CHAPTER 13

Ethnographic Research

Introduction

In this chapter, you will learn how to do ethnographic studies of communication beginning with research claims of description, interpretation, evaluation, and reform. You will learn to identify and select ethnographic data sources using participant observations, interviews, and archival texts/artifacts. You also will learn how to conduct participant observations and interviews with key informants, record and organize your field notes, and analyze your data. In the last section of this chapter, you will learn to apply the warrants of the interpretive paradigm to your ethnographic research project, including the values of subjectivity and rich description, and the standards for demonstrating your credibility as a researcher, the plausibility of your interpretations, and the transferability of your findings.

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Ethnography does not have one universal definition, perhaps because there are several different forms of ethnographic research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Duranti, 1997; Stewart, 1998). In general, ethnography is a method for grasping "the native's point of view" (Malinowski, 1922, p. 25), and "it is the trademark of cultural anthropology" (Schwartzman, 1993). Communication scholars tend to differentiate ethnography in its anthropological sense from four different forms of ethnographic research including autoethnography, ethnography of speaking, ethnography of communication, and performance ethnography. These ethnographic forms can be grouped with conversation and discourse analysis under the umbrella term *language and social interaction* research.

One good place for you to start sorting out different ethnographic forms is to distinguish between macroethnography and microethnography (Spradley, 1980). **Macroethnography** involves years of field research, sometimes by numerous ethnographers, whereas **microethnography** refers to studies of much shorter duration, usually focused on a single social situation and conducted by one researcher. Spradley (1980) argued that a microethnographic project is "no less sophisticated, but only more limited in scope" (p. 47) than a macroethnography. The general goals are the same, to "discover the cultural knowledge people are using to organize their behavior and interpret their experience" (Spradley, 1980, p. 31). Since it is a short step from interpreting behavior and experiences to evaluating them, or thinking about how they might be reformed, ethnographic research bridges the interpretative and critical paradigms for communication research.

Autoethnography, ethnography of speaking, ethnography of communication, and performance ethnography are related to both grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and naturalistic inquiry (Frey, 1994b; Frey, Botan, et al., 2000; Y. S. Lincoln & Guba, 1985). So let's look more closely at those two broad terms for field research and consider how they relate to ethnographic research.

Grounded theory is a methodology used to develop theories by systematically gathering and analyzing field data. Rather than imagining how a communicative process *might* work in practice, grounded theory "evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 158). For example, Stamp (1999) examined 288 interpersonal communication research studies published in *Human Communication Research* between 1974 and 1999 and used constant comparison to place those articles into a 17-part category system (e.g., cognition, nonverbal communication, compliance gaining, etc.). By examining the categories in relationship to one another, Stamp developed a theoretic model of interpersonal communication. Thus, grounded theory begins with observed evidence, whereas other kinds of theories begin with researchers' ideas about how communication happens, ideas tested in subsequent data collection and analysis or in logical argument and reasoning. Stamp's (1999) study shows us that grounded theory can be used in ways that are quite distinct from the goals of ethnography (i.e., grasping the natives' point of view); yet ethnographic research shares with grounded theory a preference for starting with data: "The analysis must be made on the ground. We must know what patterns are available in what contexts, and how, where, and when they come into play" (Hymes, 1962, p. 20).

In the same way, naturalistic inquiry complements, but is different from, ethnographic research. **Naturalistic inquiry** is "the study of how people behave when they are absorbed in genuine life experiences in natural settings" (Frey, Botan, et al., 2000, p. 427). Both grounded theory and naturalistic inquiry are inductive methods that are more local than general. Naturalistic inquiry may be used to test communication theory, but it is not necessarily meant for developing theory, as is grounded theory methodology (e.g., Browning & Beyer, 1998). Ethnographic researchers sometimes make use of grounded theory and naturalistic inquiry, and they usually view those methods as complementary rather than competitive (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Let's turn now to the four forms of ethnographic research we mentioned earlier. We'll start by defining ethnography of speaking because that was the first ethnographic form to be used extensively by communication scholars. You will see that each of these four ethnographic forms build on or extend the forms that emerged before it in our field.

Ethnography of speaking (EOS) is a specific method for describing and explaining culturally distinct communication patterns and practices using the sociolinguist Dell Hymes's (1962) SPEAKING acronym as a theoretic framework. (The SPEAKING framework is depicted in Exhibit 13.1, later in this chapter.) You'll learn more about the SPEAKING framework in the claims sections of this chapter. In practice, EOS studies are often associated with Philipsen (1975, 1976, 1989, 1992) and his colleagues from the University of Washington.

Ethnographers of communication (EOC) focus on speech communities and assume that "the effective communicative resources for creating shared meaning and coordinating action vary across social groups" (Philipsen, 1989, p. 258). Ethnographers do not assume that there is one most effective way to communicate in any social group. Rather, because there are multiple plausible realities, "there are moments of communicative effectiveness" in which participants "act as if they express a common sense" (Philipsen, 1989, p. 258). For the interpretive researcher, these moments of acting as if meaning is truly shared suggest ways that participants are able to coordinate their actions and share some of the meanings in their everyday lives.

Furthermore, since interpretive researchers believe that truth is subjective, they take participants' coordinated actions as evidence of their common sense of a situation. As we pointed out in the previous chapter, on conversation and discourse analysis, language and social interaction researchers view social life as a communicative accomplishment:

> Participants "...coordinate their lines of action in such a way that potentially divergent actions fit together into what the interlocutors perceive to be a harmonious pattern. There is order, at least what the participants sense to be order, in social life. This order consists of the fitting together of potentially divergent lines of action" (Philipsen, 1989, p. 259).

But the coordination of lines of action, the creation of these harmonious patterns in the collective perception process, is particular to a culture and/or group (Phillipsen, 1989). There is a "community-specific system of resources for making shared sense and for organizing coordinated action" (Philipsen, 1989, p. 260). As you can see from this description, the main difference between EOS and EOC is that EOC does not make specific use of Hymes' (1962) SPEAKING framework.

In the past decade, there has been a growing use of **autoethnography**, the interpretive or critical analysis of a social setting or situation that connects "the personal to the cultural" (C. Ellis & Bochner, 2003). Like EOS and EOC, autoethnography relies on systematic gathering and analysis of field data from people involved in genuine life experiences, whether at the microethnographic or macroethnographic level. But autoethnography extends the interpretive paradigm values of subjectivity and rich description to include one person's multiple realities, and it extends the ethnographer's focus on degree of membership to describing and interpreting one's own sense making in a cultural situation or setting. In autoethnographic research, the key informant is the researcher himself or herself (e.g., Crawford, 1996; K. Miller, 2002; A. F. Wood & Fassett, 2003). Autoethnographic writing also differs from the interpretive research reports you typically see for EOS and EOC studies: "Usually written in first-person voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms–short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose" (C. Ellis & Bochner, 2003, p. 209). Autoethnography can be used in ways that fit the assumptions of the interpretive and/or critical paradigms.

Performance ethnography, sometimes called *performance (auto)ethnography* (Denzin, 2003), builds on the three previous forms as a way of studying culture and communication by systematically gathering and analyzing field data. But, "performance ethnography enters a gendered culture in which nearly invisible boundaries separate everyday theatrical performances from formal theater, dance, music, MTV, video, and film" (Denzin, 2003, p. x). In paradigmatic terms, performance ethnography is explicitly critical because it goes beyond describing and interpreting participants' cultural meanings and uses public performances (and performative writing) to evaluate those meanings and to "make sites of oppression visible" (Denzin, 2003, p. 14). As you read the rest of this chapter, we give you examples from published EOS, EOC, autoethnographic, and performance ethnography studies, starting with the claims you can examine using ethnographic research.

