

Chapter 1

Introduction: Conceptualizing Ethnography

Ethnography is traditionally described as both a fieldwork method and an approach to writing. As fieldworkers, ethnographers participate in the lives of others, observing and documenting people and events, taking detailed fieldnotes, conducting interviews, and the like. As writers, ethnographers organize, interpret, and inscribe this collected and, as many argue, constructed information as text. Over the last century or so, ethnography's fieldwork and writing have come to signal very particular sets of assumptions, epistemologies, and expectations, and to yield recognizable – some might say, predictable – textual forms.

Though its histories and methodologies mix elements of both the sciences and the arts and their histories, ethnography also inhabits very particular ways of being, by which we mean ways of encountering, thinking about, interpreting, and acting in the world around us. Ethnographers often identify as and talk about “being ethnographers,” and although they may argue about whether what they do is science or art or both, most would agree that being ethnographers changes how we think, how we interact with others, and even how we move through the world. It does so because it brings us directly into contact with diverse people leading varying ways of life. Ethnomusicologist Nicole Beaudry points out that doing ethnographic

Doing Ethnography Today: Theories, Methods, Exercises, First Edition. Elizabeth Campbell and Luke Eric Lassiter.

© 2015 Elizabeth Campbell and Luke Eric Lassiter. Published 2015 by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

fieldwork “remains a challenging experience because it teaches us that there are many different ways for human beings to be themselves.”¹

What Beaudry says of ethnographic fieldwork has certainly been the case for us. Between us, we have done various kinds and differing levels of ethnographic work, all of which have brought us into contact with many different kinds of people. We have worked with K-12 math and science teachers, activists and community organizers, and descendants of a pre-Civil War plantation in West Virginia; African American pioneer descendants, black Civil War re-enactors, “Middletown” residents, and state and county fair participants in Indiana; Waldensians, tobacco farmers, and Lumbee Indians in North Carolina; recovering addicts, historic preservationists, and bikers in the urban South; students and faculty in a university-based digital technologies center; tradition bearers in rural Kentucky; and Kiowa Indians in southwestern Oklahoma. We have written fieldnotes and conducted interviews; recorded songs and taken photographs; traced maps (physical as well as social); dug into national, state, and local archives; documented folk culture and traditions; organized focus groups; collected life histories; participated in a whole host of activities; and, of course, produced ethnographic reports that have ranged from academic ethnographies to performance pieces to museum exhibits to briefs for state agencies. Though our fieldwork methods have generated a wide range of recognizably ethnographic products, they have also consistently led to other outcomes, often unexpected, for us and for the diverse people with whom we have worked, from educational programs, to National Register nominations, to political action, to other applied, and often activist, work.

The processes of doing fieldwork, producing texts, and connecting to unexpected – and not always directly related – outcomes have both challenged and changed us, sometimes in profound ways. Ethnography, when done with the experiential and intellectual depth it deserves, brings us face-to-face with our own assumptions and ethnocentrisms. As we study with and learn from others – who often seem very unlike ourselves – we are pushed to move beyond understanding and toward transformation. Our own ethnographic work has fundamentally shifted our understandings of what it means to be, for instance, a biker, an addict, or a Kiowa singer, and in bringing about those shifts, has also affected how we relate to others and, for that matter, to ourselves. Some projects forced us to examine how we may have stereotyped or over-generalized the experiences of some people. Other projects have forced us to think about class or race or gender in new ways. And still others have led us to navigate relationships differently. For example, an ethnographic project on bikers that Beth did as a folklore graduate student unexpectedly healed a rift that had long existed between her and one of her sisters. Although family therapy had not been a goal at the outset of that project, being with bikers – and talking with them, and writing about them, and sharing emerging understandings with them – brought the very different worlds she and her sister then lived in closer

together. That proximity led both to imagine, and then to create, different ways of being together.

