**Chapter 3**

**Ethnography: Studying Culture**

# **Chapter Outline**

**What Distinguishes Ethnographic Fieldwork from Other Types of Social Research?**

*Fieldwork*

*Seeing the World from “The Native’s Point of View”*

*Avoiding Cultural “Tunnel Vision”*

**How Do Anthropologists Actually Do Ethnographic Fieldwork?**

Participant Observation: Disciplined “Hanging Out”

Interviews: Asking and Listening

Scribbling: Taking Fieldnotes

**What Other Methods Do Cultural Anthropologists Use?**

*Comparative Method*

*Genealogical Method*

*Life History*

*Ethnohistory*

*Rapid Appraisals*

*Action Research*

*Anthropology at a Distance*

*Analyzing Secondary Materials*

*Special Issues Facing Anthropologists Studying Their Own Societies*

**What Unique Ethical Dilemmas Do Ethnographers Face?**

*Protecting Informant Identity*

*Anthropology, Spying, and War*

**Classic Contributions**: *Bronislaw Malinowski on the Ethnographic Method*

**A World in Motion**: Transnational Migration, Ethnographic Mobility, and Digital Fieldwork

**Thinking Like an Anthropologist**: *Fieldwork in an American Mall*

**Anthropologist as Problem Solver**: *Alcida Rita Ramos and Indigenous Rights in Brazil*

# **Student Learning Objectives**

* Describe the various fieldwork methods anthropologists have used to study their own and other societies
* Describe the differences between observation, participant observation, and interviews, as well as specific techniques involved in each
* Distinguish between the comparative method, the genealogical method, life histories, and various applied methods
* Clarify what is meant by “the native’s point of view” and “cultural tunnel vision”
* Identify the difficulties and opportunities involved in studying one’s own society
* Outline some uses of ethnographic methods in nonacademic settings
* Understand the ethical challenges involved in ethnographic fieldwork

# **Key Terms and Definitions**

**Emic perspective:** A cultural insider’s perspective on his or her culture.

**Ethnohistory**: The study of cultural change in societies and periods for which the community had no written histories or historical documents, usually relying heavily on oral history for data. “Ethnohistory” may also refer to a view of history from the cultural insider’s point of view, which often differs from an outsider’s view.

**Etic perspective:** An outside observer’s perspective on a culture.

**Fieldnotes**: Information the anthropologist collects or transcribes during fieldwork.

**Fieldwork:** Long-term immersion in a community, normally involving firsthand research in a specific study community or research setting where the researcher can observe people’s behavior and have conversations or interviews with members of the community.

**Genealogical method**: A systematic methodology for recording kinship relations and how kin terms are used in different societies.

**Headnotes**: The mental notes an anthropologist makes while in the field, which may or may not end up in formal fieldnotes or journals.

**Human Relations Area Files (HRAF)**: A comparative anthropological database that allows easy reference to coded information about several hundred cultural traits for more than 350 societies. The HRAF facilitate statistical analysis of the relationship between the presence of one trait and the occurrence of other traits.

**Informant**: Any person an anthropologist gets data from in the study community, especially a person who is interviewed or who provides information about what the anthropologist has observed or heard.

**Intersubjectivity**: The realization that knowledge about other people emerges out of relationships and perceptions individuals have with each other.

**Interview**: Any systematic conversation with an informant to collect field research data, ranging from a highly structured set of questions to the most open-ended ones.

**Life history**: Any survey of an informant’s life, including such topics as residence, occupation, marriage, family, and difficulties, usually collected to reveal patterns that cannot be observed today.

**Open-ended interview**: Any conversation with an informant in which the researcher allows the informant to take the conversation to related topics that the informant rather than the researcher feels are important.

**Participant observation**: The standard research method used by cultural anthropologists that requires the researcher to live in the community he or she is studying to observe and participate in day-to-day activities.

**Participatory action research**: A research method in which the research questions, data collection, and data analysis are defined through collaboration between the researcher and the subjects of research. A major goal is for the research subjects to develop the capacity to investigate and take action on their primary political, economic, or social problems.

**Primary materials:** Original sources such as fieldnotes that are prepared by someone who is directly involved in the research project and has direct personal knowledge of the research subjects.

**Rapid appraisal**: Short-term, focused ethnographic research, typically lasting no more than a few weeks, about narrow research questions or problems.

**Secondary materials**: Sources such as censuses, regional surveys, or historical reports that are compiled from data collected by someone other than the field researcher.