Ethnographic Claims

As a novice ethnographer, you should first select a research topic you sincerely care about. After all, you will be immersed in collecting and analyzing ethnographic data for an extended period of time. Start where you are now; survey your personal situation, both in terms of your current involvements and activities, and those situations to which you are related because of your personal history (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Morse, 1998). As a student, perhaps working full- or part-time to pay your way through college, perhaps you are a waitperson in the food service industry, or a sales representative, or a customer service representative in a retail environment. Ethnographers often "'make problematic' that which is problematic in our lives" (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 13). What situation in your life most stands out as you consider moments of communicative effectiveness (Philipsen, 1989), or ineffectiveness, or cultural knowledge used to organize experiences and coordinate actions?

Because interpretive ethnographers value subjectivity and aim to privilege participant views, you probably will use an inductive approach to framing your research questions. You might start by specifying a social setting or situation and then collect some initial data without articulating specific research questions. You need to know something about the nature and quality of the relationships in a social context to know what questions can be effectively pursued there (Katriel, 1995). For instance, is it acceptable for outsiders to observe and ask questions in that setting? Of course, if you are doing autoethnographic research, you will already know a great deal about the nature and quality of relationships in the setting or situation you intend to study.

Once you have selected a topic area, and perhaps collected some initial participant observations, texts, or informal interviews, you can start thinking more specifically about your research questions. Start writing down some general research questions as early as possible in your ethnographic research project. As you write your questions down and review them, you will be making your theoretical and methodological assumptions more clear, which will help you figure out the choices you should be making in your data collection and analysis.

Once you have a list of potential research questions about the situation or setting you intend to examine, and after you have conducted an initial literature review, try writing the questions on note cards and sorting them in different ways to see, for example, how a structured set of interview questions might emerge. If you have more than four or five questions, try grouping them into major questions and subquestions. "Drafting and iterating a set of six or seven general research questions should take at least 2 or 3 hours" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25). Your questions are likely to improve if you do this work in more than one sitting.

Ethnographic research can be used to support claims of description, interpretation, evaluation, and reform. In the sections following, you will learn how to develop each type of claim whether you are conducting EOS, EOC, autoethnography, or performance ethnography.

Descriptive Claims

In doing ethnography, you will very likely claim to *describe* the norms and practices used by people in a particular group or culture (Philipsen, 1989). Since you already know something about social practices and norms from the last chapter, "Conversation and Discourse Analysis," let's briefly define the terms group and culture. A **group** is a set of "3–12 people who interact regularly over a period of time and conceive of themselves as a social entity" (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 107). By contrast, a **culture** is defined as a system of shared meanings, or *webs of significance*, held in common by group members (Geertz, 1973).

EOS describes the ways that members of a culture name their speech events, the components of those speech events (e.g., senders, receivers, message forms, channels, etc.), and the functions of speech events (i.e., what is being accomplished by that speech event?). To conduct EOS, you will use the SPEAKING framework developed by sociolinguist Dell Hymes (1962). Exhibit 13.1 lists the elements of the SPEAKING framework.

The elements of the SPEAKING framework are used to *describe*

> what a child internalizes about speaking, beyond rules of grammar and a dictionary, while becoming a full-fledged member of its speech community. Or, it is a question of what a foreigner must learn about a group's verbal behavior in order to participate appropriately and effectively in its activities. (Hymes, 1962, p. 16)

Exhibit 13.2 contains two sample claims from published EOS studies.

Philipsen (1989) also suggested two kinds of descriptive claims that you might pursue by conducting EOS or

Exhibit 13.1 Hymes' (1962) SPEAKING Framework

Scene and setting (from the perspective of members)
Participants (age, role, gender, ethnicity, etc.)
Ends (goals of the participants and actual outcomes of the event)
Act sequence (structure and topic of the messages)
Key (tone or manner of the communication)
Instrumentalities (channels of communication, jargon, dialects, etc.)
Norms of interaction (how to do communication) and interpretation (how to make sense of messages)
Genre (categories like poetry, myth, jokes, etc.)

EOC. First, you may want to describe distinctive **communication resources**—the knowledge shared by members of a culture or group and used to interpret and organize action (e.g., communication rules). Second, you might want to describe the nature and scope of cultural variation in some communicative conduct. Exhibit 13.2 contains examples of each of these types of descriptive claim.

A **speech community** is a group of people who share rules for using and interpreting speech (Romaine, 1982). Some of the speech communities that have been represented in published EOS and EOC research include street youth (Dollar & Zimmers, 1998), a charismatic church (Sequeira, 1993), a regional symphony (Ruud, 1995), organizational groups in a television station (Carbaugh, 1988), and a group of Vietnam veterans (Braithwaite, 1997c). Each of these studies has described the culturally distinct knowledge used by members of a social group to organize and interpret speaking. Within a particular speech community, the **communication code** is a set of rules for speaking and interpreting others' speech (Carbaugh, 1993; Dollar, 1999; Philipsen, 1992, 1997). Of course, you also could use autoethnography to describe the communication code used in your own speech community.

Exhibit 13.2 Descriptive Ethnographic Claims

Ethnography of Speaking:

What are the scenes, participants, ends, act sequences, key, instrumentalities, norms, and genres for speaking in a given cultural context?

1. "Does Teamsterville's view of the situated appropriateness of speaking implicate something about the meaning and significance of speaking to its people?" (Philipsen, 1976, "Places for Speaking in Teamsterville," p. 15).
2. "'Communication' is examined as a cultural term whose meaning is problematic in selected instances of American speech about interpersonal life.... In the discourse examined here, 'communication' refers to close, supportive, flexible speech, which functions as the 'work' necessary to self-definition and interpersonal bonding" (Katriel & Philipsen, 1981, p. 301). Katriel and Philipsen (1981) outline the topic, purpose, participants, act sequence, setting, and norms of interaction on pp. 311–313.

Ethnography of Speaking and/or Ethnography of Communication:

How are communication resources or shared knowledge used by members of a group or culture to interpret and organize action?

1. "How do interactants adapt when the conversational rules identified as essential for successful interaction are repeatedly and consistently violated? In other words, what happens when rule violations become the norm, rather than the exception?" (Braithwaite, 1997a, p. 64).
2. The Finnish communication code "structures some cultural scenes as occasions for positive silence," and uses the term *quietude* (*hiljaisuus* in Finnish) to embody "a model of personhood for which this is a valued, respected, and natural practice" (Carbaugh, Berry, & Nurmikari-Berry, 2006, p. 203).

How does the use of communication resources or knowledge vary within a culture or group?

1. "The present analysis first explores variations in the identity experiences of Oklahoma Indians.... Additional analyses test the linkages between ... participation in communicative relationships outside one's own ethnic community ... participation in communication relationships with other Indians ... [and] development of intercultural identity" (Y. Y. Kim et al., 1998, p. 259)
2. "Instances of morphophonemic variation ... may express a number of various meanings that express, reflect, and reproduce speakers' life experiences. The analysis also enables us to develop a set of theoretical statements that explain the motivations of workers' selections of a low prestige variant and why workers' reliance on a low prestige variant persists" (Huspek, 1986, p. 149, on *ing/in'* variation in North American workers' speech).

Interpretative Claims

So far, you know that EOS and EOC studies *describe* the communication resources or shared knowledge that cultural members use and how those resources vary within a culture or group. A third element of the ethnographic research agenda is to ascertain the relationships between culture and communication (Philipsen, 1989). This is a claim of interpretation. At its broadest level, the interpretive ethnographic claim addresses how culture creates communication and vice versa. Exhibit 13.3 contains several examples of interpretative ethnographic claims from published studies.

You can also use ethnographic methods to support an interpretative claim about more specific relationships between culture and communication. A specific relationship that you might study with EOC, autoethnography, or performance ethnography is the **communal function** of communication—the ways that communication is used to create and affirm shared identities (Philipsen, 1992). Exhibit 13.3 shows several sample claims about the communal function of communication. Notice that communication can serve a different communal function for cultural insiders (e.g., Philipsen, 1975; Schely-Newman, 1997) than for outsiders (e.g., Murillo, 1996).

Codeswitching, mixing the rules of one speech community with the rules of another, is also an interpretative claim. Studies of codeswitching are especially relevant for

EXHIBIT 13.3 Interpretative Ethnographic Claims

Ethnography of Speaking and/or Ethnography of Communication:

What is the relationship between culture and communication?