Such experience is not at all unusual when it comes to doing ethnography. In an ethnographic study of a small Iowa community where he grew up, anthropologist Douglas Foley describes in *The Heartland Chronicles* how a complex matrix of relationships between and among whites and Mesquaki Indians yield multi-layered ethnic and racial negotiations through time. But he also describes how the processes of ethnographic fieldwork helped him understand his own experiences and memories growing up in the town, and of how the process of “one person trying to understand him- or herself enough to understand other people” can lead us to understand others and our relations with them better. In Foley’s case, he was led to learn more about his father (whom he never met) and make connections with his mother (who helped shape his views of Indians from an early age) that he had not made before, which, in turn, helped him understand on a deeper level the subject of his study. He writes, for example, that “knowing Mom better was absolutely crucial for understanding abandoned Mesquaki mothers and grieving Mesquaki men.” Importantly, though, Foley points out that the process of ethnographic fieldwork and cross-cultural understanding “takes much more than simple empathy. It takes endless hours of listening to people and observing, constant recording and reflecting, a grab-bag of theories to ply. But knowing yourself always seems like the biggest part of understanding others.”²

As Foley suggests, knowing yourself as you come to know others is a big part of “being an ethnographer.” But as Foley also suggests, so is learning to be with – and listen to and take seriously – others. It should not come as a surprise, then, that many ethnographers doing ethnography today emphasize more than a purely methodological approach, calling attention instead to ethnography’s histories, philosophies, epistemologies, and ontologies. Although learning the “how to’s” of ethnographic fieldwork and writing are necessary for doing ethnographic work, actually “being an ethnographer” requires us to reach beyond method. Consider, for example, this quotation from the late communication studies scholar and ethnographer, H. L. “Bud” Goodall:

[T]he choice of “being an ethnographer” is a profound philosophical commitment that very much transcends ordinary concerns about the utility of fieldwork methods or even prose styles. Not everyone is suited for this line of work. Unlike traditional methods of social science, ethnography is not theory-driven, method-bound, or formulaic in its research report. Ethnography requires a person who is comfortable living with contingencies, who is good at associating with others from widely diverse backgrounds and interests, and who likes to write. As such, ethnography is more of a calling than a career, and the decision to do it – as well as the ability to do it well – seems to require more of a particular, identifiable, but oddly ineffable attitude toward living and working than belief in method.³

Not everyone may see ethnography as a kind of “calling.” But everyone should, at the very least, understand that ethnographic practice requires commitments that are different from other research approaches. One of the most important of these is committing to a particular *way of being with people*, which brings up an important consideration for any student of ethnography, regardless of whether or not you are invested in “being an ethnographer” as such: in spite of its many different approaches (and there are many), at the end of the day, *doing and writing ethnography is about engaging in, wrestling with, and being committed to the human relationships around which ethnography ultimately revolves*. Folklorist Carl Lindahl, whose home discipline is rooted in the processes and relationships of ethnographic fieldwork, has this to say: “I regularly tell students on the verge of their first foray into fieldwork that folklore, done as it should be, is as personal as it gets: fieldwork can easily double the number of birthday cards you send and funerals you attend.”⁴ To Lindahl’s statement – with which we absolutely concur – we add this: the relationships that emerge “in the field” are as rewarding and challenging and “real” as any others, especially because they encourage us to know others as well as ourselves. Understanding that ethnography will necessarily expand and complicate your own personal web of relationships is, we think, a very important place to start in conceptualizing ethnography.

This book is grounded in the idea that ethnography begins and ends with people. Ethnography, as we understand and practice it, articulates a very particular way of being that foregrounds the personal and relational; assumes an underlying collaborative perspective; necessarily implicates an interpretive and hermeneutic approach; works within the realm of the cultural; and depends on the very human arts of understanding. To elaborate exactly what we mean by all of this, in the sections below we briefly outline some of the basic assumptions we bring to the practice of ethnography and thus to this book. We think you should know what we are up to right up front.

