CHAPTER 2

PLANNING AND PROPOSING A RESEARCH PROJECT

Ethnographers must have a plan formulated before entering the field. They will need it not only for a reminder but also to consult in the event of having to make changes in plans during the research. Flexibility is thus paramount, but it is not equivalent to "free-wheeling." There is a need, in turn, for transparency in all forms of the research operation toward the project sponsor, the people with whom the ethnographer works in the field, and other agencies who claim a stakeholder interest. In short, all efforts need to be made to turn the unexpected into either a research opportunity or at least a containable emergency.

Planning for research is best illustrated by the seemingly contradictory statement attributed to Dwight D. Eisenhower that "plans are worthless; planning is everything." Ethnographers will conclude that the best research plan will survive up to the beginning of the fieldwork. They will at the same time need to recognize that they are lost if they do not have a plan to start with.

The basics of research plans answer the questions of *what* subject is to be studied, *where* the study takes place, with *whom* the study is conducted, and *when* the study is best conducted. Answers to these questions become the plans that will be the basis of the proposal. Proposals need to link theory, the researcher's specific questions, and the data collection that will best address the questions.

THE PROPOSAL

A proposal is a document that prospective ethnographers write before they get into the field. During the ethnographic process, it should be consulted often. A good proposal combines the best features of a map

and a compass. It tells ethnographers where they are, in addition to where they want to be, and highlights likely paths that show how to get there. Once in the field, ethnographers are surrounded by the riches of human culture, and therefore of ethnographic data. Virtually all new ethnographers have discovered that it is easy to lose one's way and chase after exotic but irrelevant detail. The following discusses the minimum attributes that a research proposal might take, in light of the practical research issues confronting all ethnographers.

What the Ethnographer Will Study

This section of the proposal contains the research problem statement and a review of previous work in the subject area. It includes the literature review, which in turn includes a review of theories. Such theories are a form of conceptual guidance that has been applied to similar problems in the past. In the best of all possible worlds, it should include a new theoretical synthesis—a better way of looking at the problem. A word of caution is necessary, however: a literature review can become lengthy. Often the bulk of it can be put in an appendix. The proposal proper should include only some form of summary—at most about 10 pages—of a lengthy literature review.

Sometimes ethnographers may want simply to describe as much of the culture as possible. This sentiment applies particularly at the beginning of the research. Later on, the researcher may find that other theoretical issues emerge that affect the research. Much theory can be derived from disciplines such as psychology, economics, political science, and sociology. To various degrees, ethnographic research can inform the explanatory power of these theories in turn.

When and for How Long the Research Is Conducted

Every ethnography is a compromise between stated goals and the time available in which to meet them. One of the most common mistakes that ethnographers make is underestimating the time required for the work to be done. The question of *when* depends on factors peculiar to the situation the researcher will be studying. Some circumstances are frequent, while some circumstances are infrequent and may happen rarely. A researcher may wish to avoid major events such as natural disasters, revolutions, national elections, or wars. Although they are doubtless interesting sources of information, ethnography concentrates more on the everyday, unlike the reporting tendencies within journalism (see Chapter 1).

Before setting up a schedule, the proposal must discuss the length of stay in the field, which forces questions such as how researchers expect their project to progress through the weeks or months of research. The proposal also addresses the time to be taken for preparation, establishing contact, transporting/commuting, interviewing, observation, transcription of interviews, managing the database, analysis in the field, and perhaps even some report writing in the field.

Where the Ethnographer Is Personally Located

Two questions of "where" involve both questions of where the research will be conducted and where the researcher will be living. Answers to both of these questions involve extensive background research in geography, climate, politics, foreign affairs, and anything else that would be relevant to the research conditions. Regarding the location of the research, there are four different kinds of interview locations: the white room, the grass hut, the muddy field, and the commute. The term "white room" means that the interview is sequestered in a room far away from the usual field of activities. The setting may distort the kinds of information an interviewer may receive, and close the researchers off from observing what is going on around them. On the other hand, there are advantages. One advantage was illustrated in interviews conducted in some New Mexico villages. The interviews included finding out why local people would travel to a clinic located farther away from the ones in their own village. It soon became clear that people from the local village were predictably reluctant even to visit clinics, much less to talk about socially transmitted diseases, because they were afraid that their neighbors or relatives would conclude the worst about them. Instead, they would drive to a clinic 40 or 50 miles away, where they were less known. Under these circumstances, the white room interview elicited better results.

In the 1920s, Leslie White conducted several ethnographies of the Rio Grande Pueblo Indian villages by interviewing individuals off-site. The Indians were very secretive. Most of us today would consider such sequestering ethically dubious. However, in the 1920s, few people had such qualms and admired White for having "beat the system" of Pueblo secrecy, especially since it was "in the name of science." Future generations of Pueblo Indians will continue to judge if the deception was worthwhile.