# **Chapter Summary**

**Introduction**

* 1. Prior to the 1970s, anthropologists typically aimed to work in “exotic” faraway places in order to document the most pronounced cultural differences.
  2. Today, cultural anthropologists are much more aware of the research potential of, and insights about, humanity to be gained from closer-to-home field settings. Advertising executives, factory workers, or transnational migrants in an anthropologist’s home country are equally important subjects of anthropological inquiry.
  3. At the heart of these research projects, near or far, is a central goal: to learn about the contexts, meanings, and fluidity of human social lives.
  4. Chapter 3 explores the question, How do anthropologists learn about other ways of life? Within this question are specific questions around which the chapter is organized:
     + 1. What distinguishes ethnographic fieldwork from other types of social research?
       2. How do anthropologists actually do ethnographic fieldwork?
       3. What other methods do cultural anthropologists use?
       4. What unique ethical dilemmas do ethnographers face?
  5. Ethnographic methods, which have been around for the better part of a century, have proven to be effective tools for helping anthropologists understand the social complexities they study.

**What Distinguishes Ethnographic Fieldwork from Other Types of Social Research?**

1. Anthropology is generally less well known than other social sciences, like psychology, economics, or political science. This creates a lot of misunderstanding about what anthropologists in the field actually do.
2. Cultural anthropologists do research by building personal relationships over a long period, and it is a difficult process to prepare for in advance of the actual experience—especially working among people who may be culturally very different.
3. Anthropologists often use quantitative data comparable to other social sciences, but cultural anthropology is the most qualitative of the social sciences. Two additional features distinguish anthropology from these other disciplines:
   1. Anthropologists are more holistic, traditionally studying all aspects of social life simultaneously.
   2. In anthropology, long-term immersion and participation in a community (at least a year or more) and the application of open-minded cultural relativism yield insights that would be thwarted by preconceived ideas.
4. Fieldwork
   1. This long-term immersion is called *fieldwork*, and it is the defining methodology of cultural anthropology. It allows insights that would never be possible with short visits, surveys, or brief interviews.
   2. By personally participating in community activities, ethnographers observe what community members consider important, what they discuss among themselves, and how these matters intertwine with social institutions. This approach can yield an understanding of culture and behaviors that people themselves might not even be aware of.
5. Seeing the World from “the Native’s Point of View”
   1. As outsiders, the behaviors anthropologists observe may seem paradoxical. But if we earnestly seek to see things in terms of local context, things that people say and do begin to make cultural sense—we begin to see the world from an *emic* (or insider’s) perspective.
   2. Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski referred to this perspective as “the native’s point of view” and asserted that it was the heart of the ethnographic method.
      1. See “Classic Contributions: Bronislaw Malinowski and the Ethnographic Method”
6. Avoiding Cultural “Tunnel Vision”
   1. Most people assume that their own way of doing things is inherently better than everyone else’s. Even anthropologists are subject to cultural *tunnel vision*: unquestioned tacit meanings and perspectives drawn from our own culture that prevent us from seeing and thinking in terms of another culture’s tacit meanings and perspectives.
   2. *Everyone* has a tendency toward ethnocentrism. Informants feel that their way of doing things; their moral, ethical, and legal codes; and their ways of thinking about the world are correct, while everyone else’s are flawed—they have their own tunnel vision.