Ethnography is as Personal as it Gets

As Lindahl says so poetically, engaging the complexities of fieldwork also means engaging the complexities of human relationships. Those relationships, of course, are framed by the dynamics of experience, through which we participate in people’s lives and engage them in dialogue. To be open to this process is to be open to experience itself, to its often unanticipated twists and turns, and to the unexpected places it may take us. We see experience as an apt metaphor for the ever-emergent qualities of both ethnographic fieldwork and ethnographic writing. But more than this, we also see experience and the human relationships it generates as the crucial

and vital space within which the contours of ethnographic practice – from its design to its composition – are negotiated. As such, we see the processes of doing ethnography as deeply personal and “positioned” activities. This implicates a complex intersection of worldviews, sensibilities, agendas, hopes, and aspirations that are an inevitable part of each individual endeavor, and of every relationship into which an individual may insert her- or himself, including the relationships that constitute ethnography.

If, as we believe, doing ethnography is deeply personal and positioned, then it is also deeply subjective. In this sense, we adhere to a long tradition of philosophical and critical thought that scrutinizes (and is skeptical of) the very idea of objectivity, and that considers the pursuit of a purely objective point of view a misdirected foray. In our view, ethnography proceeds not from an objective, or even reasonably objective, research position – an idea which we believe masks rather than erases one’s worldviews, sensibilities, agendas, hopes, and aspirations. Rather, ethnography develops out of an unambiguous consideration of one’s own experiences, positions, and subjectivities as they meet the experiences, positions, and subjectivities of others. In this way, ethnographic practice is a relationship-based intersubjective practice that demands honest and rigorous appraisals of our own assumptions and ethnocentrism as we learn about those of our ethnographic collaborators through co-experience and shared dialogue.

Ethnography is Collaborative

Ethnography has always depended, at least to some extent, on collaboration. Indeed, it would be hard to imagine any ethnographic project without at least some level of shared work. But collaboration in ethnography has most often been limited to fieldwork processes. In the field, for example, ethnographers work closely and talk deeply with key “informants” or “consultants,” collaboratively constructing and interpreting cultural concepts, practices, and so on. Writing up the “results” of these dialogic collaborations, however, has traditionally been left to the ethnographer, and control over the final work (and often its dissemination) usually remains in her or his hands. This kind of collaboration tends to begin and end in the field; it is more a collection method or strategy than an underlying perspective or philosophy for doing and writing ethnography.

We do want to say that there can be good reasons for carrying out ethnography like this. We have written ethnographic reports for local community groups, for instance, who have requested this kind of arrangement. But we also want to say that, in our view, ethnography is at its best when collaboration carries through from beginning to end. Taking seriously the human relationships that give rise to collaborative processes means that we also take seriously the ethical and moral

commitments we make to ourselves and others as our ethnographic projects unfold. This can and often does extend well beyond the mechanics of fieldwork: the obligations and responsibilities of collaboration can animate the entire process of an ethnographic project, from its conceptualization, to its design, to its inscription. If we are open to it, that is.

In the context of this manuscript, then, we assume a stance of collaborative ethnography, which strives for – even if it does not always fully attain – ongoing collaboration at every point in the development of an ethnographic project. The ethnography we have in mind is responsive to the commitments established between and among ethnographers and the people with whom we work, and it shares authority and control whenever and wherever possible. Ethnographic practice undertaken in this way can be controversial, even today; students (and, to some extent, junior scholars) should be aware that not all who identify as ethnographers are willing to enact or support this particular kind of ethnography.

Ethnography is Hermeneutic

We view ethnography as hermeneutic, in that we believe it is an entirely and inescapably interpretive affair. Of course, it has long been assumed that fieldwork involves the reading, interpretation, and production of cultural “texts” (human actions, expressions, and traditions, for example), and that writing ethnography is intimately tied to this dynamic and dialogic process. Doing and writing ethnography involves us in more than just the analysis of texts, however. It is also intimately tied to the personal: as we participate in others’ lives and engage them in dialogue, we cannot help but be influenced by the unfolding and ongoing co-experience that develops among us. This co-experience, moreover, changes our subjectivities, and as those subjectivities change, our positions – our ways of being in and interpreting the world around us – move into states of flux. This is a basic fact of ethnography: as we learn about others, we learn about ourselves; as we learn about ourselves, we learn anew about others; and when we are open to what we learn about others and ourselves, we change.