A second kind of interview setting is the grass hut. Here, the interviewer moves closer to where the social interaction is actually taking place, but it is not necessarily the site of that interaction. When the

Nuer in Nigeria allowed Edward Evans-Pritchard to pitch his tent in the middle of their village, that arrangement was grass hut living. Interviewing under a tree outside the native village is an almost prototypical case in anthropology. The obvious advantage of the grass hut interview is that a consultant can point to, demonstrate, and enlist other people to help illustrate something.

A third kind of interview setting is what Werner called the "muddy field." Werner used this label when describing the work of Christina Gladwin and her decision-making studies of African, Mexican, and Guatemalan farmers (see Gladwin, 1989). She would watch them while they were planting, cultivating, irrigating, or fertilizing their corn. She would then ask them about what they were doing at the same time they were conducting these activities. In these cases, some of these activities appeared so automatic that it was otherwise difficult to discuss them away from the immediate context in which they were observed. A large number of the decision-making studies seem to fall in this category. Thus, the muddy field was exceedingly valuable in collecting detailed decision-making information.

A fourth, more recent interview setting is the commuter or part-time interview. For example, in the Navajo reservation school ethnographies (Werner et al., 1976), the ethnographers would reside somewhere in a nearby administrative center or town, commute to the school daily while it was in session, and return to their accommodations at night. This approach has been especially useful in rapid-assessment research. Here, the interview is only a part of the overall enterprise, and often little time is available to conduct it (Beebe, 2001).

The commuter setting also becomes important for longer-term research in areas considered too dangerous to implement the other approaches. Throughout the world, recent times have seen an increase in violence due to warfare (Kilcullen, 2010) between nations, insurgencies and counterinsurgencies within natioins (Kilcullen, 2010), ongoing battles between states and crime syndicates (Kilcullen, 2013), or a high crime rate. Anthropologists have been discouraged from conducting research in some areas, and they themselves have often decided to avoid staying in them (Wladyka & Yaworsky, 2017). The commuter setting has become a resort in circumstances where ethnographers need to stay out of the way of danger.

Considerations of *where* also involve questions such as whether the site is situated in a rural area, a small urban area, or a large metropolitan port. Crosscutting these questions are those pertaining to climate. For example, is the research to be conducted in a humid, humid subtropical, temperate, high desert, hot desert, arctic, subarctic, or boreal forest environment? In all these circumstances, ethnographers need to know

about the availability of water, electricity, transportation, and housing. Safety again emerges as an issue.

As a general rule, ethnographers first make contact and then bring all their gear after someone has offered them safe housing. It is rare that ethnographers are parachuted into the hosts' territory and then face for the first time a bunch of curious strangers. The author knows only of Jean Briggs, who arrived at an Eskimo village by seaplane, apparently without prior contact. The plane took off, and she sat there on the shore of a lake with her bags until a kind native took her in. This tactic of field entry is very surprising and very dangerous, particularly where survival without a supportive family and safe shelter is impossible (J. Briggs, 1970; J. L. Briggs, 1970).

Finally, there is no guarantee that all hosts would be as generous as that Eskimo family—who concluded that someone had to take her in or she would perish. However, for "studying up" with the politically powerful or high-status groups, there may be an intake system already established through which the ethnographer must proceed (Ho, 2009). Ho (2009) found this intake system necessary to negotiate before studying stockbrokers.

The Dominant Language Researchers Will Be Speaking

As discussed in Chapter 1, command of the native language is exceedingly important. However, there are two problems with achieving this standard. First, it is not always easy to determine fluency in a second language before entering the field. As discussed in Chapter 1, any language or culture will be filtered through the system within which the researcher grew up. All ethnographers have not only a linguistic accent but also a cultural accent. Moreover, even if ethnographers are fluent in the second language, it is often convenient for them to speak to a consultant through an interpreter. Even if researchers are confident in their fluency in the native language, having an interpreter can buy time by allowing the ethnographer to pause in answering a consultant's question. The cost of hiring interpreters, in addition to the native coresearchers, needs to be factored into the proposal.

Although some researchers are not confident in their native language fluency, they can maintain control over the reliability of the transcriptions and the overall validity of the analysis. This control can be achieved through ethnographic analysis, which will be the subject of Chapters 4 to 7. The native research partners are very important.

They need to be trained, if necessary, in the transcription of their native language. Only then can outside researchers and native coresearchers work together to translate and analyze these transcriptions in a way that guarantees that all are "on the same page." Translation training has to be factored into the training of native researchers.