1. Within a given cultural context, *silence* may be viewed negatively (consumptive silence) or positively (generative silence): "In consumptive silence interactants are seen to expend key resources of a communication event (i.e., time and symbols) for negative or relatively unproductive outcomes.... In generative silence interactants are seen to engage in a fertile communication activity wherein people affirm the self and each other personally, interpersonally, culturally, and even metaphysically" (Covarrubias, 2007, p. 268).
2. How do bilingual teachers use codeswitching to manage their identities? (see Chien, 1996, on how teachers in Taiwan embed English words or sentences in Chinese-based interactions to either show solidarity or establish social distance in Taiwanese classrooms; or Jaffe, 2007, on how bilingual teachers in Corsica switch between French and Corsican to display their own stance toward "the content and the form of their utterances," p. 53).

What is the communal function of communication?

1. In the Chicago suburb he called Teamsterville, "speaking like a man" helps to create and affirm the shared identity of blue-collar workers (Philipsen, 1975).
2. Latin American *mojado* festivals help to teach non-Latino/a people about La Raza culture (Murillo, 1996).
3. "This paper attempts to show how people use narratives in the process of self-definition based on locale" (Schely-Newman, 1997, p. 401).
4. The themes of hard work, family, and religion "serve as unifying forces despite the economic struggles" of Mexican-American families in Biola, California (Aoki, 2000, p. 207).

Autoethnography:

"The experience of teaching in the days following the Texas A&M University 'bonfire' collapse in November of 1999 is examined ...by considering the intense experience of emotions and the struggle to balance the needs of students with the need to cover course material" (K. Miller, 2002, p. 571).

Performance Ethnography:

1. "This interpretive ethnography describes the barbershop in a Black community as a cultural site" and "a centralized occasion within a cultural community that...meets at the intersection of culture and performance" (Alexander, 2003, p. 105).
2. "I decided *Menopause and Desire* would be composed of interconnected prose poems and scenes dealing with such topics as sexuality in middle age, how to admire the postmastectomy body, and whether or not it is possible to learn anything about love, even if you live to be a hundred" (Jenkins, 2005, p. 254).

intercultural communication research. Exhibit 13.3 contains two sample claims from EOC studies of codeswitching. Of course, if you want to make an interpretative claim about codeswitching, you'll first want to describe the communication code(s) in terms of the verbal strategies or other communicative resources that members use to organize their actions (e.g., Schely-Newman, 1997). You also may want to interpret the functions served by the code(s) in a particular social setting or situation. To conduct a study of codeswitching, you'll need to be fluent in the codes you want to study; we talk more about your degree of membership as a researcher in the warrants section of this chapter. If you are one of the key informants for your ethnographic study, then your work will be autoethnographic.

To study the communal functions of communication, or to study codeswitching in cross-cultural settings, you may stake claims of evaluation and reform as well as description and interpretation. Interpretive ethnographic research stops short of evaluating participants' cultural communication, but critical ethnography is used to support claims of evaluation and reform. Let's consider those claims next.

Evaluative and Reformist Claims

Claims of evaluation are advanced when you judge the worth or value of the communicative practices or messages that you are studying. As we pointed out in the first part of this book, evaluative claims are quickly put to use in support of changing communication practices in particular groups or cultural contexts. Perhaps you, the researcher, will decide what changes are needed, or you may give the results of your analysis to another person or group who will then decide what changes to attempt (Dorazio & Stovall, 1997). Either way, it is a short step from evaluating communication practices to reforming them.

Around 1990, critical ethnographies (whether EOC, autoethnography, or performance ethnography) began to emerge that focused on showing how norms of communication and power usage privileged some group members and oppressed others (e.g., Ang, 1990; Conquergood, 1992, 1994; Crawford, 1996; Gordon, 2002; Trujillo, 1993; Witmer, 1997). Critical ethnographers go beyond describing and evaluating cultural variations in speech codes. They also "attempt to take action against the social inequalities exposed in their research, action aimed at challenging the status quo and calling for a rebalancing of power" (Dollar & Merrigan, 2002, p. 62).

Perhaps the earliest and most well known proponent of critical ethnography in communication is Dwight Conquergood (1983, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1995). Conquergood's participatory research with a Chicago Latino gang included actions aimed at helping gang members stay out of jail, learn to read and write, and gain a more empathic voice in the media (Conquergood & Seigel, 1990). Conquergood's (1992, 1994) attempts to understand this cultural group moved well beyond description and interpretation for its own (or for theory's) sake. An equally important goal of that research was the attempt to redress power imbalances experienced by members of the cultures (Conquergood & Seigel, 1990).

As you read critical ethnographic studies and conduct those studies yourself, you may notice a blurry line between making claims with ethnography and writing about or performing a culture. Goodall (2000) argued that critical ethnographers approach *writing as inquiry*. In critiquing power relations within a culture, or between cultural groups, writing is not merely something you do after the research is conducted. Instead, writing is the manner of interrogating and exposing power relations within the social situation. It may even be a way of interrogating your own beliefs and participation in an oppressive social system, if you use autoethnographic writing or if you participate in collaborative writing (Trujillo, 1999). Exhibit 13.4 contains several examples of evaluation and reform claims from published ethnographic research.

Furthermore, ethnographers use participant observations, interviews, and textual analyses to create public performances that evaluate cultural communication and suggest how it might be changed (e.g., Jenkins, 1999, 2000). As such, performance ethnographers are always consuming and producing texts, and since both consumption and production are power-laden, both activities require reflexivity (Bowman & Kirstenberg, 1992). Exhibit 13.4 contains one such sample claim (Rusted, 2006). Jenkins' (2000) play, *A Credit to Her Country*, provides another example: The play is about gays and lesbians who served in the U.S. military, and it was based on Jenkins' ethnographic oral history interviews with men and women who were discharged from military service because of their sexual orientation. The use of ethnographic data in performance studies has expanded significantly in the past decade.

EXHIBIT 13.4 Evaluative and Reformist Ethnographic Claims

Ethnography of Speaking and/or Ethnography of Communication:

How do members' use of communication resources or knowledge deal with power, or privilege some members' interests at the expense of others members' interests?

1. "The Internet is not a placeless cyberspace that is distinct and separate from the real world.... People in Cybercity are investing as much effort in maintaining relationships in cyberspace as in other social spaces" and "are widening their relationships, not weakening them" (Carter, 2005, p. 148).
2. "Our findings suggest that grammar and language instruction needs to be reconceptualized in order to promote language ideologies that are reflective of current research in linguistics, that help students become more proficient in written Standard English, and that build upon students' linguistic experiences in positive ways" (p. 123).
3. "Invisibility shapes (and is shaped by) processes of stigmatization, 'street smarts' as enacted by youth, and 'Mayberry' and 'not in my backyard' community discourses....The disappearance of youth without homes simultaneously serves and undermines various stakeholders" (Harter, Berquist, Titsworth, Novak, & Brokaw, 2005, p. 305).

Autoethnography:

1. "Inferential sexism and racism are endemic to U.S. higher education and classrooms and are as dangerous as overt forms of sexism and racism because they are harder to identify, and more naturalized and acceptable" (Patton, 2004, p. 60).
2. Autoethnography can extend previous studies that frame "CMC or computer-aided instruction (CAI) as liberatory without accounting for the cultural and political realities of the classroom" (A. F. Wood & Fassett, 2003, p. 287). Second, "technology is not simply present in the school. Rather, it schools *us*" (A. F. Wood & Fassett, 2003, p. 287).
3. Autoethnographic research "highlights the need among practitioners to correct ourselves, as much or more than the need for us to correct them (offenders)" (Williams, 2006, p. 23).

Performance Ethnography:

1. "Artwork themed on the activities of the North American cowboy and the North American west has a marginal status in contemporary art worlds despite its iconic place in popular culture. The expression of such a social distinction is embodied in the performative practices of institutions that collect, legitimate, or exhibit such work" (Rusted, 2006, p. 115).
2. Public performances of interview data from uninsured or underinsured California workers can "engage readers, the public, and policymakers to address difficult issues associated with the lack of health insurance" (Saunders, 2008, p. 528).