**How Do Anthropologists Actually Do Ethnographic Fieldwork?**

1. *Participant observation* is a key element of anthropological fieldwork: the standard research method used by cultural anthropologists that requires the researcher to live in the community he or she is studying to observe and participate in day-to-day activities.
2. Participant Observation: Disciplined “Hanging Out”
   1. Participant observation can be thought of as “disciplined hanging out”—*hanging out* because anthropologists observe and take part in events, rather than coordinating or directing them, and *disciplined* because anthropologists methodically record their observations and experiences, while building rapport with community members.
   2. Establishing rapport as a “professional stranger” requires a lot of discipline as well as acceptance of local customs and practices, however peculiar, unfamiliar, or uncomfortable.
   3. Anthropologist Johannes Fabian (1971) suggested that obtaining objective data is not the goal of fieldwork. These data are created by the relationships between an anthropologist and his or her *informant*: any person an anthropologist gets data from in the study community, especially people interviewed or who provide information about what they have observed or heard.
   4. Cultural data are not firmly objective or subjective but the product of *intersubjectivity*: the realization that knowledge about other people emerges out of their relationships with and perceptions of each other.
3. Interviews: Asking and Listening
   1. Field anthropologists also rely on *interviews*: any systematic conversation with an informant to collect field research data, ranging from a highly structured set of questions to the most open-ended ones. So how do anthropologists know what questions to ask?
      1. Anthropologists usually have specific questions in mind based on their backgrounds, curiosity, or research focus. And questions frequently change during fieldwork as new cultural realities present themselves.
      2. The goal of insightful cultural questions is to get people talking. The more individuals talk and the more rapport that is built up, the more people tell us about the cultural logic of their daily lives—ways of viewing the world that they may not even be aware of.
4. Scribbling: Taking Fieldnotes
   1. These observations and interviews must be recorded in some manner, most often *field notes*: any information that the anthropologist writes down or transcribes during fieldwork.
   2. Usually these scribbles are only shorthand notes made in small, unobtrusive notebooks and often referred to as “jot notes” that remind us of a conversation or observation we can document more fully later.
   3. Field notes are essential since details can easily be forgotten after months and years have passed. Anthropologists also often record *headnotes*: the mental notes an anthropologist makes while in the field, which may or may not end up in formal field notes or journals.
   4. Long-term fieldwork and detailed field notes led to a profoundly better understanding of human cultures, but they are no guarantee against bias and ethnocentrism.

**What Other Methods Do Cultural Anthropologists Use?**

1. Participant observation and open-ended interviews are the basis of cultural anthropological fieldwork. But the sheer complexity of human culture requires additional strategies: the comparative method, the genealogical method, life history, ethnohistory, rapid appraisals, action research, anthropology at a distance, and analyzing secondary materials.
2. Comparative Method
   1. The comparative method, comparing data from many different cultures, has always been part of anthropology. Lewis Henry Morgan gathered kinship data from around the world by mail and published his results in *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1871). Others used comparative data to rank human societies (invariably with their own societies on top).
      1. Comparative information is still relevant in modern anthropology and readily available via the Human Relations Area Files (hraf.yale.edu), which includes ethnographic data from hundreds of societies.
      2. See “A World in Motion: Transnational Migration, Ethnographic Mobility, and Digital Fieldwork.”
3. Genealogical Method
   1. The genealogical method was first used by English anthropologist William H. R. Rivers in 1898 in the Torres Strait (islands between Australia and New Guinea). He wanted to study the heritability of color blindness and needed accurate data on familial relations. The Torres Islanders used a classificatory system of kinship terms that made it hard for him to disentangle biological relationships. Rivers developed a simple, systematic way of classifying all kin according to their relationship to his informants, a system that is still used today.
4. Life Histories
   1. Life histories reveal age-related aspects of social life. As people go through life, they take on different roles in society and in social institutions. Ethnographers can understand how age affects typical social roles by recording multiple life histories within a society.
5. Ethnohistory
   1. Ethnohistory combines ethnographic and cultural approaches to understanding how cultures change through time. Ethnohistorians are also interested in how societies understand and recount the past. The concepts of history and how to tell it may differ from one society to another.
6. Rapid Appraisals
   1. Rapid appraisals, short-term ethnographic fieldwork (“parachute ethnography”), may be required for highly specific questions or when time for field research is short.
7. Action Research
   1. In the 1950s, American anthropologist Sol Tax advocated for *action anthropology*: research committed to social change. Tax encouraged anthropologists to give voice to disenfranchised communities and aid in collective problem-solving.
      1. Today, some anthropologists use *participatory action research*: a research method in which the research questions, data collection, and data analysis are defined through collaboration between the researcher and the subjects of research. A major goal is for the research subjects to develop the capacity to investigate and take action on their primary political, economic, or social problems.
8. Anthropology at a Distance
   1. Sometimes anthropologists are unable to travel to the field at all, owing to war or political repression. In that event, anthropologists may choose to attempt “anthropology at a distance” by interviewing informants from the study community who have moved elsewhere.
      1. For example, during World War II, Ruth Benedict was unable to pursue field research in Japan. She opted to interview Japanese expatriates in the United States and published her research in *Chrysanthemum and the Sword*(1946).
9. Analysis of Secondary Materials
   1. Much can be learned from *secondary materials*: any data that come from secondary sources such as a census, regional survey, historical report, other researchers, and the like that are not compiled by the field researcher. These differ from *primary materials*, which are produced by the researcher).
10. Special Issues Facing Anthropologists Studying Their Own Societies
    1. Anthropologists working “at home” experience both the benefits and the drawbacks of familiarity. They are familiar with language and customs, but this familiarity has the potential to blind them to patterns obvious to an outsider.
    2. See “Anthropologist as Problem Solver: Alcida Rita Ramos and Indigenous Rights in Brazil”
11. Increasingly, ethnographic fieldwork is not just about indigenous peoples but by indigenous peoples. For example, the Pan-Maya ethnic movement in Guatemala asserts a research agenda relevant to Maya social interactions and worldviews.