One principal rule or outlook is to learn as much of the native language as possible. Having stated this, the requirements of learning a language are quite daunting. They are not impossible to meet, however, and ethnographers should get as far along the path to fluency as they can. Indeed, ethnography is possible without fluency *if* the data management proceeds with care. Ethnographers have at their disposal useful resources. Some of the native consultants with whom the ethnographer works may have knowledge of English, or whatever the ethnographer's dominant language is, and may even be literate in that language. It may thus be possible for the ethnographer to teach them literacy in their own language if they do not have that skill already. Once they are biliterate, they can provide translated texts for the ethnographer to monitor and to begin schematic analysis. A feedback process is the result. The ethnographer's initial analyses of the translated texts become the beginning of a research partnership or collaboration. This practical learning process provides the partners an opportunity to become more active in the analytical process too. Thus, while such early quality control must be conducted painstakingly and slowly, both the ethnographer and the native coresearchers can learn each other's language to a level that is sufficient to proceed with the analysis. However, this system takes time and funding, and progress must be factored in as the research proceeds.

It may be tempting to ask why ethnographers need to waste time and research money in developing any foreign language competency at all, particularly if time is short and the only payoff appears to be making ethnographers vulnerable to ridicule. Here are some of the reasons. First, natives often do appreciate the effort to learn their language and are surprisingly forgiving of imperfections. It is possible that some natives express impatience at language-learning attempts because the outsiders are seen as not making a sincere effort. Natives are often generally experienced enough to tell the difference between a systematic and sincere effort and one that is not. Second, ethnographers should not confuse mistakes they find embarrassing (which are often hilarious to the natives) as native rejection. Ethnographers should thus not be discouraged when the learning attempt appears boring to both themselves and the native. Important ethnographic information is always to be found in determining how to avoid mistakes, minimize the risk of

embarrassment, and make bearable the boring repetition often involved in instruction. Mistakes, in other words, can be yet another window of opportunity. Even if ethnographers cannot master the target language, they can at least get further along than they might have anticipated. When in doubt, the benefits likely exceed the costs of slow progress. Besides, "down time" or idle moments are best put to use.

Equipment for Data Gathering, Management, and Storage

Before even beginning this discussion, the paramount principle of data gathering, storage, and management must be made explicit: the *separate storage* of (a) the text data gathered directly from the consultants through interviews and (b) the observations and impressions of the ethnographer. The research budget will have to allow for the necessary equipment. In some situations, ethnographers may already own some of this equipment, having either bought it for themselves or received it from earlier project grants. If not, equipment cost needs to be factored into either the budget or the ethnographers' personal finances.

The first two obvious pieces of equipment are sound recorders and cameras. Inexperienced ethnographers often purchase or borrow a digital camera or recorder just immediately before they depart for the field. This last-minute preparation may be forced on them due to delayed financial support or procrastination. In any event, *equipment should be second nature to ethnographers by the time they depart for the field.* Even when there is electricity available it is advisable to bring batteries. In fact, bring lots of batteries. Many houses or buildings throughout the world do not have any electricity. Where they do, appropriate outlets may not be available or may be located in areas which are difficult to access, such as a floor during an interview. It is also important to make sure that the batteries are fresh and tested before use. Similarly, one needs to glance at the recorder during an interview to make sure that it is operating properly. A researcher's fumbling with technology distracts the consultant from thinking about what needs to be discussed in an interview. Difficulty using equipment properly may also adversely affect the consultant's respect for the researcher's preparation.

An associated issue involves cameras and video recorders. Some ethnographers in the past have been shy about taking pictures. Once they return home, they then regret that they did not take more pictures. The best approach is to ask the natives with whom the ethnographer works when and when not to take pictures. Ethnographers may find that the natives are perfectly happy to have their pictures taken—at the

right time. They may indeed insist on being photographed, and nowadays they are likely to take pictures of the ethnographer with their own smartphones. Once the ethnographers know where, when, and with whom they can take pictures, it is best to take pictures of anything and everything. Modern smartphones allow easy indoor and outdoor shots, portraits and full-length photos, as well as candid and posed pictures. Care must be taken to make sure the subject is comfortable.

Increasingly popular in recent times is the use of smartphones for recording documents. Whether working at the National Archives or somewhere in the field, the researcher should be proficient at photographing documents (where and when permitted) and in other ways exploring the strengths and limitations of the devices being used. Before leaving for the field, the researcher should take pictures at high noon, at sunset, in the middle of the night, and any other time one might expect to be taking pictures. Ethnographers need to know what to do in any number of lighting conditions. In addition to using smartphones as cameras, consideration should be given to their use as video recorders. The advantages of being able to video record an interview are obvious. The researcher can gain information on nonlinguistic properties such as the speaker's body language and expressions, the surroundings, and the effects of other people being in the vicinity of the interview, all of which become easier to note during interview analysis. iPhones can now be used for both audio and video recording. The authors have found them useful, and they recommend, first, that when conducting an interview the smartphone should

1. *not* be handheld but should be placed on some kind of stand or other arrangement, comfortably at head height;
2. be placed so that the interviewer and the consultant are otherwise free to interact with each other, without having to hold the phone (or have it held) in one's face; and
3. be positioned in a way that distorts as little as possible the faces of the interviewer and the interviewee.

iPhones need to be tested before and after an interview. The interviewer needs to know how well and at what range the video and audio components pick up sight and sound. Similarly, if redundantly, the interviewer needs either to recharge batteries or to replace dead batteries. The authors are not aware of any technical solutions to the issues of battery power and life but await future developments. In short, the authors recommend getting a good video camera and relying on

smartphones as backups. For those initiating small-scale projects close to home, iPhones may be sufficient.