Now let's turn our attention to the different sources and strategies for ethnographic data collection and analysis.

Ethnographic Data

In this section, you will learn more about the major sources for ethnographic data collection, including participant observations, interviews, and analysis of archival documents and cultural artifacts. We help you consider the procedures you can use to collect these data, from gaining access to selecting key informants, taking field notes, and exiting the field. Finally, you'll learn more about the basic strategies for analyzing ethnographic research data: transcribing interviews, coding and reducing data, applying descriptive frameworks to analyze communication norms and rules of interaction, and writing case studies. All of these ideas will build on the concepts you learned in chapter 5, "What Counts as Communication Data?"

Sources for Data Collection

Two of the defining characteristics of ethnographic research are that "the investigator goes into the field, instead of bringing the field to the investigator" (Schwartzman, 1993, p. 3) and that data are represented from the view of the participants (Stablein, 1996). **Participant observation** is the process of watching and learning about the setting and participants while you are participating in the daily realities you are studying (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Spradley, 1980). **Interviews**

with key informants are interactions between you, the researcher, and informed, articulate members of the culture or group you want to understand. If any of the key informants are the researchers, then the work is at least partially autoethnographic. **Archival documents** are written or symbolic records of cultural communication such as letters, newspapers, Web sites, instant messages, billboards, or memos. **Artifacts** are objects used by group or cultural members such as clothing, jewelry, buildings, tools, or toys.

In doing ethnography, you will typically triangulate two or more data sources either simultaneously or in iterative sequences. For example, you may follow a period of document analysis and participant observations with some interviews and then do some more observations. Your ethnographic data collection will likely proceed from making broad descriptive observations to making increasingly more selective and focused observations (Spradley, 1980). In this section, we outline how you can proceed to collect each of these four sources of ethnographic data.

Participant Observation

Your level of participation in an ethnographic setting can range from nonparticipant (i.e., observer only) to complete participation, depending on your research question and the access you have to that setting, which we discuss later in this chapter. For example, Braithwaite's (1997b) ethnography of Navajo educational communication practices was based on 8 months of participant observation, during which Braithwaite (1997b) lived in a dormitory at Navajo Community College in Tsaile, Arizona. As he observed over 100 hours of classroom interactions, Braithwaite (1997b) collected more than 300 pages of field notes, including descriptions of class content and specific verbal and nonverbal speech events. In this setting, Braithwaite (1997b) was a participant in the sense that he resided in the dormitory with the Navajo students, but he was a faculty member rather than a student, and he is not of Navajo descent.

In his ethnographic study of baseball, Trujillo (1992) used participant observation and interview methods to gather data over 2 years at a major league baseball stadium, including over 500 hours of fieldwork. His participant observations included a variety of roles and settings. Trujillo (1992) began the process of data collection by observing numerous off-season "luncheons, banquets, autograph appearances, and speaking engagements" (p. 353). Then, during the two seasons under study, Trujillo (1992) "attended a total of 67 home games" (p. 353) where he participated as a *fan, invited observer,* and *ballpark wanderer,* observing and conducting brief interviews in many locales. During these interviews and observations, he took extensive field notes to reconstruct the communicative actions of workers. We discuss procedures for taking field notes in more detail later in this chapter.

Whatever your degree of participation during observations, it is important that you develop and maintain trusting relationships with the group members you study. Your access to participants' knowledge is relative to the kinds of relationships you establish with group members and, in particular, with which group members you establish relationships. The roles that these members play in their local network and their goals in relating to you also influence your degree of participation and the observations you are able to collect. As a case in point, Schely-Newman (1997) observed instances of codeswitching as she interviewed members of her family and friends who all lived in an Israeli *moshav* or cooperative community:

> Members of the older generation speak Arabic, French, and Hebrew with varying degrees of fluency, and codeswitching is an unmarked choice within the community. Nevertheless, because each language has different connotations and prestige, the choice of a dominant language may result from the immediate context (participants), the subject discussed (Israeli politics are discussed in Hebrew; the concerns of women and children, in Arabic), or the image being presented by the narrator (sophistication is marked by French). (p. 405)

Schely-Newman (1997) observed that "as the formality of the event and the heterogeneity of the participants increases, the mixing of languages occurs less often" (p. 405). Such an observation could be made only if she selected informants capable of performing multiple language codes and if her relationship to the informants allowed them to share stories with her, during which codeswitching occurred naturally because she was a family member.

As these examples suggest, you will need to possess or develop certain skills and attitudes to be an effective participant observer. The skills you will need involve recognizing and performing communication that is the normal standard in the social group you are studying (Dollar, 1995; Lindlof, 1995). You also will need to be good at "creating sharp, detailed, and theoretically informed descriptions" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 135). That is, you must be skilled in writing, organizing, filing, and synthesizing field notes. These skills can be learned if you do not already possess them.

To be an effective participant observer, though, you also will need certain attitudes and sensitivities. You will need to be capable of and comfortable with fading into the background of a social situation—what Lindlof (1995) called a tolerance for marginality. You also will need to be sensitive to all the verbal and nonverbal communication cues that are available in a social setting, not just visual and auditory cues. Instead, we can "open up our sensing to the tastes, smells, tempers, touches, colors, lights, shapes, and textures of the cultures we study" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 138). Finally, to be an effective participant observer, you will need to be good at "giving people the benefit of the doubt, getting along by going along, and not being overly querulous or contentious" (Fine, 1993, as cited in Lindlof, 1995, p. 139). If you are observing yourself, you will need to use all of the skills we just mentioned, and you will need to develop *reflexivity:*

> A researcher must reflect on their own experiences in order to discern how they are both product and producer of a given cultural phenomenon. However, rather than lapse into solipsism or catharsis, the researcher must articulate such moments so as to engender similar reflection in the reader, so that the reader might understand how they stand in relation to the same phenomenon. (A. F. Wood & Fassett, 2003, p. 288)

Participant observation will allow you to see what the members do and say in their setting; interviews with key informants, on the other hand, will help you to describe what members *report* that they do and say and what sense members make of those actions and interactions. For example, you may observe the stories participants tell, to whom those stories are told, where, with what structures, forms of elaboration, and so on. The stories participants tell one another in their natural settings may be quite different than the stories they relate to you, the researcher in the context of an interview. Thus, observations provide a different window into the participants' worlds than does participants' talk about their world. Interviews with key informants are one of the ethnographer's methods for uncovering participants' talk about their world.

Interviews With Key Informants

Compared to the individual or focus group interviews that you learned about in chapter 7, "Survey Research," the **ethnographic interview** is "the most informal, conversational, and spontaneous form of interview" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 170). Ethnographic interviews take the forms of conversations and storytelling between participants and researchers. The interview is a way to find out things that you cannot directly observe (Newman & Benz, 1998; Patton, 1990).

Just as selecting participants to interview is critical to your participation in and observation of a setting, establishing rapport with informants is essential if you are to gain useful interview data. **Rapport** means that the people you interview and observe feel comfortable with you and trust you; it does not mean that they see you as naïve, "or an easy target for deception" (Madison, 2005, p. 32). Your demeanor and appearance, listening skills, and nonverbal style all contribute to your effectiveness as a human research instrument in the interview process. In a collaborative ethnography, you may want to use **interviewer training** to ensure that interviews are conducted consistently (i.e., interactions with one informant are comparable to interactions with another informant, and interviews conducted by one researcher are comparable to interviews conducted by another researcher working on the same research project).You may want to review the information in chapter 7, "Survey Research," on interviewer training as well.

There are three main forms of ethnographic interview: (1) "*oral history* which is a recounting of a social historical moment reflected in the life or lives of individuals who remember them and/or experienced them"; (2) "*personal narrative*, which is an individual perspective and expression of an event, experience, or point of view" ; and (3) "*topical interview*, the point of view given to a particular subject, such as a program, an issue, or a process...each type will often and necessarily overlap with the others" (Madison, 2005, p. 26). Each of these types of interview can be structured or unstructured (Spradley, 1980). If your interview is structured, check your written interview schedule to be sure that each of your questions, and the overall organizational pattern, are consistent with your study's purpose and your claim(s).