**What Unique Ethical Dilemmas Do Ethnographers Face?**

1. All anthropologists face common ethical dilemmas: the commitment to do no harm, considerations about to whom anthropologists are responsible, and who should control anthropology’s findings.
2. Protecting Informant Identify
   1. In order to do no harm, anthropologists often use pseudonyms for informants in published accounts to conceal identities.
      1. For example, Margaret Mead (1928) altered details about the adolescent girls she interviewed so they could not be identified, especially those who engaged in socially disapproved behaviors like premarital sex.
      2. The Limits of Anthropology’s First Amendment Protections
         1. Unlike journalists, anthropologists in the United States have no First Amendment protections. Anthropologists are obligated to protect their informants, but field data are subject to a subpoena from a court in criminal investigations.
      3. Who Should Have Access to Fieldnotes?
         1. This raises the question of who should have access to field notes. Most anthropologists view field notes as too private for publication, except in carefully edited excerpts. It is questionable whether field notes should be made available to informant communities. On the one hand, the data belong to informants. On the other, they may contain details that individuals do not want publically exposed.
3. Anthropology, Spying, and War
   1. Are anthropologists obligated to their informants, their government, or both? During World War II many anthropologists assisted with the war effort: Ruth Benedict, Sir Edmund Leach, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, and Gregory Bateson, for example.
   2. More recently, the embedding of social scientists with combat units in the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has created an ethical controversy.
      1. Some anthropologists argue that Americans (anthropologists or not) have a moral obligation to help fight terrorism.
      2. The American Anthropological Association officially condemned the Human Terrain System program.

**Conclusion**

1. Participant observation provides rich insights that the other social sciences cannot provide, specifically because it emphasizes a holistic perspective, direct experience, long-term participation in people’s lives, and responsiveness to unexpected events. Anthropologists listen to the stories of their informants and understand their culture through them.
2. All of the other methods that anthropologists use are in service to the insights that participant observation can provide but where participant observation may not be possible.

# **Key Controversies Discussed in This Chapter**

*A Note for the Instructor*: We understand anthropology is a living science. At the end of every chapter in the textbook, there is a table that reviews for the student reader both what we as a discipline know about the topics covered in the chapter as well as issues that remain unresolved. The goal here is not simply a reprise of what is presented in the textbook but an expansion on some of those issues and others that are more latent but that we nevertheless consider important for you to have as background for your teaching.

Fieldwork has been the hallmark of cultural anthropological research since the nineteenth century, when scholars began visiting indigenous communities to observe their lives and understand their customs. Many anthropologists from the United States and from Europe had interviewed native peoples and conducted what amounts to what we now call ethnographic fieldwork, but Malinowski is usually credited with “inventing” the ethnographic method when he pitched his tent in the village he wanted to study. Malinowski was exaggerating the uniqueness of his research methods, but he was well positioned at the London School of Economics to promote his explanation of how our distinctive field method arose. For several decades anthropologists had checklists of topics that should be included in a proper ethnography, but by the 1960s and 1970s ethnographic research began to be focused on specific research questions rather than general questions aimed at generating holistic insights about how the people in a particular society lived. These new research questions required more focused research methods aimed at answering the specific questions anthropologists brought with them to the field. In addition, anthropologists are working in a variety of new settings under diverse new conditions. As anthropological research has broadened into these diverse research topics, new methods have been developed so that ethnographic research is far from being a static methodology and is developing new methodologies to tackle whatever question researchers want to ask.

## **What We Know: Old Controversies Now Largely Resolved**

*(a) Does anthropological fieldwork provide insight that other research methods do not?* All anthropologists know that learning local languages, spending time with people doing ordinary things, listening to what is said, and observing what people do is a powerful way to find out about any community. Anthropological fieldwork that centers on participant observation offers insights about why people do the things they do and what they actually do in ways that questionnaires, highly structured interviews, and more systematic surveys can never fully equal. Participant observation has limitations because it takes time (months or years) and is never replicable because it is dependent upon the ability of the individual researcher at a particular time and place.