Also needed are word-processing and data storage applications that allow the interviewer to store text files in a widely readable format, such as *.doc, *.docx, *.TXT, or other similar format. This requirement brings up the question of the kind of computer needed. Advances in portability, power, and memory make it almost mandatory to bring computers with adequate amounts of memory. This book makes no brand-specific recommendations on word processing, but the authors have successfully taken MS Word almost everywhere. Software is available that provides a platform for various fonts and characters. Some of it is in the public domain and is free, but it is best to purchase something that is reliable.

At the risk of exposing the age of the writer for all to see, I observe that most ethnographers are going to need to bring notebooks or the digital equivalent—lots of them. Notebooks, in some form, have important implications for data gathering as well as social interaction. Not only will a notebook help record information, it can actually become an integral part of the interview itself. I refer to some sort of pad that is easily portable but not too small to hold information—such as stenographer's pads. The notebook can be either electronic or paper. Once the interview begins, the interviewer may be writing furiously.

After the interviews are finished, the information obtained from them will have to be stored in a secure location. With increasing numbers of younger people no longer educated in cursive writing, new equivalents for notebooks may need to be found. I welcome any information on how to deal with this educational transformation.

Along with notebooks, there may always be times when using any kind of sound or visual recording may make people uncomfortable. However, these occasions are not as frequent as many beginning ethnographers fear. In fact, I have found myself berated by those I intended to interview when I did not bring voice recorders. The reasons given were the same, whether the speaker was a Navajo living in a hogan, a county or regional planner, a rancher, or an urban-neighborhood resident: *People being interviewed consider what they have to say to be important*. If interviewers show up to an interview without the proper equipment, it may imply to the would-be consultant that they do not really consider their knowledge to be important. Obviously there will be times when speakers may be hesitant about being recorded. At other times, the interviews are not formal but may be a part of less formal conversations. Under those circumstances, the researcher needs to ask permission and ascertain what the native concerns about recording may be.

Hardware for data storage is paramount. Most storage is for interview sound recordings, interview text data, text data for personal journals, possible personal journal sound recording, and files for pictures. Additional separate hard drives for backups are recommended for all of these. Nothing is more heart wrenching than losing data. With that kind of worry in mind, it is also wise to have two backups—one for on-site, the other sent periodically off-site. Stories of anthropologists losing data on the flight home are no longer an excuse for not having the data available.

All these media require storage as well as routine backup. At least each day, the contents of the digital recorder, camera, or iPhone need to be copied or moved to a separate computer. While the requirement is indisputable, the means to achieve it vary. For example, many might recommend use of the cloud. We find ourselves in no position to recommend computer capabilities. Once the interviews are recorded and transcribed, setting up a text data system can become rather involved. Basically, any management system needs to access hard and digital data. Many times, during an interview, both will be collected. Both must be redundant, secure, and readily accessible. "Redundant" means that there should be at least two recordings of each interview in the database. In most cases, this means simply copying memory clips or cards to the hard drive or the portable remote hard drive of a computer. In addition, it is easy to expect that photographs, paper documents, and other nondigital materials will be made available to a researcher in the field. These must be stored; they are often copied on-site and stored safely on-site. Also, arrangements need to be made to transport these data copies back to the university, the agency office, or the private home of the researcher. With the advent of the cloud, data storage can, on the one hand, be easier and more secure. On the other, care must be taken to maintain security and backups, should there be failures in Cloud management or data hacks. The authors lack sufficient information to make judgments or recommendations. They therefore raise the question.

For longer stays in the field, it may be necessary to generate hardcopy to analyze interviews. The documentation generated by such analysis also needs to be stored securely. There is nothing that will invite disaster more than the people with whom the research is being conducted witnessing or reading partial documentation or analysis. These tracts can easily lead to misunderstanding, from which the researcher may at best only partially recover. Text data management must allow indexing.

Data Management for Analysis

Every ethnographic project needs a text data management plan in its proposal. Ideally, it needs to work equally well manually as well as digitally. The ethnographer normally does not have the time or energy to change data management procedures midethnography. Thus, the system needs to be ready before the ethnographer leaves home and should be robust enough to survive the fieldwork.

Also, both the journal and the interview notes should be stored separately. Database management is the first stage of analysis. The universality of language structure and logic makes vital the careful maintenance of what ethnographers hear and what they see. It is also indispensable for ethnographers to begin understanding and analyzing foreign cultural knowledge systems and to protect their analysis against bias. Not only do ethnographers manage recorded interviews and texts. They also structure interviews and document the steps they take to focus on the questions they use for follow-up.