Whether you are adopting the interpretive or critical paradigm perspective, you will likely use unstructured, or minimally structured, face-to-face interviews. You may not have any questions written out before beginning to observe the setting and participants because the participants' actions will indicate to you what questions are important to ask (Schwartzman, 1993; Spradley, 1980). Indeed, participant observations will almost certainly be needed to determine whom you will want to interview.

As your interview format becomes less structured and more personal, your role will be more interactive. Whatever degree of structure you plan to incorporate, use these guidelines for a successful ethnographic interview: (1) Respondents must feel that their interactions with you will be pleasant and satisfying, (2) they need to see your study as being worthwhile, and (3) barriers to the interview in their minds need to be overcome (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996).

Before you conduct your first interview with an informant, develop face sheets and postinterview comment sheets. Both of these items will help you develop an audit trail, a record of all the data you are about to collect (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). **Face sheets** include details about the interviews such as a code or name for the participant; the date, place, and time of the interviews; and any relevant demographic information about the interviewees. **Comment sheets** are for you to jot down notes after your interviews, perhaps concerning the emotional tone of the interview, your insights and reflections about any difficulties you encountered during the interview, and so on.

In addition to creating face sheets and comment sheets, you will need to develop an introduction to the interview. What will you say to a participant before you begin the interview? You will probably want to tape record interviews, so you can think and talk and not be occupied with field notes during the interview (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). But you should take a few notes while the tape is running just to help you pay attention.

As a novice ethnographer, never enter the interview scene without some interview guide. Your guide might be a page of one-word notes about themes, symbols, and patterns observed in artifacts or other data, but it would never be a strict schedule of questions. If you are doing ethnography of speaking, you may want to have a copy of Hymes's (1974a) SPEAKING mnemonic with you during observations or interviews. If you are doing performance ethnography, you may want to have with you some outline of the scenes you intend to develop from your data collection (Denzin, 2003; Madison, 2005). The important thing is to give yourself enough of a guide to focus your interviews but not so much as to override the direction your key informant suggests for your conversation.

In some cases, you may want to combine participant observations and/or interviewing key informants with analysis of archival documents or cultural artifacts (i.e., texts). Let's consider each of these sources of ethnographic evidence next.

Archival Documents

The archival documents used for ethnographic research are usually written texts that you encounter in the field setting. Archival documents are sometimes implicated in the talk or actions of participants whom you are observing. Alternatively, archival texts may help you gain background knowledge needed to reconstruct past events or processes that are not available for you to observe. Finally, library research about a setting or situation, including conducting a literature review on the topic area you are studying, also makes use of archival documents, although in this section, we refer more to those documents encountered in the field data collection itself. Participant diaries, memos, newsletters, e-mail messages, and newspaper clippings are all examples of such archival documents. For instance, in her ethnography of Far End Design, Markham (1996) analyzed official company literature and diaries kept by employees, along with her field notes from observations and interview transcripts. By considering not only the content of those documents but also their format characteristics, origins, uses, circulation, and so on, in conjunction with her other evidence, she identified some of the ambiguities and contradictions experienced by those employees. In the same way, archival documents can supplement your ethnographic evidence and help you understand how participants are making sense of their situations.

You may also want to incorporate visual media, such as film, video, or still photography, in your ethnographic project, which are also considered *texts* for analysis, in conjunction with participation observations or interview data. In chapter 15, "Critical Studies," we consider some examples of entire research projects based on textual interpretation and evaluation of media sources. But for ethnography, texts are customarily used to triangulate evidence gained from self-report interviews or observations with participants.

Artifacts

Finally, you may want to examine actual objects used by participants in the setting you study to understand the participants' communication rules, meanings, or behaviors. Such artifacts could include the participants' costumes and dress; items used in routine activities like eating, cooking, bathing, meeting or interacting with other participants; and so on. As we just mentioned, artifacts typically support other kinds of ethnographic evidence, but artifactual analysis plays a more central role in rhetorical criticism and critical studies (see chapters 14 and 15 for examples from published communication research).

Strategies for Data Collection

Now you know something about the sources of data for ethnographic research. But before you can conduct ethnographic research, you will need to know some procedures for collecting these data. In the following sections, we briefly describe these procedures. Their sequence can vary across different ethnographic research forms, depending on the participants and the kinds of claims you are attempting to support (Philipsen, 1982).

You will need to think about the issue of time management at the beginning of your ethnographic project. Allow extra time to develop skills you do not already have, since things go more slowly the first few times whether it's interviewing, taking field notes, coding data, writing reports, or whatever. As you think about the amount of time needed for your project, consider some of the tasks you will need to accomplish. You will be entering a site of data collection; conducting a literature review; spending days, weeks, or months at the site; writing up and coding interview transcripts; analyzing data within and across cases; writing up notes from site visits; holding weekly meetings with other researchers, if applicable; and writing interim and final reports. Miles and Huberman (1994) estimated 185 days for such a task list, which is probably a conservative estimate. Trujillo's 2-year study of baseball culture involved over 500 hours, or over 60 workdays, 8 hours a day, in just the fieldwork tasks! "Time plans usually suffer from excessive optimism. Get a cynical skeptic to critique them" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 47). One issue in planning your timeline is gaining access to the field.

Gaining Access to the Setting

"Stepping into a setting for the first time is probably the most significant phase of the entire ethnographic process" (Schwartzman, 1993, p. 49). "Everything counts" (Goodall, 1989, p. xv, as cited in Schwartzman, 1993). Ethnographers call the process of getting participants' permissions and approvals for doing research in a particular setting **gaining access** or entry (Lindlof, 1995; Spradley, 1980). It is at this stage that you will have the opportunity to make the strange familiar and make the familiar strange (Frey, Botan, et al., 2000). You can elect different roles at this point, depending on the degree of participation you desire in the setting, ranging from pure or even covert observer, to full, overt participant, or somewhere in between these two.

Ethnographers sometimes refer to the period prior to gaining access as "casing the scene" (Lindlof, 1995). Your initial entry into the setting may be "simply a matter of walking through the door" (Witmer, 1997, p. 329). While casing the scene, you can collect some initial impressions of the setting and participants, and consider, "Is *this* the right project *now, for me?*" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 82). Go into these places, "looking, listening, touching, and smelling—*hanging out*" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 82). Of course, you will already have some idea that this setting and your timing are appropriate, but your initial observations may change your idea of whether your study is actually feasible. For example, can you devote the amount of time needed to adequately study communication in this setting? What expenses (or other risks) might you incur for traveling to and/or participating as a group member in this setting? Finally, consider whether you are competent in the cultural communication code(s) needed to function effectively as a research instrument and participant in this setting (Lindlof, 1995; Philipsen, 1997; Spradley, 1980).

One often debated topic among ethnographers over the years has been the issue of the researcher's membership in the culture being studied. Some ethnographers feel it is essential that you be a full member of the culture; others acknowledge that degrees of membership are possible and helpful in data collection and interpretation, especially in gaining access to the setting (Ellingson, 1998; Lindsley, 1999). Your degree of cultural membership impacts your ability to enter the setting, to choose which concepts to attend to, and the interpretations you are able to make about the data (Dollar, 1995; Dollar & Merrigan, 2002; Spradley, 1980).

Not only can you gain access to the setting more easily as a cultural insider, but membership also allows you to recognize features of meaning that would be unrecognized by a nonmember. For example, Dollar and Zimmers's (1998) use of the term *houseless*, rather than *homeless*, youth stemmed from Zimmers's 5-year participation as a job placement coordinator in that community. Zimmers recognized that the youth in this study intentionally used the term *houseless* to mean something different than homeless. They constructed themselves as being without a house (i.e., the building), but as having homes in the places they hung out, ate, and slept. Your degree of membership and the roles you can enact in a setting also will influence your selection of key informants for ethnographic interviews.

