Ethnography & Ethnology (70 points)
Due: March 6

In the field, anthropologists "step out" of their familiar perspective in order to investigate unfamiliar phenomena. This allows the anthropologist to make objective or detached observations. For this assignment, you will make the familiar strange by "stepping out" to adopt an outsider's perspective of a familiar routine in order to discover the many levels of behaviors and beliefs that make people act and think the way they do. You will also be applying ethnothology by conducting a mini cross-cultural study.

Stepping Out: Consider this parody of preparing breakfast as an example of making the familiar unfamiliar:

Every morning, the reigning patriarch, as if in from the hunt, shouts from the kitchen, "How many people would like a poached egg?" Women and children take turns saying yes or no.

In the meantime, the women talk among themselves and designate one among them the toastmaker. As the eggs near readiness, the reigning patriarch calls out to the designated toast maker, "The eggs are about ready. Is there enough toast?"

"Yes," comes the deferential reply. "The last two pieces are about to pop up." The reigning patriarch then proudly enters, bearing a plate of poached eggs before him. Throughout the course of the meal, the women and children, including the designated toastmaker, perform the obligatory ritual praise song, saying, "These sure are great eggs, Dad."

In this passage, the author has made the familiar unfamiliar and in the process uncovered power and gender relationships. The father is the leader while the women take on roles as helpers and praise singers. By employing parody, the author allows the reader to see it as an outsider may describe the activity.

Anthropologists also employ subjectivity in their attempt to understand other cultures. For instance, an anthropologist and his wife were studying the Ilongot of the Philippines, who sever heads as a ritual of grief and revenge over a deceased relative. It was not until the anthropologist's wife died in an accident during fieldwork that he began to understand the complex emotions involved in the Ilongot's headhunting.

[N]othing in my own experience equipped me even to imagine the anger possible in bereavement until after [his wife’s] death in 1981. Only then was I in a position to grasp the force of what the Ilongot had repeatedly told me about grief, rage, and headhunting. 2

Anthropologists use both the objective and subjective self to understand cultures through listening to and questioning our assumptions, views, and interpretations.

2 Ibid, p. 9

The Assignment:

Decide on some activity to study. Some suggestions include a sporting event, the grocery store, a restaurant, family interaction, the workplace, a church, a library, the mall, etc. The only place you cannot observe is a coffeehouse (that's just way too easy in this area!). You may want to focus on one activity, such as meal preparation for a family, pre-game activity for a football game, getting ready for work or school, or interaction at the office water cooler. It is up to you. Whatever you chose must be legal for you to do. You may have to get permission ahead of time to make your observations. You are not to interview people; one of the objectives of the assignment is to hone your powers of observation. You may pair up with another student in class if you so desire. If you do, please read the "Pair Instructions" and follow those instructions instead.

Once you have chosen an activity, you must make two sets of observations. This can be done a number of ways. For instance, if you decide to make your observations at a restaurant, you could go to the same restaurant at different times of the day or go to two different restaurants - it depends on what question you ask, e.g., How does patron behavior different at Shari's Restaurant at 1:00am and 10:00am Sunday morning?

After completing your observations, you will write an ethnographic report that includes an ethnology (cross-cultural comparison).

Pair Instructions: Pair up with one student in the class. Decide on some activity to study. Some suggestions include a sporting event, the grocery store, a restaurant, family interaction, the workplace, a church, a library, the mall, etc. The only place you cannot observe is a coffeehouse. You may want to focus on one activity, such as meal preparation for a family, pre-game activity for a football game, getting ready for work or school, or interaction at the office water cooler. It is up to you and your partner. DO NOT MAKE YOUR OBSERVATIONS TOGETHER. The only reason you need a partner is so you can complete your ethnology (cross-cultural comparison). Determine a date that you want to exchange your ethnographies. Make sure you give yourselves enough time to write your cross-cultural comparison. You will not include your partner's ethnography as they will be submitting their own report.
Organize your ethnography using the following subheadings: Introduction, Methodology, Data Presentation and Analysis, Ethnology, Conclusion. Note that the conclusion and reflection are two separate subheadings.

Mechanics:

- Write a 1500-2000 word essay addressing the questions below
- Formatting guidelines:
  - make sure your name is in the header
  - single-space
  - 11-12 point Times, Geneva, Tahoma, or Arial font
  - spell and grammar check

Information to help you get started

Collecting your data:
Conduct your fieldwork at a time that is convenient for you. I recommend a minimum of an hour for observation. Keep careful field notes, describing in detail the place, people, and behaviors you observe. Also record your subjective responses and feelings and how they affect your data. Ask yourself,

- What surprised me? (to track your assumptions)
- What intrigues me? (to track your positions)
- What disturbed me? (to track your tensions)

Don’t worry about analyzing your data as you collect it. You will formulate hypotheses about what is important in the subculture you are studying after your fieldwork is complete. This does not mean that if an idea occurs to you while you are making your observations that you shouldn't write it down, but it is easy to get caught up in the analysis and miss activities. Keep as detailed of notes as possible – you can never go back and observe the exact same thing again.