Longer-term data storage is also necessary for analysis, both in the field and afterward. Ethnographers need to review the transcribed interviews while in the field in order to modify and enhance the interview questions. Initial data analysis can rely on a word search utility to conduct partial or preliminary indexing. Nowadays, these are available—in English, at least—on Adobe or Microsoft software. The researcher needs to create an index as soon as there is an interview in computer-readable form. Such an index should have integrity sufficient to organize data yet be flexible enough to be modified as more data arrive. After indexing, it is necessary to check the resulting word list. This consultation provides a more reliable method of appraising the content of interview texts. At that point, the only bottleneck is transcription.

If all else fails, digital transcription of interviews provides the opportunity not only for word searches but also for data mining. When attempting to elicit definitions, no single consultant will likely provide a complete definition of a term, with all the crucial attributes. Eliciting folk definitions is exceedingly important because it is a check on *semantic accent*—the ethnographer's tendency to define native terms with meanings that originate mostly in the culture of the ethnographer. As will be seen in Chapters 4 and 5, the folk definitions are analogous to an extensive bilingual dictionary that translates native terms into ordinary English explanations.

Any indexing program will do. One should be able to look at the index in two ways: in alphanumeric order and in order of word frequency.

The alphanumeric order is preferred by designers of indexing programs because it facilitates quick retrieval. Quick retrieval is particularly useful if the ethnographers know what they are looking for and are strongly committed to a theoretical orientation. An index by word frequency can make it easy to find out what an ethnographer *should* be looking for. Finally, it is necessary to be able to print the index. Software such as Adobe Acrobat is widely available and has at least some of the required capabilities.

Indexing software is generally not equipped to handle phrases very well. Some software will keep the words separated by dashes, so that key phrases can be hyphenated during transcription. This search method can be easy in languages the ethnographers know well, but it is impossible in languages over which they have no control.

Determining how sophisticated the data management system should be depends on the scale of the research. Ethnographic texts, journals, transcriptions, collected documents, and analytical structures are all collected in either actual or digital form in work papers. Werner, in his Hungarian fieldwork, set himself the goal of entering a minimum of 1,000 words, or 4 or at least 5 double-spaced typewritten pages, into his journal entries per day. In a year, that comes to about 365,000 words, or 1,460 pages.

On the other hand, I found that for 2-week rapid assessments, I might still record as many as 25 interviews. These interviews would last as long as an hour and a half. Two weeks was all I was given for each site visit in my work, so I had to rely on the hand-written steno-pad notes I took during the interviews as the platform from which to generate further questions and consider analysis. I, thus, could not analyze the interviews themselves until I left the field. With the notebook, I could at least keep track of the interviews. With the interview notes in front of me, I could devise follow-ups to elaborate on certain details.

Also, all the interviews were in English, which meant that I could use voice-activated software such as Dragon Naturally Speaking® for transcription. This convenience shortened the time taken for transcription. I could listen to an interview segment, mark the recorded segment's digital position in the transcription, and then recite what I had heard from the recorded interview segment.

The data management system is also governed by ethical issues of privacy and confidentiality. The two terms are often confused and need to be clarified. "Confidentiality" means that all information exchanged between the ethnographer and the consultant may be withheld from any third party. It refers to entire withholding of a name or other information from any third party. "Privacy" pertains more to control of access to

personal and medical files and other similar files the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.

THE PARTIES INVOLVED: PEER REVIEW AND INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARDS

Depending on the nature of the written research proposal, the ethnographers may face a broad array of review organizations. This section will limit itself to scientific review, but we acknowledge that various humanities and philanthropic organizations have their own. The principal aim of the review system is for a proposal to undergo a quality control process in which the scientific merit of a product is critically reviewed and evaluated by independent peers. This book defines peers as persons who are not associated directly or indirectly with the product under review and whose background and expertise put them on par technically and scientifically with the authors of the product. We can categorize peers broadly as external and internal. Internal peer review is a review by individuals within the organization to which the ethnographer belongs. External peer review is an assessment by independent experts from outside the ethnographer's institutional organization. Blind review occurs when the identity of the reviewers is not made known to the authors.

Research proposals will all have to withstand review of varying intensity. There are three kinds of review that ethnographers encounter in the evaluation of proposals or review of reports. The first is the review by the ethnographer's academic professors or administrative supervisors within the organization or agency. These will not be discussed in this book in any great detail, other than to emphasize the importance of following whatever rules and regulations are acknowledged by other institutions.

The second kind of peer review is by scientific or program peers either as part of the proposal review or for article publication. Ideally, its goal is to highlight shortcomings in the document's theory or methods of data gathering or analysis, and mandate remedies. Such a review is usually binding. That is, failure to address the recommended remedies for noted shortcomings will usually result in denial of a project's funding or clearance for publication.