*(b) Can open-ended interviews take the place of participant observation?* Most anthropologists would feel that interviews alone can provide rich data about a community’s way of life, understanding the world, and ways of living within it. But anthropologists generally feel that during interviews people present themselves as they want to be viewed rather than as they really are. Open-ended interviews often point out contradictions between what people say they do, but observing behavior is generally more reliable. Structured interviews tend to offer less opportunity to perceive contradictions.

*(c) Can anthropologists ever understand the world from the native’s point of view?* Anthropologists recognize that they never see the world as a native person in a community or other research setting does, but there is a general consensus that anthropological methods offer researchers the best way to understand all of the factors that people face in their ordinary lives. But because our goal is not to become a native but only to appreciate the lives of people from their perspective, participant observation offers the best way to achieve these ends.

*(d) Do anthropologists have a special ethical responsibility toward their research subjects and informants?* Unlike psychological and sociological researchers who use various kinds of questionnaires, participant observation involves whole communities and activities that were not originally understood by the researcher. Anthropologists have to take greater precaution to protect their research subjects by concealing identities. Because anthropologists are rarely in a situation where they can get a signed consent form from everyone they might encounter, they have to protect the interests of all of their research subjects in ways that other social scientists do not.

*(e) Are anthropologists establishing new relationships with people in their study communities that they did not establish forty or fifty years ago?* Most anthropologists today feel that they need to establish more reciprocal relationships with study communities than they did in the past. Often, this process involves clearer obligations to help study communities in disadvantaged neighborhoods, on reservations, inside corporations, and other settings. Some communities require that anthropologists sign contracts. Most anthropologists recognize that their research can carry special risks for study communities, and most of us accept Laura Nader’s admonition that we should be careful about what we say about the poor because there are forces out there who will use it against them.

## **Issues to Be Resolved: Controversies That Continue to Attract the Attention of Anthropologists**

*(a) Are there ways to shorten the time needed for anthropologists to conduct their research?* Although most anthropologists recognize that having done one ethnographic field project makes subsequent study both easier and faster, there is no consensus about which, if any, methods can “stand in” for participant observation when time is short, such as when emergencies arise or a research sponsor wants short-term findings. Generally, the more an anthropologist knows about a community and can turn to reliable contacts, the more possibilities there are for shortening a project. Nevertheless, this issue remains unresolved.

*(b) Can focus groups, open-ended interviews, and other methods provide alternatives to traditional participant observation in emergency settings?* Although many newer methods have been developed by anthropologists to deal with urban settings and other contexts where it is impossible to observe ordinary social behavior, up to now there has been no real consensus about what methods anthropologists should use. All of these strategies have their benefits, but none is considered as reliable as a year of participant observation when studying life in a rural village in the twentieth century.

*(c) How can anthropologists study modern communities and industries that have a global or regional reach in ways that a traditional village-based study in Africa, South America, or New Guinea had?* The rise of multisited ethnography, in which the researcher studies an immigrant community in both its original setting and its new home or a product that is made in one country but shipped to and consumed in another, are starting to address anthropological questions with new methods. But these multisited ethnographies do not usually have the depth that traditional ethnographies had (see Chapter 6). Anthropologists are developing new strategies to deal with understanding these new multisited settings; none are considered as reliable as traditional ethnography is, but the new settings do not allow a traditional approach.

*(d) Can anthropologists fully achieve informed consent from their research subjects?* Ethnographic researchers have always faced problems obtaining informed consent because many of the communities they have studied had little understanding of the outside world or what anthropologists actually did. Today, people in many far-flung communities have more knowledge of the world than they did in the 1960s, but because anthropologists live in communities it remains problematic how to inform research subjects and members of the community about everything that they plan to use the data to understand. Anthropologists have not reached a consensus about the best way to reach informed consent because field settings are so diverse.

*(e) Who owns ethnographic data?* One of the most contentious issues in anthropological research concerns who really owns the data that anthropologists collect, whether it is the researcher or the study community. Ethnobotanical data about traditional herbal remedies pose some of the most obvious problem areas, but many kinds of social and cultural data pose problems anthropologists never thought about before, in much the same way that data collected by Google, Facebook, and other Internet sites need clarification in the future.

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# **Web Resources**

1. Ethnographic Praxis in Industry (EPIC) (<https://www.epicpeople.org/>)

Dedicated to advancing the value of ethnography in industry, this professional organization works with ethnographers working in a variety of setting utilize ethnographic expertise. They hold an annual conference that showcases ethnographic practitioners from around the world.