Selecting Key Informants

Your ethnographic observations will rely on and be influenced by identifying key informants, members of the group under study whom you can interview. Key informants are either highly articulate or especially helpful and wise, relative to other participants in that setting (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Key informants provide information about the relationships, groups, and cultures you seek to describe, interpret, or evaluate.

One good way to identify key informants in your setting is to look for **gatekeepers,** the participants who have power to grant or deny your access to the setting. In addition, you might want to identify sponsors. A **sponsor** is a participant who "takes an active interest in the project, vouches for its goals, and sometimes helps the researcher locate informants or move into participation roles" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 109). In short, you will want to select key informants because you are "already aware that they know something, or have had some experience, that is important for the project" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 125).

You can select informants who will provide a wide range of qualities that are present in the scene to be studied by using maximum variation sampling (Y. S. Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Or, you can ask key informants to suggest other people from whom data can be gathered, thus using the snowball selection method (e.g., Lindsley, 1999). Of course, you can also use less formal means of selecting informants such as convenience sampling. Finally, if you are conducting grounded theory, you may want to use **theoretical sampling,** a process of collecting the additional data specifically needed to fill out one part of the emerging theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Janesick, 1998). Such additional data will give you a way to check the adequacy of emerging categories and the relationships you are theorizing among those categories. In addition, you might use **deviant case sampling,** the deliberate search for cases that are different from those you have already collected, to sort out contradictions or inconsistencies in the observations you have already collected (Janesick, 1998; May & Pattillo-McCoy, 2000).

Once you have some sense of whom your key informants from a scene will be, a key consideration for you and your informants is how many contacts, or interview opportunities, will be needed, and what will be the duration of those contacts? Then the next step in preparing for participant observations or interviews will be to think about how you will record and organize your field notes.

Taking Field Notes

Since ethnography depends greatly on your prolonged immersion in and observations of the field setting and its participants, keeping field notes is a crucial aspect of ethnographic data collection. It is a good idea for you to keep an informal log of problems or questions you encounter as you plan your study and collect and analyze the data. Such a log will be immensely useful when you are writing up your study (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Miller, Creswell, & Olander, 1998). Your field journal can be used for recording your "experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems that arise during fieldwork" (Spradley, 1980, p. 71). Journal entries should be dated, as your entries will be "an important source of data" when you start writing up the study (Spradley, 1980, p. 71).

It is sometimes feasible to make notes quite openly during participant observations. Sometimes, you can incorporate note taking into the roles you are already playing in the field by disguising note taking as some other situationally appropriate behavior, like doing homework in an educational setting or working on a report in an organizational context (Lindlof, 1995). Trujillo (1992) sometimes posed as a "reporter" while taking notes in the pregame dugout and in the baseball locker rooms. As a "fan," Trujillo carried his notebook inside a game program, where he made brief notes as he observed ballpark employees; he elaborated these notes during lulls in ballpark action and dictated additional ideas into a tape recorder as he drove home from the games.

When there is no situationally appropriate ploy for taking notes, you can withdraw or be shielded for moments to record notes. You might retreat to a bathroom, your car, or just around the corner (Lofland & Lofland, 1995).Tardy and Hale's (1998) participant observations of mother-toddler playgroup meetings were collected when "the attending researcher sat as unobtrusively as possible near sites of conversations, and essentially, 'eavesdropped'" (p. 342).

Data logging is the ethnographic term for carefully recording various forms of data, including field notes from participant observations, write-ups from interviews, maps, photography, sound recordings, document collections, and so on (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 66). The researcher who boasts, "I didn't take notes because nothing important happened" is either being arrogant or naïve, or perhaps both. Your ability and motivation to record detailed notes during or shortly after interactions with participants, and to organize these notes effectively to later make sense of them, is vital to doing good ethnographic research.

Exiting the Field

As you can see by now, ethnographers may be involved with members of a group or culture over months or even years. You are likely to develop a variety of relationships with group members, if you did not already have those relationships prior to beginning your study. So the idea of *exiting the field,* as it has been traditionally called in anthropological research, is more complicated than just closing your notebook after writing your last field note and then not returning for additional observations or interviews.

Of course, you could just leave the field of data collection, but more likely, you will have some process of disengagement over time. For example, your official observations may cease by agreement between you and your key informants, but unofficial reflections may come to you in the setting long afterward. Perhaps you will continue to interact with participants on topics not related to the research project per se. Or you may invite group members to read and respond to your interview transcripts, a report of your interpretations of the group's communication practices, or some prose or poetry based on your data collection in that setting. In any case, exiting the field of human communication relationships is as delicate and important an issue as entering that field, and for ethnographic researchers, both access and exit require serious attention and ethical care. Morse (1998) advised that it is time to exit the field when one of two things happens: Either you recognize that you are putting other goals ahead of the research, or you realize you have reached theoretical saturation.

> For instance, the researcher may suddenly realize that he or she did not record an event, because it may reflect poorly on the participants, or because it was everyday and not special or interesting enough.... If the researcher is not learning anything new, he or she may be reasonably sure that the data are saturated. (Morse, 1998, pp. 78–79)

Of course, you will need to be continually analyzing your data to know when you've reached a theoretical saturation point. So let's now consider some strategies for analyzing ethnographic data.

Strategies for Data Analysis

For the ethnographic researcher, "The analysis of data begins shortly after the data collection commences and continues during data collection and beyond" (Morse, 1998, p. 75). You will amass field notes from observations, interviews, and archival and artifactual texts; and at some point, you will have to face the daunting task of somehow reducing and interpreting these large amounts of data, and reporting (or otherwise representing) the whole process, from conceptualization through data collection and analysis, to interpretations and conclusions. "Transcripts and notes must be easily retrieved, easily cross-referenced, and easily separated from and linked with their original sources" (Morse, 1998, p. 75).

Strategies for data analysis in ethnographic research typically begin with transcription, that is, translating audiotaped or videotaped records of interview conversations with key informants into written form. You will be trying to integrate the transcripts with your field notes, including observations of and reflections about the participants, the setting, relevant artifacts, and so on. One way to integrate multiple sources of data and multiple types of inferences is by reducing many specific observations into themes or categories. This process is called **coding** the data. At some point, you may apply a descriptive framework that consists of predetermined categories, such as the SPEAKING mnemonic used by ethnographers of speaking presented earlier in this chapter. Finally, you might write a case study, a narrative account of the communication practices in a particular setting and among specific participants (Philipsen, 1982). Each of these data analytic processes is outlined in more detail following.

Transcribing Interviews

At some point during or after field observations, you will need to produce written transcriptions of your interviews with key informants. At the very least, your transcripts will reproduce the verbatim verbal interaction between you and the informant(s), although your transcripts may also contain paraverbal indicators such as pause length, word stress, interruptions, and so on. Plan, at a minimum, to spend "as much time *immediately* studying and analyzing the interview material as you spent in the interview itself" (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 87). This means studying transcripts *as you go along,* so that you will *know* when you need to collect more data; where to classify and file observations, notes, or transcripts; and so on. Doing your own transcription is a chore but one of enormous value since it keeps you close to your data. You will be making interpretations as you listen to the tapes many times.

Ethnographers' transcripts range from verbatim texts of verbal and nonverbal interactions to summaries of what was said at what point, combined with your own tentative ideas, early bits of analysis, as well as notes on methodological difficulties and your personal or emotional experiences from an interview or observation session. You already know some elements to consider in formatting transcripts and some of the conventions for notating paraverbal interaction cues from the last chapter. Next, let's look at the steps you might take to make sense of your collected field notes.

Coding and Reducing Field Notes

Feldman (1995) described the problem of working through massive quantities of field data that included audiotapes, floppy disks, documents, field notes, and thousands of pieces of electronic and hard mail. Feldman (1995) noted that the complexity and ambiguity was at times overwhelming: "The task at hand is to create an interpretation of the setting or some feature of it that will allow people who have not directly observed the phenomena to have a deeper understanding of them" (p. 2). Ethnographers create interpretations based on participants' meanings. To do so, you have to somehow get away from two kinds of prepackaged interpretation. First, you must avoid creating interpretations that are based only on what you knew about the setting before you began collecting data. Second, you must avoid creating interpretations that are based only on what you know about other similar settings. In other words, your interpretations need to come from your field notes.