Institutional Review Boards

The third kind of review is to guarantee protection of human subjects in research. By law, protection of human participants is regulated

under 45 C.F.R. 46, under the administration of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS):

> . . . a systematic investigation, including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or *contribute to generalizable knowledge*. Activities that meet this definition constitute research for purposes of this policy, whether or not they are conducted or supported under a program that is considered research for other purposes. For example, some demonstration and service programs may include research activities. (*U.S. Code of Federal Regulations*, n.d., 45 C.F.R. 46.102(g); italics added)

The regulations then list six activities that are deemed not to be research, including mostly education-related programs. However, if these activities are considered research, including scientific research, then they involve a "human subject." Under the regulations, a "human subject" is a

> living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research: (i) Obtains information or bio specimens through intervention or interaction with the individual, and uses, studies, or analyzes the information or bio specimens; or (ii) Obtains, uses, studies, analyzes, or generates identifiable private information or identifiable bio specimens. (*U.S. Code of Federal Regulations*, n.d., 45 C.F.R. 46.102(g))

(The term "human subjects" as defined in these regulations is the same as "human participants.") This book joins the AAA in recognizing this definition of "subject" as including consultants being interviewed or observed as part of ethnography.

The DHHS regulations similarly define an "intervention" to include both the physical procedures by which information or biospecimens are gathered and manipulations of the subject or the subject's environment that are performed for research purposes (*U.S. Code of Federal Regulations* 45 C.F.R. 46(e)(ii)). Even ethnographic interviews or observations can apply under this definition if the project is found to constitute research. Thus, a proposal writer is urged to read the *American Anthropological Association Statement on Ethnography and Institutional Review Boards* (AAA, 2004) and track its conclusions through a review of the definitions contained in 45 C.F.R. 46.

Sometimes ethnography has not been considered to be research because its findings are not considered "generalizable." For example, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) decided that oral history conducted by the National Park Service did not require IRB review because

> oral history interviewing activities, in general, are not designed to contribute to generalizable knowledge and, therefore, do not involve research as defined by DHHS regulations at 45 CFR 46.102(d) and do not need to be reviewed by an institutional review board (IRB). (Carome & DHHS, 2003)

According to OMB (2002), "'influential,' when used in the phrase 'influential scientific, financial, or statistical information,' refers to disseminated information that OMB determines will have a clear and substantial impact on important public policies or important private sector decisions."

The AAA (2004) statement considers ethnography subject to IRB review, and it is therefore recommended that any ethnographer submitting a proposal review the AAA statement as well as refer to *U.S. Code of Federal Regulations* (n.d.), 45 C.F.R. 46.

Elements of Peer Review of Project and Proposal

The ethnographic process has always been a public one with many audiences. One audience is the native consultants and co-researchers. Others include the funding agencies and various academic and governmental peers. All will want to review some aspect of the research, and all may want to see who was interviewed. Ethnographers have attempted to guarantee confidentiality by not naming the individuals, giving them fictitious names, or withholding individual identities outright. The exemptions under the Freedom of Information Act (1967) allow at least some privacy but not confidentiality. Thus, inquiry directly undertaken or funded by the federal government involves introducing a prospective interviewee with what the Freedom of Information Act exemptions allow and do not allow. The question becomes when and when not to seek qualified legal advice.

Associated with privacy are also issues such as copyright and ownership of information. If the project is funded by the federal government of the United States, the information generated from it becomes part of the public domain. It cannot be withheld by the consultant unless

agreed on in the contract. In short, privacy is important and increasingly difficult to observe. *Ethnographers should not promise consultants what cannot be delivered*. They need to obtain, moreover, the outline of a legal background on what they can and cannot do. This outline should be sufficient to encourage ethnographers to consult with legal experts before they get into trouble.

Ethnographic Sampling

A cognitive ethnographic proposal needs to contain a plan for how to select people for interview. While this planning begins before the research starts, it is crucial to understand that developing or negotiating a sampling process will continue into the fieldwork itself.

First, the ethnographer needs to obtain any information available on the target population's demographics, history, accessibility, government relations, and economy, and the required research permits. Moreover, agencies and other organizations with which ethnographers must deal in the field may have different ideas.

Second, ethnographers must be sure that the sampling procedure is representative. *A representative sample ensures that an ethnographer implements methods that obtain consultants the consensus of whose knowledge provides as complete a view of a social group's knowledge system as possible*. This definition means that ethnographers do not necessarily deal as much in the distribution of knowledge as in obtaining a consensus on what this knowledge comprises. These deceptively modest requirements presuppose that ethnographers can select people who know what they are talking about. Then, they must be able to determine whether the contradictions or differences in how the knowledge is obtained reflect incomplete research, the variability of a knowledge system found among individuals, differences that reflect the classes of people within a group, or differences that are indicative of different cultural outlooks.