This is not, we want to emphasize, a one-way street; the processes of learning and transformation are by no means limited to the ethnographer. In collaborative ethnography, in particular, where both ethnographers and their “interlocutors” or “consultants” struggle together to co-interpret and even co-theorize experience via the ethnographic text, the process can be multi-directional and multi-transformational (as when collaborative ethnography prompts collaborative actions). We take for granted that this co-learning process can (and often does) transcend both ethnographic method and ethnographic product. In fact, learning

from and with each other can be, in our minds, one of the most important things we do as ethnographers; it can be (and often is) much more significant than any field method we might acquire or any monograph we may write.

Having said this, though, we do view the ethnographic monograph and the ongoing discussions about ethnographic theory and practice as key to doing and writing ethnography, and indeed, to learning how to “be an ethnographer.” The regular and ongoing engagement with actual texts – *independent of any individual ethnographic project or partnership* – is absolutely critical to honing an interpretive stance for doing and writing ethnography, and is thus central to ethnographic practice. Being an ethnographer, or even just learning the basics of ethnographic method, requires a firm commitment to the activity of *reading* (a lot) and interpreting text as ongoing intellectual practice, intellectual practice that ideally prompts complex understandings of the complicated settings in which we do ethnography. “Being an ethnographer” requires “being a reader”; broad and deep reading will ideally absorb us in the vast range of ethnographic possibilities we can then draw upon when doing our own ethnographic work. (For this reason, we offer a short list of written ethnographies and other sources at the end of each chapter that we find particularly useful and interesting.) We assume, then, that this hermeneutic activity is as crucial to ethnography as fieldwork and that without regular and reflective *reading* ethnography becomes a very thin endeavor indeed.

Ethnography is Creative and Constitutive

Along these same lines, we also assume, as Goodall point out, that whatever final form ethnography may take, writing (in whatever form it may take) is intimately tied to this hermeneutic process. And as such, we assume that ethnography is inherently creative and constitutive: creative and constitutive in the sense that engaging in the activity of writing is not just about putting already formed thoughts and ideas down on paper or up on the screen. The processes of writing itself also *generate*, *interpret*, and *transform* thoughts and ideas; those thoughts and ideas, in turn, have the potential to *change the way we think* about things, and thus *how we navigate the world* in which we live. Scholars of literacy have known, for a very long time, that reading and writing, on their own, have this extraordinary potential. But when we view collaborative ethnographic writing through the lens of creative and constitutive action, we see that the activity of inscription takes on another layer of possibility that engages us in collective thinking, reflection, action, and transformation. This particular aspect of ethnography is enormously exciting and, as yet, it remains largely untapped; for these reasons, it is also one of this book’s animating precepts.

Ethnography Grapples with the Idea of Culture, however Deeply Compromised

The notion that learned systems of meaning (ideas, behaviors, practices – in a word, culture) inform human experience to a greater extent than does our biology has been central to the idea of ethnography since its inception. Ethnographers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example, provided descriptions of culture as alternatives to biologically determined (and in many cases, overtly racist and sexist) descriptions of exotic and seemingly strange human behaviors. In this light, culture became an extremely powerful concept for elaborating how and why humans around the globe constructed their worlds in such vastly different ways. Indeed, the tremendous variety of human experiences and expressions like language, marriage customs, child-rearing practices, funeral rites, religion – just to name a few – made much more sense when viewed through the lens of culture.

But culture is an enigma now, a problematic concept for many scholars. It was once widely accepted that cultural systems were separate and bounded; today, we know that has never been the case. We know that cultural ideas, behaviors, and practices overlap, and that quintessentially authentic or pure traditions have never existed, not even in the days of “lost tribes” and other imagined isolations. Anthropologists, for instance, no longer speak of the actuality of individual “cultures”; they speak instead of multiple and interdependent cultural – and political, economic, and social – systems. These systems are informed and shaped by complex and intersecting histories that surface in the present as complicated and intertwined global processes.