Accordingly, then, as an ethnographer, you necessarily will be involved in reducing and coding data as you form interpretations and develop theoretic propositions about relationships between concepts in the setting you study. You may impose coding categories onto your data from the outset, as is the case when ethnographers of speaking apply the SPEAKING framework. If you are planning to "perform or adapt the data for the stage, you may also code with scenes for your performance in your mind" (Madison, 2005, p. 37). Alternatively, you could induce categories for coding data after considerable immersion in the setting as is the case when you use constant comparisons to develop a grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) or when you use analytic induction (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). For example, Lindsley (1999) used inductive reasoning to categorize different types of misunderstandings and conflicts encountered by U.S. American and Mexican employees at a *maquiladora* (i.e., a U.S.-owned assembly plant located in Mexico). Based on data collected in interviews, nonparticipant observations, and written periodicals on the *maquiladora* industry, Lindsley used constant comparison to group problematic interactions into three categories (e.g., negatively stereotyped identities).

Another way that you can begin to analyze a culture or group is to identify and describe the participants' rules for interaction. Rules are prescriptions for who can speak, on what topics, in what settings, and how speaking by others is to be interpreted. One form that a communication rule can take is "Do *X* in order to be seen as *Y*." College students know many such rules, such as "Show up for class on time to be seen as a serious, motivated student." Rules are followable, prescribed, and contextual (Shimanoff, 1980, 1985). Therefore, rule-governed behavior is controllable, criticizable, and contextual (Dollar & Beck, 1997). All of these characteristics suggest strategies you can use to describe and evaluate the rules for conduct within a culture or group. For example, you can look for *breaches*—instances when members violate rules and are called to account for their behavior; you can try to analyze what rule has been violated in that case.

Applying Descriptive Frameworks

Frameworks are favored by some ethnographers who believe that it is impossible to enter a social scene completely free of any interpretive categories (Philipsen, 1992). A variety of descriptive frameworks may be used to analyze communication within a group or culture. As we mentioned earlier in this chapter, Hymes's (1962) SPEAKING framework is used by ethnographers of speaking to analyze a variety of cultural groups (e.g., Dollar, 1999; Katriel & Philipsen, 1981; Philipsen, 1975, 1992; Ruud, 1995; Sequeira, 1993).One of the benefits of using the same descriptive framework across many groups is the ability to compare interpretations across more than group or culture. If your interest is in comparing groups or cultures, you will probably tend to see a description of any one social setting as a case study.

Writing Case Studies

C. J. Mitchell (1983) and Philipsen (1982) have argued that theoretically plausible interpretations can be made from one good case (e.g., Bastien & Hostager, 1992; Braithwaite, 1997a; Eisenberg, Murphy & Andrews, 1998;

B. J. Hall & Noguchi, 1993; M. Miller, 1995). A typical case is one instance of communicative behavior or practice that "is similar in *relevant* characteristics to other cases of the same type" (C. J. Mitchell, 1983, p. 189). Philipsen (1977, 1982) has advocated that researchers scan a number of cases for familiar concepts that can be analyzed and to hypothesize links between those cases and particular theories. The data for comparing cases can be gained from participant observations, interviews, archival documents, artifacts, or some combination of these data sources. Let's consider one published example in detail.

Braithwaite's (1997a) ethnography of interaction management rules in naturally occurring conversations at a blood plasma donation center well illustrates the value of a single case study. Braithwaite (1997a) donated plasma 16 times over a 2-month period to observe conversations between other donors and the technicians who worked at the center. He discovered that conversational rules that are *normal* in other settings were consistently violated at the plasma donor center. His analysis showed how task requirements in that setting took precedence over the usual rules for interaction management. But Braithwaite (1997a) also showed how the normal rules for conversation management applied in this setting, even though they were routinely violated whenever "successfully accomplishing a task takes precedence over a 'normal' conversation" (p. 70). Braithwaite (1997a) gave several examples from other settings in which participants prioritize task requirements over following normal conversational rules, such as parents conversing together while watching their children play in a park or professors trying to get to their next class while engaging in a hallway conversation with a student. Consistent with the interpretive paradigm's view of truth as subjective and comprised of multiple realities, incongruencies among cases will likely be seen as illustrative, rather than problematic, by the interpretive researcher. But while we are thinking about contradictions, let's look at some of the ethical issues you will need to consider in your ethnographic data collection and analysis.

Some Ethical Issues

Recall from chapter 2, "Ethics and Research," the four rights of research participants: to freely choose their participation in research, to privacy, to be treated with honesty, and to be kept free from harm. It is your obligation as a researcher to protect these rights for your participants, and doing so in the field, over a long time, is much more complicated than doing so in a one-shot experiment, interview, or questionnaire (Tinney, 2008). In this section, we stress some of the particular ethical choices you must make in doing ethnographic research. If you want to look at a professional code of ethics that was developed with ethnographic research in mind, you might check out the American Anthropological Association's code of ethics, or the American Folklore Association's codes of ethics, on those organizations' respective Web sites (Madison, 2005).

As you conduct your initial participant observations in the field setting, think about how you might be open and transparent with participants in that setting about your ethnographic project (Madison, 2005). For example, at what point, if ever, would you share your motivation for selecting that setting and those informants? If your study was funded, would you let participants know? Would you use some of your funding to benefit participants, such as paying participants for interviews or buying food for homeless informants (Dollar & Zimmers, 1998)? How will your interactions with the participants, or your departure from those relationships once you finish data collection, affect them (Tinney, 2008)?

As you write up your ethnographic study, and in the case of performance ethnography, prepare public performances based on field data collection, think about how you will avoid harming the people with whom you have worked as well as the places and materials you studied (Madison, 2005, Miller et al., 1998). What impact will your research report, or your performances, have on their safety, dignity, or privacy? Will you offer them any assistance, or reciprocal use of *your time,* in exchange for their assistance in your data collection? It is not uncommon for communication researchers to offer training workshops, or simply volunteer in the community of their ethnographic projects, to benefit the participants and as a way of compensating participants for their contributions to the ethnographic research.

Some ethnographic data collection is now occurring over the Internet (e.g., Bakardjieva & Smith, 2001; Cezec-Kecmanovic, Treleaven, & Moodie, 2000; LaRose & Whitten, 2000), and ethnographic data collection solely from Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) data brings with it particular ethical issues, whether the data come from a chat room, e-mail messages, or a listserv group. CMC interactions are more readily observed in a covert fashion, and there are still vast "unsettled distinctions between 'public' and 'private' behavior across a range of cyberspace contexts" (Lindlof & Schatzer, 1998, p. 186). The processes of gaining participants' informed consent, disclosing research procedures and making agreements with participants, negotiating access, and so on are all impacted by differences between virtual and embodied communities. Finally, because the data for such research projects already exists in digital form, the storage and later use of those data must be approached with particular attention to maintaining participant privacy and assuring freedom from harm.

In fact, deciding when to pursue institutional review board (IRB) approval for your ethnographic project is an ethical matter. You must get IRB approval before you interview participants, but you may want to do some initial participant observations in a setting before you know whom to interview, let alone what questions you might ask. If you are observing legally competent adults, in a setting that is observable by anybody, you can conduct your initial observations before pursuing IRB approval of your project.

Finally, reform claims pose particular ethical dilemmas for the ethnographic researcher (Markham, 1996). Namely, your presence affects the lives of your research participants, for better or worse. "Just as there are many political ideals which can claim the allegiance of persons of good will, so ethnography leads you to the careful study and appreciation of many discourses, including, on occasions, discourses of power" (Philipsen, 1992, p. 329). With these sobering thoughts in mind, we turn to the warrants for ethnographic research.