These research questions make ethnographic sampling very different from probability, or statistical, sampling. Probability sampling depends on applying a design that ensures that everybody within a given population has an equal chance of being selected for the sample. This approach ensures that any kind of selective bias is avoided that would distort the distribution of knowledge throughout a population. Ethnographic sampling makes it possible to select people based on how much knowledge they have. Ethnographers want to characterize the *whole knowledge* of a people or group, not the *distribution* of some of its traits within that group.

Ethnographers thus have to take issues of sampling into account *before* entering the field, and to be prepared to negotiate and adapt research designs *throughout* the fieldwork. There are four major kinds of ethnographic sampling: (1) opportunistic sampling, (2) judgmental sampling, (3) ethnographic adaptations of probability sampling, and (4) face-to-face network sampling.

Opportunistic Sampling

Sometimes the selection of the research site is predetermined by factors external to the research design. For example, a governmental or other agency may have selected a group or class of people for research without the researcher's involvement, or there may be limitations of time and funding. In addition, someone will recommend a site because they have contacts there. If ethnographers have any say, they are best reminded of a very important rule of thumb: When confronted with the inevitable limitations of time, funding, interests of sponsorship, and accessibility, *it is best to concentrate on the group of people about whom the least is known*.

A good example comes from James Spradley's 1970 book *You Owe Yourself a Drunk*. He was asked to do an ethnography describing the interaction of homeless men, an alcohol rehabilitation program that was available to them, and the police. Spradley decided that he could not cover all three very well and selected the group about whom he knew the least—the homeless.

Another example is from the *Six Navajo School Ethnographies* (Werner et al., 1976). It shows in detail how the ethnographers developed a defensible sampling design by accounting for features within the social organization of Navajo schools during the mid-1970s. Here, it would have been optimal to study the interaction of school system administration, community, and student body.

Figure 2.1a Sectors Interaction

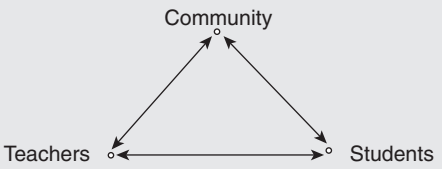
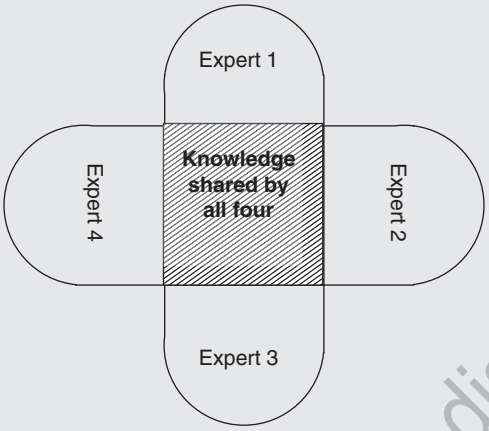


Figure 2.1b Sector Overlap



Due to insufficient time, the ethnographers decided to concentrate on the students—the least known segment of the triangle.

Once the ethnographers obtained tribal support for concentrating on the students, they had to acknowledge that they could not interview all the students in all of the six schools. They relied on their teaching experience to choose the most knowledgeable students among the different age-groups. Their experience had revealed that

1. 2nd-grade students seemed to know what the primary grades are all about but were not preoccupied with the 3rd or 4th grade;
2. 5th graders had learned what the elementary school system was about but, unlike 6th graders, had not begun to focus themselves on the next age-group;
3. 9th graders had mastered middle school but were not fully concentrating on high school; and
4. 11th graders had learned how to adapt to high school, but unlike 12th graders, they would not have set their sights on goals beyond high school.

Then, sampling shifted from opportunistic to network. At all grade levels, the ethnographers agreed that the classroom teachers would select the initial group of students to be interviewed. In addition to helping select articulate students to interview, consulting the teachers reduced their possible anxiety and helped secure their full cooperation. The researchers then tried to select the students who were mentioned in the interviews. These could include students who had problems or who were problems to others. See below for further discussion on network sampling.

Judgmental Sampling

Judgmental sampling is also known as purposeful, or purposive, sampling (Palinkas et al., 2013). In this design, individuals are selected according to certain criteria important to the ethnographer's research. The primary criterion is assessing individuals who are the most knowledgeable about the subject being studied.

Adaptations of Probability Sampling

Qualitative analogs to statistical sampling include random sampling and cluster sampling, among possible others. In normal random sampling, a researcher starts with a complete list, or census, of the people residing in an area. Each individual is assigned a number, and the researcher selects the individual by referring to a generator of random numbers. Werner and Bernard (1994) emphasize that a random sample

> establishes what is typical in a social system. . . . In an ethnographic sample we usually have no idea what is typical. We work with key consultants, often experts, on topics like witchcraft, hunting, manioc planting, etc. Not knowing where to start, we start anywhere, often close to our entry point [to a cultural group]. We develop our network of contacts from there and the [result] is anything but random. (p. 8)

An example illustrates how a simulated random sample was applied for ethnography. A team of ethnographers conducted an ethnographic evaluation of a Navajo-controlled community school. They first obtained a list of parents who had had students enrolled at the school at one time or another. From this list, a 10% random sample was selected for interview (Platero et al., 1983).