Some theorists, who see culture as an irredeemably outdated concept, have gone so far as to suggest that we abandon the idea of culture altogether. While we agree that older concepts of culture still in use today can be problematic, we also believe, as historian James Clifford once put it, that “culture is a deeply comprised idea [we] cannot yet do without.”⁵ Indeed, the idea of culture remains a powerful concept for apprehending the deeper meanings of human activities, complex and interconnected as they are, especially when juxtaposed with increasingly popular contemporary explanations that (like their nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century counterparts) reduce human behavior to biological – especially genetic – processes. In many ways, ethnographers, who work in the realm of the cultural, offer a particular and unique perspective on the human condition that mercifully resists reduction and over-simplification.

Ethnography is Mostly Art

In that ethnography assumes a primarily hermeneutic stance; that it requires the writing and interpretation of texts engaged on multiple levels; that it is deeply

personal, dialogic, and collaborative; and that it grapples with the idea of culture, we view ethnography to be an intellectual pursuit in the best tradition of the humanities. Because we also view it as having the potential to transform ourselves, others, and even the communities in which we live and work, we believe that ethnography asks us to fully engage the human arts of understanding, and that it can thus be an act of peace (however modest or small) in a world wrought with *misunderstanding*, conflict, and violence. Collaborative ethnography, in particular, emphasizes finding common ground on which to build co-understandings and co-actions (without eschewing difference) instead of producing rarified texts that may put ethnographic outcomes in direct tension, and even conflict, with the people with whom we work. Doing and writing the kind of ethnography we have been describing should, ideally, provide space for the open and reciprocal exploration of ideas. Crafting those ideas into artful ethnographic forms, in turn, can connect us with each other, with our communities, and, ultimately, with broader understandings about what it means to be human in all of our complexities.

We thus couch ethnography more within the arts (particularly of participation, conversation, and inscription) than within the sciences. Contemporary ethnography does connect to a long tradition of systematic and empirical methods based in experience (as generated by fieldwork, for example), which in turn have stemmed from scientific assumptions about the acquisition of knowledge (that all is, in theory, knowable, for example), and the problem-solving potential of applying that knowledge to larger human issues (as in comparative sociology, for example). Ethnography as art, in our view, is not necessarily opposed to science, but it is different from science. And it seems to us that when ethnography is positioned as a kind of “objective,” scientific research method that can be acquired and applied independent of its humanistic, textual, and intellectual histories and traditions, its promise is limited (in the same way that, say, the history, function, and meaning of Shakespeare and the theatrical arts are limited when reduced to method).

In many academic circles, ethnography is often situated within the larger field of qualitative methods, and often sits opposite quantitative methods on a continuum of positivist, scientific inquiry. This paradigm is also limited, in that it too often reduces ethnographic and other qualitative approaches to techniques for supplementing quantitatively generated data (as in many “mixed methods” models). In these cases, ethnographic and other qualitative inquiry turn out to be little more than diluted quantitative inquiry (as when a single open question is added to a survey, for example), or as a source of illustrations for the more “serious” quantitative work (as when heartwarming scenes or compelling quotations are sprinkled throughout a report). When the very complex work of describing, navigating, and interpreting human relationships is reduced in this way, it is easy to see why qualitative work is so often construed – and constructed – as inferior to quantitatively generated data.

Although we recognize that, for many, ethnography draws from and informs discussions of both qualitative and quantitative theories and methods, we insist

that, ultimately, conceptualizing ethnography must stand outside that positivist continuum, and resist the restraints that limit its full range of possibilities. Ethnography, in its practice, certainly does mix a wide range of research methods – from drawing maps to doing surveys to taking photographs. But in the end, ethnography is humanistic inquiry: an artful form that, as anthropologist Clifford Geertz once famously wrote, provides the curious, “sociological mind with bodied stuff on which to feed.”⁶ As such, ethnography is ultimately about exploring the greater truths of what it means to be human in ways that positivist inquiry, whether posed in either qualitative or quantitative schema, simply does not address. Ethnography, like any other artful form, is more meaning-full, and has much more to offer us when it stands on its own, when each ethnographic project is evaluated according to its own unique potential and possibility. We are thus philosophically and epistemologically suspicious of the idea that learning how to do and write ethnography can be reduced to mastering a method or instrument that can be applied in the same or similar ways across settings. Again, although learning different methods and approaches is essential to learning the craft (and we do explore those methods and approaches in all of the chapters that follow), ethnography is, in the end, more complicated than this. Ethnography necessitates epistemological rigor *and* ontological flexibility. It asks us to be persistently creative, imaginative, and original. And it demands, most importantly, that we become comfortable with the contingencies and ambiguities of human relationships.

