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## ANT 2020 – Introduction to Cultural Anthropology

### Fieldwork Exercise 1: Ethnography

Anthropology works to uncover and understand the workings of culture. Through the method of ethnography, anthropologists are, as Michael Agar put it, “professional strangers,” connecting emic and etic perspectives to understand how life unfolds for different groups, and how people experience and make sense of their worlds.

#### **The Task:**

For this exercise, your mission is to put on an anthropological hat and collect ethnographic information about an aspect of culture that is unfamiliar to you. This is your chance to explore someone else’s world. Anything (**within the ethical guidelines – no vulnerable populations, children etc.**) is fair game.

#### **Some Examples (feel free to make your own question and ask me if you want help):**

- We are a highly diverse, multicultural city. You can take this opportunity to learn about issues as diverse as different religions, different countries, the experience of people with differential physical abilities, the experience of immigration, or the experience age.
- Observe and describe a ritual. This need not be “high” ritual of church or state. We are symbolic critters and engage in ritual activity all the time. Sports, rallies, social events are all rituals, and even daily life among family and friends can have significant ritual components. Some of these have even made it to online/virtual formats that you may be able to observe (with **permission!**) and discuss with participants. How is the ritual performed? What are some of its components? What do they symbolize?
- What seems evident and “normal” is also prime ground for investigation: What may be the insider excitements of doing people’s taxes? Of teaching classes at a university? Of operating a MARTA train?
- You are looking forward to graduating and getting a job as (\_\_\_\_). But do you know what these people actually do? What their day to day lives are? What common and what unique situations the encounter?

#### **Methods and Ethics:**

You have a choice of two **data collection methods**:

a) Engage in **Participant Observation** (e.g. engage in a volunteer opportunity, attend a class, follow around a person engaging in the activity you are interested in).

**Ethics issue: Be sure those you engage know you are doing fieldwork and consent to it. NO COVERT WORK.**

b) Conduct an **interview** (arrange to meet and talk with a person about their experience).

**Ethics Issue: Make sure to CLEARLY EXPLAIN who you are, why you are doing this, and how you will use the material, and get their CONSENT. Ask them directly whether they agree to talk with you. Clearly explain that whatever they want to tell you is TOTALLY UP TO THEM (voluntary participation) and that you will keep their identities CONFIDENTIAL. Identify persons and places with a PSEUDONYM (made up name) in your narrative. Strictly no children.**

#### **The Challenge (and Trick):**

Be an **active listener/observer**. Allow the person (or the experience) to narrate their own reality. Can you suspend your views and preconceptions and try to understand that which is in front of you in its own terms?

#### **The Product:**

In a 3-4 page double-spaced paper (standard fonts and margins) write an **ethnographic narrative** addressing:

- What is your question and what is the topic/cultural group/situation?
- What methods did you use?
- What did you see/hear/find out? (if interviewing, feel free to add a few direct quotes in your narrative)
- Reflect on the experience: What did you learn? Anything that surprised you?
- Submit in iCollege – Assessments→ Assignments



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