Another probability sampling analog, known as area sampling, was comparable to the cluster sampling design (Cochran, 1977; Lang et al., 2004). Fanale (1982) first estimated the overall Navajo population. She then estimated density by (1) estimating that an area of 3 square miles contains, on average, three Navajo households. She then (2) divided her study area into a grid of 3 square-mile units, (3) sampled the squares randomly, and (4) censused, or selected all of, the households in the squares sampled.

Afterward, she conducted open-ended interviews of the residents on their livestock raising practices and obtained oral histories of the effects of the 1930s' federal Livestock Reduction on them.

Network Sampling

Network sampling is the most common form of sampling in ethnography. The approach starts with either an opportunistic or a judgmental sample. Then, the ethnographer asks each consultant to name other persons they would recommend for interview. The named individuals and their connections with the referring consultant are the start of a network. A network sample is sometimes referred to as a "snowball sample." This term suggests that the sample simply aggregates people during the research, with little attention paid to the method. A documented network approach is more systematic and methodical precisely because it *documents* the contacts. At the least, this documentation can reveal a record of how the ethnographer chose the consultants. Better yet, further study may reveal more about the group. For more information, see Chapter 4.

How Many Is Enough?

Once the questions of what, where, when, and who are considered, the next question is "how many?" It is here that ethnography differentiates itself very sharply from more conventional survey research. As mentioned above, probability sampling (Cochran, 1977) is designed to guarantee that any individual within a population has the same chance to be selected as any other such individual. If the purpose of the sample is to describe the distribution of traits, such as attitude, throughout a population, then this sampling approach helps avoid bias that might distort the true distribution. A random sample "establishes what is typical in a social system (population)" (Werner & Bernard, 1994, p. 8). It follows that in random sampling, or any of its derivatives, the more

people or other elements selected, the better. Sample numbers of more than 100 are not unusual (see McCarty, 1994). However, adequacy of sample size becomes a matter of probability estimate. As McCarty (1994) summarized,

> When all is said and done, sample size is often determined by budget constraints rather than by formulas. If the formula calls for 3000 responses at $10 each, and there is only $20,000 in the budget, ethnographers lived with 2000 surveys. There is nothing wrong with this, so long as one is aware of the effect this may have on confidence and precision. (p. 5)

For ethnography, the aim is to describe a knowledge system as precisely and as thoroughly as possible, not to estimate the distribution of its parts throughout a population. As Werner and Bernard (1994, p. 8) stated, ethnographic sampling helps establish "the range of phenomena . . . not the proportion of traits within a population at large." In many instances, the ethnographer may have little idea of what this knowledge is, much less how it is distributed. Ethnographers know that they have succeeded in describing a cultural knowledge system if they have achieved *consensus* within their sample.

A.K. Romney and colleagues (1986) developed a mathematical model that ascertained the number of individuals who might be needed for consensus. They first administered a general knowledge test to a preselected group of university students. From this larger group, they generated a small sample of students, some of whom demonstrated high expertise in whatever the subject. They then selected others who did not have this expertise. From all these responses, they developed a table that showed that good results describing a body of knowledge can be generated from as few as four people *if they demonstrate a high degree of cultural consensus*.

> Are we really justified in using as few as a half dozen subjects with only a few items? We feel that the answer is yes for the following reasons: (1) we have a very tight theory whose assumptions are very stringent; (2) we are working with very high concordance codes where consensus is high; (3) we are only trying to find one "correct" answer for a question rather than, say, differentiating questions on a continuous scale of tendency to be "true" or "false." (p. 327)

In short, ethnographers need not be obsessed about relatively small selections of people. In fact, interests might often be better served by interviewing a few highly knowledgeable people intensively. An appropriate number of individuals have been selected when the ethnographer experiences *saturation*—keeps hearing the same body of knowledge over and over again. Werner and Bernard (1994, p. 8) have found that "when three or more consultants agree on a fact with any homogeneous social system it is time to move on to another group that views things somewhat differently" (see Romney et al., 1986).

Planning ethnography is a balance between time and resources. Writing a proposal and reviewing it from time to time will help keep the ethnographer focused on what needs to be done. By taking stock periodically, the ethnographer establishes what has been accomplished and what remains to be done. Also, planning an ethnography bleeds into the conduct of ethnography itself. It is always useful to look at what needs to be done in relation to the available time left for the project, and make practical changes to the ethnography as it proceeds.