1. Ethnography Matters (<http://ethnographymatters.net/>)

Ethnography Matters is a site containing practical advice for ethnographers in the private and public sectors, particularly those focused on aspects of technology. The website includes sections on Methods, Interviews, Series, and Editions, the latter of which focus on a new topic every two months.

1. Fieldsights (<http://www.culanth.org/fieldsights>)

Fieldsights is a collection of blogs run by the editorial staff of the Society for Cultural Anthropology. Its featured blogs include “Field Notes,” in which authors reflect on fieldwork experiences; “Hot Spots,” an essay series on current global issues; and “Theorizing the Contemporary,” which explores current debates in anthropology.

**In-Class Activities and Project Assignments (also available on the Companion Website as “Student Activities)**

**Field Observation Project**

Have your students go to some public venue such as the mall, a popular restaurant, the local supermarket, or Walmart to observe how people behave. Do not encourage students to interview anyone they see; rather, explain that this is an observation exercise to find out how much they can learn about normal human interactions at the site and what the social rules are for interacting there. Have students write up their descriptions of human behavior. Ask them to identify the underlying social rules of behavior in this setting. For many, this will be the first time they have ever observed how people behave in normal settings in any sort of analytical way. You may even consider this for a term project in which they must return for a total of three visits of an hour or two each. Expect to be amazed by how powerful an experience observing behavior will be for many students.

**Want to Be an Ethnographer?**

In the textbook, we have written that “establishing rapport requires a lot of discipline, as well as acceptance of local customs and practices, however peculiar, unfamiliar, or uncomfortable.” Even with long anthropological training, acceptance is easier for some people than for others. What kinds of personality traits and skills might help? Considering all of this, would you choose to conduct fieldwork in a radically different cultural context?

**Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) Project**

This research project introduces students to retrieving summary cultural data using eHRAF (hraf.yale.edu). Instructors can modify the difficulty and scope of the project by requiring more (or fewer) cultures, different regions, additional headings, and/or more cross-cultural comparison as needed.

* Students begin by visiting eHRAF World Cultures (ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu). Then select “browse cultures” and “regions.” Cultures are categorized by major geographic regions and subregions.
* Students should randomly select one culture from each of the following regions: Africa, Europe, Asia, Oceania, North America, Middle America and the Caribbean, and South America (for a total of seven cultures).
* Each culture has a “culture summary” associated with it. Within the heading “Orientation,” summaries include subheadings for location, demography, and linguistic affiliation (in addition to many other headings that may be assigned).
* Ask students to submit a summary of the location, demography, and linguistic affiliation of their seven world cultures. (This summary can be in the form of a paper, map, poster, computer-generated illustration, etc.)

**Ethnographic Film Activity**

This “virtual fieldwork” activity gives students a chance to practice using an emic perspective or, as Malinowski called it, “the native’s point of view,” without leaving the classroom.

* Begin by choosing an ethnographic film. Instructors will likely have personal favorites. Or see this site for a list of recommended teaching films: http://www.aaanet.org/sections/sacc/?page\_id=924
* Students should be prepared to take some field notes as they watch the film. They will undoubtedly observe some “strange” behaviors (i.e., things they’d prefer not to do themselves, like eating monkeys or spiders). These behaviors should be recorded as accurately and objectively as possible.
* After the film is over (or the next class period), students can compare field notes and reach a consensus on the three most surprising or shocking events they documented.
* Then, as a class, discuss emic interpretations of these events. Possible questions:
  + From “the native’s point of view,” why do the people in the film do what they do? (For example, if they eat spiders, why? Why do they not feel the same revulsion that the students probably do?)
  + Do we do anything comparable in our own society (e.g., do we eat anything that other cultures might consider “gross”)?
  + At the end of the discussion, do the behaviors observed make more sense?

# **Class Discussions**

**Activist Anthropology**

What are the benefits and potential dangers when ethnographers become activists for the communities that they are researching? What ethical obligations, if any, do anthropologists have to the people they come in contact with during fieldwork? Are these obligations the same for anthropologists who “study up”?

**Native Anthropology**

Recent decades have witnessed a growing number of “native anthropologists” (people who study their own social or ethnic group). What advantages might a native anthropologist have over someone studying a society very different from his or her own? Are there any potential drawbacks?

**Participant Observation**

Participant observation is one of the most fundamental research methods of cultural anthropology. What do you consider the proper balance of participant and observer? Obviously, if one is only an observer, there is no possibility of building rapport. Are there any practical limits to participation in a study culture? In other words, can an anthropologist “go native” and still be an anthropologist?