Writing Your Ethnography:

Once you have completed your observations, it is time to begin writing your ethnography. Before you begin writing, ask yourself the following (these questions can help you get started in organizing your data before you begin writing; YOU DO NOT HAVE TO SPECIFICALLY ANSWER ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS—THEY ARE JUST TO HELP YOU GET STARTED):

- What's going on here? (asks descriptive questions of your data)
- Where’s the culture? (what is the language, place description, rituals, behaviors, artifacts, etc.)
- What's the story? (what is the story of the culture and what is the story of how you did your research)
- Who is my audience?
- What do I want them to get out of this?
- What do I want to get out of this?
- What position am I going to take?
- Do I want to be scientific/distanced or do I want to be more narrative/involved. The scientific approach generally reads more formally than a narrative approach and is usually written in the 3rd person. The narrative approach is more personal and written in the 1st person. Whichever approach you take, you need to do two things: 1) make sure that your readers understand what you are doing and 2) do justice to the information about the group you studied.

To reiterate, your ethnography should include an introduction, your methodology, data presentation and analysis, cross-cultural comparison, and a conclusion. Use subheadings to make these sections clear.

Here are a few tips to help you write the various parts (AS BEFORE, THESE ARE SUGGESTIONS ONLY—YOU ARE NOT REQUIRED TO ADDRESS EACH POINT):

Introduction: This should be a lead-in to your case study. It should act as the frame for the picture you will be presenting. It should discuss the goals of the study and the questions you tried to answer. One to two paragraphs should be long enough.

Think about questions such as:

- Why did you choose this subculture to study?
- What information will be included in your study?
- How are you going to present your study? (basically a road map to your ethnography)
- What's missing right now that won't allow us to get a clear picture of what you are doing? (e.g., you couldn’t observe the entire event)
Methodology: How did you conduct your study? Some other points to consider:

- How did you select the specific place for your study?
- How do you fit into the picture?
- What do you bring to the study?
- What are your goals?
- What are your experiences?
- How does your worldview influence the study in general?

Data Presentation & Analysis: This will be the longest part of your personal ethnography. Here you present your findings, engage in thick description (breaking down the ethnographic information – looking through the information to derive meaning from the “native’s” perspective), analyze/interpret the data you collected. Go through your data, find out if there is any pattern, major points that come up again and again, discrepancies that are important to note. What cultural values are inferred or displayed by the behaviors? Think about the function of the various traits you’ve observed. Make sure you explain why you chose the information you are presenting and why you leave out other aspects that you also explored but are not telling us about. Similar to any other paper, you need to support and develop your main points by using specific examples from your data collection. You can structure your study around:

- thematic units (section headings)
- times you did your study
- artifacts important for your study
- distinct cultural practices within the group you studied

Cross-Cultural Comparison: This section should be 4-5 paragraphs comparing the subculture you studied with that of your partner. Note the similarities and differences and propose hypotheses (explanations) for the similarities and differences.

Conclusion: In your final section you can indicate what research still needs to be done:

- discuss how your line of argument needs further discussion (it doesn’t end right here);
- discuss the parts of your question that remain unanswered;
- discuss the next question to be answered;
- discuss the implications of your main findings for later discussions

Assessment

Learn Actively: 15 points

- recognize key elements of human culture and have a basic understanding of fundamental cultural anthropology concepts: can use anthropological terminology and concepts correctly
- be familiar with and have practiced a few of cultural anthropology's fieldwork and method: student uses anthropological approach to analysis; engages in thick description; follows organizational approach

Communicate with Clarity and Originality: 15 points

- have begun to develop or improve your communication skills: essay is spell and grammar checked; follows mechanics of assignment; limitations of study are clearly stated
- be able to clearly express your thoughts about human culture and adaptive processes: essay is well-organized; examples are provided to support statements; statements are concise and clear

Think Critically, Creatively, and Reflectively: 30 points

- understand how to look at culture at various levels (individual, community, national) and from an anthropological perspective: can identify behavioral patterns and identify level of behavior
- be able to assess the interaction between culture, biology and the environment: can put behavior into context and considers both natural, biological and other cultural influences
- be able to interrelate your personal experiences and societal forces within the context of cultural anthropology: student can understand how is related to personal experience and can understand why the behavior is the way it is within an anthropological framework; in cross-cultural analysis can identify differences and suggest reasons why those differences exist
- understand that while there are various ways of being human and we are each unique, we also share basic commonalities of experience and living: in cross-cultural comparison can identify commonalities and suggest reason why

Interact in Diverse and Complex Environments: 20 points

- have some tools to use to help you identify ethnocentrism: can identify personal bias that may impact observations and
- have explored cultural anthropology methods through real-world ethnographic observation: conducted ethnographic observation and cross-cultural analysis
- have worked on your cooperative and verbal skills through team work: completed pair portion of assignment in timely manner and in good faith

This assignment has been approved by the Human Subject Review Board at Cascadia Community College.

The American Anthropological Association’s statement of ethics in research can be found at http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/ethstmnt.htm.