EXERCISE – TAKING STOCK: EXPLORING YOUR LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES

Ethnography is, at base, a fundamentally personal, social, and situated enterprise. The specific projects you engage will necessarily draw upon your own *experiences and ethnocentrisms*, the socio-cultural problems and possibilities that are available to you, the institutional contexts within which you find yourselves, the resources you can tap, and so on. We believe that before you actually make any decisions or commitments about your project and partners, you must think intentionally and deeply about your own – and your group’s, if you are working that way – full range of possibilities.

When we were students at UNC-Chapel Hill (Eric was working towards a PhD in Anthropology and Beth towards an MA in Folklore), we took a seminar with folklorist Glenn Hinson called “The Art of Ethnography.” The seminar very effectively merged theory and practice: over the course of the

semester we simultaneously carried out experimental ethnographies and met weekly to discuss important contemporary readings and issues, as well as the progress of our own projects. One of the discussions we both remember well asked us to honestly consider what kinds of groups we could reasonably expect ourselves to work with. For those who had been trained to think of social science in more positivistic terms, that seemed a rather startling discussion topic. Many were accustomed to much more traditional research frames, where the “value” of potential knowledge rather than the subjectivities or preferences of the researchers drives decisions about whether or not to engage particular groups and/or questions.

But contemporary and collaborative ethnographic practice is different – we believe that it almost has to be different – because it asks us to seek open, reciprocal, and productive interactions and relationships with other human beings (in all of our complicated and problematic glory). In the seminar that day, we talked passionately about whether or not we could work – openly, honestly, and collaboratively – with hate groups, or religious fundamentalists, or human traffickers, or the uber-rich. We also argued about whether or not we *should* work with such groups. Clearly, such studies would yield important and quite necessary knowledge. But if our frame for ethnography asserted that building understanding was as important as building knowledge, we had to ask ourselves if – setting aside the not insignificant problem of gaining access to such groups – we could honestly try to build understanding with Klan members, for example, or with those who committed “honor” killings. Some of us asked if we should even try to understand those positions, or if some things were simply beyond the pale. Others insisted that ethnography could not pick and choose, and that ethnographers should be open to all potential subjects. (We want to say here that this was a tremendously interesting and passionate conversation, one we *highly* recommend that you and your fellow researchers and collaborators also take up.) In the end, few of us could imagine – for reasons of preference, ideology, class, gender, experience, and a host of others – being able to engage in honest, respectful, or reciprocal relationships with such groups.

Of course, we have named extremes here, but wrestling with those extremes does illuminate the kind of honest personal appraisal any collaborative project demands. As you begin thinking about and planning your own projects, remember that ethnography necessarily asks us to engage actual, living people whose experiences could be either familiar or foreign to us, whose opinions we might share or abhor, and whose agendas we may or may not be able to embrace. And so it is critical that you begin your ethnographic work by

thinking about, exploring, and discussing the experiences, preferences, and prejudices you carry with you.

This exercise will ask you to do just that; first on your own, then in collaboration with a partner, then in discussion with the larger group.

1. On your own, write about the experiences, preferences, and prejudices you bring with you to this project. This writing will be completely private; no one will see it but you. We grant that acknowledging, naming, and describing your preferences and prejudices is an intimidating task, but you can start addressing it by answering specific questions like these:
 - How does your background (religious, cultural, ethnic, regional, family, class, and so on) predispose you toward (or against) particular people, groups, or practices?
 - List several potential ethnographic projects you'd like to undertake. Why do they interest you? What ties them together? List several you would not consider under any circumstances. Why do you feel that way?
 - Describe your social skills. What situations do you thrive in? What kinds of situations do you find intimidating (or dull, or intolerable, or ...)?
 - Are there certain kinds of situations – physical, cultural, or otherwise – that may be difficult or dangerous for you to navigate?

