Field work techniques

Ethnography (ethnographers)
- Research strategy where the approach is to get as much information as possible
- Try to get information from many angles to see whole picture
- Multiple field techniques:

Participant Observation – hallmark of anthropology
- Pioneered by Branișław Malinowski
- Participate and observe—record everything possible
- Emic—how do the local people think about various things vs etic—researcher’s interpretation
  o Insider vs. outsider

Interviews, Conversation
- First learn the language
- Informant (key individual—usually someone with a lot of knowledge about the group—interview—small picture of what’s going on
- Interview cross-section of population to get more holistic picture

Genealogical Method
- Learn about kinship, family and marriage from gathering data on genealogies
- Basic information needed to understand social relationships and history

Life Histories
- Personal history of an individual
- Can give insight into perceptions
- Usually collect several life histories to get more balanced information

Ethnographers produce ethnographies—reports on their ethnographic work
- Ethnographic realism—use etic approach to get scientific, objective view of the society
  - In 1970s see movement to emic approach—try to get past our own ethnocentrism to understand the natives’ viewpoint
    o Interpretive anthropology
  - Reflexive ethnography/anthropology
    o Anthropologist’s feelings and reactions
    o How are they impacting the group; how might their interpretations be biased; etc.
- Problem oriented ethnography
  o Research a specific question; collect data just on that question
  o e.g., effects of modernization on social organization

Whatever technique and ethnographic approach, necessary to conduct ethical research
- Informed consent = agreement to take part in research if going to impact their lives
- Permission from national government; local government; individuals
- Welfare and interests of people being studied always comes first

Part of the difficulty in making ethical decisions is the fact that anthropology has always been an activist discipline. E. B. Tylor claimed that, “the science of culture is essentially a reformer’s science” and Ruth
Benedict said that the purpose of anthropology was to make the world safe for human difference. John Bodley has been quoted saying that anthropology is a subversive science. My undergraduate anthropology profs stressed the activist nature of anthropology (northern Ireland and First Nation peoples). So where do we draw the line between cultural relativism and intervention?

Cultural relativism as you know from AnthroSpeak assignment is idea that traits can only be understood within their cultural context.
- Extreme version: all traits good within their cultural context...as stated in Mirror for Humanity...Nazi Germany would be evaluated as nonjudgmentally as Athenian Greece
- Moderate version recognizes that we are all human beings with cultural baggage—have ideas about what are right and wrong
  - Professor at Ohio State once said that can be culturally relative and still disagree with a behavior if, and this is an important if, if you try to understand why that behavior exists in the group. In other words, what is the function of the behavior
  - e.g., human sacrifice, cannibalism, infanticide, female circumcision.

What do you do if intervention could change the culture? Is that our role as a researcher? Most anthropologists would say that it isn’t our job to change things; however that doesn’t mean we can’t give people information that they can then do with what they will
- Kuru

What if it interferes with cultural rights? What if researcher sees a cultural trait that interferes with an individual’s human rights? Where is the ethical line in that situation?

Currently in anthropology there is a heated debate about anthropologists working for the US government in Iraq. Since WWII there has been mistrust in the anthropological community regarding governments and especially the military. In WWII, the military wanted to use anthropological studies to help develop military strategy against the Axis powers. Many anthropologists had trouble with that as the information would be used in a manner that did not advance the welfare of the people studied. It’s the same situation today with the Iraq war. You can read a relatively recent article about it on the NY Times web site:
http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/05/world/asia/05afghan.html?_r=1&ex=1192161600&en=93026094c4e7f20d&ei=5070&emc=eta1&oref=slogin

American Anthropological Association has a number of real ethical dilemmas posted on their web site. These posts also include comments by other anthropologists—sometimes agreeing with the researchers decision and sometimes not. It’s interesting information and I urge you to take a look at a couple of the cases.

As we begin reading more excerpts from anthropological research, keep cultural relativism and intervention in mind. Ask yourself what are the ethical dilemmas the researcher faced.