from kindergarten through university, as well as reform initiatives for schools and communities serving such students. Her books in these areas include *The Way Schools Work: A Sociological Analysis of Education* (1990, 1995, and 1999) with K. DeMarrais; and *Giving Up on School: Teacher Burnout and Student Dropout* (1991) with A. G. Dworkin. Her diverse interests as a researcher, evaluator, and consultant to school districts, museums, communities and universities have led to publications on dropouts, artistic and gifted students, school reform efforts, schools serving American Indian students, and the impact of strip mining on the social environment of rural communities. Her most recent research involves explorations in the politics and finance of public universities. A Fellow of the American Educational Research Association, the American Anthropological Association, and the Society for Applied Anthropology, she has been president of the Council on Anthropology and Education of the American Anthropology Association and editor of the journals *Review of Educational Research* and *Youth and Society*. A founding member and the first president of the University

of Colorado–Boulder chapter of the American Association of University Professors, she also served as vice president of the Colorado Conference of the AAUP and is active in faculty governance at the University of Colorado. In these capacities, she continues to use action research strategies in the service of improving the intellectual life in higher education.

Jean J. Schensul, founding director, and now full time senior scientist, Institute for Community Research, Hartford, is an interdisciplinary medical/educational anthropologist. Born in Canada she completed her BA in archeology at the University of Manitoba and her MA and PhD in anthropology at the University of Minnesota. From 1978 to 1987, as deputy director and co-founder of the Hispanic Health Council in Hartford, Connecticut, she built its research and training infrastructure. In 1987, she became the founding director of the Institute for Community Research, an innovative, multimillion dollar community research organization, conducting collaborative applied research in education, cultural studies and folklore, participatory action research, and community intervention research in the United States, China, and India. Dr. Schensul's research cuts across the developmental spectrum, addressing contributions of ethnography to disparities and structural inequities in early childhood development, adolescent and young adult substance use and sexual risk, reproductive health, and chronic diseases of older adulthood. She is the recipient of more than twenty National Institutes of Health research grants, as well as other federal, state, and foundation grants. In addition to conferences, workshops, over eighty peer-reviewed journal articles, many edited substantive special issues of journals including *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, *AIDS and Behavior*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, and the *American Journal of Community Psychiatry*, her collaborative work in research methodology is reflected in a book (with Don Stull) entitled *Collaborative Research and Social Change*, the widely celebrated seven volume series, *The Ethnographers' Toolkit*, with Margaret LeCompte, and in other articles and book chapters on ethnography and advocacy, community building, and sustainability of interventions. She has served as president of the Society for Applied Anthropology and the Council on Anthropology and Education and is an elected board member of the American Anthropological Association. In recognition of her work as a scholar activist she has been awarded two senior anthropology awards, the Solon T. Kimball Award for anthropology and policy (with Stephen Schensul) and the Malinowski Award for lifetime contribution to the use of anthropology for the solution of human problems. Dr. Schensul holds adjunct faculty positions in the Departments of Anthropology and Community Medicine, University of Connecticut, and is co-director, Qualitative Research and Ethnography, Interdisciplinary Research Methods Core, Yale Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS.

A fiber artist, quilter, teacher, curator, and lecturer, **Ed Johnetta Fowler-Miller** is acknowledged to be one of the most creative and colorful improvisational quiltmakers in the United States. Widely exhibited in the United States and internationally, her quilts can be found in many important museums, corporate and private collections including The National Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.; Nelson Mandela's National Museum in Cape Town, South Africa; Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Connecticut; and the Rocky Mountain Quilt Museum in Golden, Colorado. Her home state of Connecticut awarded her its most prestigious artistic award, The Governor's Art Award as well as the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Arts first Presidents Award; Leadership of Greater Hartford's Arts and Cultural Award, Vision Award for Arts; and Cultural and Capital Community College Heritage Award. The Home and Garden Station featured Ed Johnetta on the Modern Masters series; she appeared on Debbie Allen's series "Cool Women," Public TV, Tokyo, Japan; and her woven creations were worn by actress Phylicia Rashad on "The Cosby Show." The Sunday *New York Times* featured her in the Best of the Best series and most recently, she appeared on HGTV's Simply Quilts. In 2009 Ed Johnetta represented the United States and the Women of Color Quilters Network at the largest quilt festival in the world in Yokohama, Japan, and in 2010 she will again represent the United States in Costa Rica where she will lecture and teach workshops. She has exhibited her work across the United States and lectures and offers workshops in New England, elsewhere in the United States, and worldwide. More information can be found at http://www.edjohnetta.com.

Graciela Quiñones-Rodríguez is a gourd carver/lutier/multi-media artisan/performer, and Master Teaching Artist. She draws most of her inspiration from indigenous and traditional Puerto Rican imagery and symbols to create *higüeras* (gourds), clay/wood figures and folk string instruments (*cuatros, tiples, and bordonuas)*. Graciela has been a resident artist in numerous schools and libraries throughout Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York. She has received fellowships and awards from the Commission on the Arts, the New England Foundation for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Her works have been on exhibit in Puerto Rico, the Smithsonian Institute, University of Massachusetts, Wisconsin, New York, and several exhibit sites throughout Connecticut. She is a member of Urban Artists Initiative and the Connecticut Cultural Heritage Arts Program. Graciela is a licensed clinical social worker, currently working at the Storrs campus of the University of Connecticut.