Follow whatever leads these questions open, and be as honest as you can with yourself. Again, this part of the exercise is private and will not be shared.

2. Revise and condense your responses down to a page or two that you feel comfortable sharing with someone. Select a partner, then share this condensed response with her or him. He or she will also share his or her responses with you.
3. Read and discuss each other's responses. Feel free to ask follow-up questions, and to seek clarification when you are not sure of something. Take notes.
 - Where do your experiences, preferences, and prejudices intersect? Where do they diverge?
 - Where has your partner drawn hard and fast lines? Where is there room for negotiation?
 - What is most interesting or surprising about your partner's responses? What is most interesting about your reactions to each other's responses?
4. Share the notes you have just taken with each other. Separate to fully read each other's notes, then come back together to discuss them. How well did your notes capture your discussion? What did you find particularly

interesting about each other? How did each of you write about the things that were difficult, or unflattering? If significant gaps remain in how you understand each other's possibilities and limits, make time for additional discussion. By the end of this discussion, you should be able to talk for a few minutes about your partner's background and experience, and about what kind of a project your partner would be best suited to and why.

5. Come together as a whole, and have each person spend a few minutes reporting on her partner. The partner being discussed should remain silent as she is being discussed, but may offer corrections and/or additional details after her partner has finished.

When you are working as part of a group, it is also important to have open discussions about where the interests of group members converge and diverge, and the degree to which your different positions are set or flexible. Using a process similar to what is outlined above, build a group discussion that leads to an understanding of what the group's possibilities and limits are. In addition to the valuable information and critical "reality checks" these kinds of discussions provide, the intentional process of openly sharing and negotiating these issues also serves as important experience in collaboration and with collaborative processes.

Suggested Readings

- Barz, Gregory F., and Timothy J. Cooley, eds. 2008. *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. This collection features essays on the contemporary challenges of conducting fieldwork and ethnography in the field of ethnomusicology.
- Behar, Ruth. 1996. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press. A personal account that eloquently combines ethnography and personal memoir.
- Denzin, Norman K., and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds. 2013. *The Landscape of Qualitative Research*, 4th ed. London: Sage. A collection of essays on qualitative research that provides a broad range of perspectives for thinking about the concepts and issues that inform doing ethnography and closely related research today.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books. A classic collection that every student of ethnography should read, especially its most well-known essay, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." Geertz famously (and almost single-handedly) shifted ethnography's orientation from one focused on positivism and deduction to one focused on interpretation and meaning.

Suggested Websites

Engaged Ethnography – <http://engagedethnography.wikispaces.com/> Provides information about ethnographies that explicitly encourage social, political, and other forms of change.

Side by Side – Practices in Collaborative Ethnography – www.sidebyside.net.au/ A blog about the intersections of art, ethnography, and collaboration. The site has several interesting posts about collaborative art and ethnography that use “creative methods (such as photography, video, writing, visual art) to represent community and cultural stories in a collaborative way.”

Notes

1. Nicole Beaudry, “The Challenges of Human Relations in Ethnographic Enquiry: Examples from Arctic and Subarctic Fieldwork,” in *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, edited by Gregory F. Barz and Timothy J. Cooley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 63–83.
2. Douglas E. Foley, *The Heartland Chronicles* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 220.
3. H. L. Goodall, Jr, in James A. Anderson and H. L. Goodall, Jr, “Probing the Body Ethnographic: From an Anatomy of Inquiry to a Poetics of Expression,” in *Building Communication Theories: A Socio/Cultural Approach*, edited by Fred L. Casmir (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1994), 100.
4. Carl Lindahl, “Afterword,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 41, nos. 2/3 (2004): 173.
5. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 10.
6. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 23.