Ethnographic Warrants

In this section, we reiterate some of the ideas that we first presented in chapter 6, "Warrants for Research Arguments"—ideas about the standards for what counts as good interpretive and critical research. You already know that interpretive researchers illuminate multiple realities by valuing subjectivity and rich description in their data collection sources and strategies, data analytic moves, and conclusions. In this chapter, we show you how to demonstrate that you are a credible ethnographic researcher, that your interpretations of the field data you collect are plausible, and that the insights you gain in a particular setting or situation are transferable (i.e., that they are heuristic, or thought provoking to those interested in culture and communication, not that they are generalizable in the discovery paradigm sense).

If your ethnographic project includes claims of evaluation and reform, then you also will need to draw on the critical paradigm values and standards to warrant your project. To make a coherent argument about the need for ideological change, your critical ethnographic research (most likely an autoethnography or performance ethnography) should include elements from the interpretive and critical paradigm warrants that we outlined in chapter 6. In the sections following, we bring into play the values of voice and liberation and the standards of coherence and researcher positionality, as those are relevant to critical ethnographic research.

Let's start by considering how the interpretative values of subjectivity and rich description are enacted in ethnographic research.

Valuing Subjectivity and Rich Description

Subjectivity refers to your ability to know using your own mind, your thoughts, feelings, and reasoning processes. Your perceptions of the social situation you study, and your ability to represent participants' perceptions of communication in that situation, are as important in ethnographic research as is any objective reality that exists independent of your perceptions or the participants' perceptions.

Interpretive researchers stand for the value of subjective knowledge. In doing ethnographic research, you will act on this value by privileging participant views and field settings for data collection. If you are doing autoethnography, you will privilege self-knowledge (your own experiences and feelings) in data collection and analysis, but you will still need to be rigorous and reflexive about your own standpoint (Pelias, 2003). The kinds of ethnographic data you collect, the time you spend immersed in the group or culture, and the detail level of your interviews and field notes will allow you to richly describe that situation, its participants, their actions, and relationships. Ultimately, you will be presenting your subjective understanding of those participants' meanings.

We mentioned earlier in this chapter that triangulation is customary in ethnographic research because triangulating data sources, settings, collection and analytic strategies, or researcher perspectives can enrich your descriptions of communication and help you flesh out multiple plausible interpretations. **Collaborative ethnography,** the use of more than one researcher to provide multiple viewpoints on a setting, or on similar settings, can actually help you warrant your ethnographic project (Duranti, 1997). As a case in point, May and Pattillo-McCoy (2000) conducted a collaborative ethnography of Chicago neighborhood recreation centers. May and Pattillo-McCoy recorded their observations separately and then photocopied their field notes and examined points of similarity and difference in their written observations. May and Pattillo-McCoy found that their combined field notes contained more details than either researcher's notes alone, and their combined notes brought out points of inconsistency in their individually recorded observations, which they resolved through discussion during team meetings or informal conversations.

May and Pattillo-McCoy (2000) advocated that collaborative ethnographers intentionally induce diversity into their research teams, such as having researchers from different age groups, races, cultural backgrounds, or disciplines, and that "collaborative ethnography can be useful for providing a richer description, highlighting perceptual inconsistencies, and recognizing the influence of the ethnographers' personal and intellectual backgrounds on the collection and recording of data" (p. 65).

Another way of doing collaborative ethnography is to have several researchers gather data on the same social phenomenon but in different settings (e.g., Communication Studies 298, 1999; Trujillo, 1999). Either way of doing collaborative ethnography will complicate your data collection by adding an extra layer of coordinating activities with other researchers, but either procedure will help you to enact the values of subjectivity and rich description. Collaborative ethnography

> allows for more complete coverage of the setting and a more rapid period of data collection.... The insights of one person trigger new perspectives or insights in other team members. Thus leads may be confirmed or refuted more quickly. However, the team must have several characteristics: Team members must be able to brainstorm together frequently, preferably every day; members must have respect for the contributions of others; and relationships among team members must be excellent and egalitarian. (Morse, 1998, p. 75)

Whether you are doing solo ethnographic research or collaborating with other researchers, you will need to establish your credibility as an ethnographic researcher. Let's look at how you can do so by considering your training and experiences; your degree of membership in the situation you are studying; and your faithfulness in collecting, analyzing, and reporting evidence.

Researcher Credibility

In chapter 6, "Warrants for Research Arguments," we said that researcher credibility is important in all three paradigms, but that credibility is an explicit standard for evaluating interpretive research because you, the researcher, are the instrument through which subjective interpretations are made, whether you collect and analyze interviews and participant observations, conversational transcripts, or rhetorical texts and artifacts.

In all likelihood, you are reading this book as part of your initial training as a researcher, so you probably don't have experience collecting and analyzing field data. You may have some theoretic knowledge that sensitizes you to noticing things about culture and communication in a field setting. In addition, you should have some experience with the group or culture you intend to study. In this section, we help you to consider two issues related to researcher credibility: First, we help you think about your own and your key informants' *degree of membership* in the culture or group you intend to study. Second, we show you how the issue of *faithfulness*—the steadfastness with which you engage in ethnographic data collection, analysis, and reporting—contributes to researcher credibility.

Degree of Membership

Your credibility as a human measuring instrument in the field is closely related to your degree of membership in the culture or group you seek to understand (Dollar, 1995; Fitch, 1994). You should be "deeply involved and closely connected to the scene, activity, or group being studied" but you should also "achieve enough distance from the phenomenon to allow for recording of action and interactions relatively uncolored by what [you] might have had at stake" (Fitch, 1994, p. 36).

You may recognize these two requirements as a sort of dialectic tension. Your ability to become deeply involved in a social situation is enhanced by membership, whereas your ability to distance yourself from interactions you observe, or in which you participate, may be inhibited by being a member. Remember the Martian and the Convert roles (F. Davis, 1973) that we described in chapter 6? The Convert makes unfamiliar actions and situations familiar by becoming deeply involved, whereas the Martian tries to make everything strange or unfamiliar, so as not to impose his or her own cultural knowledge on the situation. In any given study, you will want to be "both or either" of these roles (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 23). Don't expect to always be the Convert or always be the Martian.

Membership is partly a matter of knowing the cultural rules of the situation that you intend to study: If you are a member, you may already know those rules before you begin the study; or you may intend to learn as you go if you are an outsider. Anthropologists call these emic and etic views of culture, respectively (J. A. Anderson, 1987). An **emic view** holds that the participants' understanding of what they are doing in the situation is the most useful or important. An **etic view** prefers the patterns of behavior that are available to the outside observer.

Think back to Y. Y. Kim et al.'s (1998) analysis of identity among American Indians in Oklahoma (from chapter 5, "What Counts as Communication Data"). Y. Y. Kim et al. combined the emic and etic perspectives: Their six-member research team consisted of "three members who had Indian backgrounds and were long-time residents of Oklahoma. One of the three was an active, full-blooded Kiowa. The other three non-Indian members were of Asian, Black, and Irish backgrounds" (Y. Y. Kim et al., p. 259). In addition to the research team, 26 Indian students served as interviewers and coders, and 17 Indian residents served as community informants.

If your research claim concerns the rules that participants in a social situation use to construct and interpret their own and others' behaviors, then the emic, or insider perspective, may be your best bet for studying culture and communication. After all, insiders possess at least two kinds of cultural knowledge: **Explicit cultural knowledge** is used to interpret experience, or to read cultural artifacts, physical environments, and behavior and events (Spradley, 1980). **Tacit cultural knowledge** is used to generate behavior in culturally intended ways including taking actions, feeling, and using cultural artifacts (e.g., what to wear, buy, eat, etc.).

We hope that the concepts of emic and etic perspectives, and explicit and tacit cultural knowledge, help you to see why many ethnographers feel that the researcher who is more of a cultural insider is more credible. Regardless of your own degree of membership, you will need to evaluate the credibility of your key informants. The people with whom you interact, those you observe and interview, must be good representatives of their group or culture. They should represent different types of participants in that setting (i.e., different roles) if you are to capture the full range of subjective meanings available to members.

Both you and your informants enact your degree of membership when you competently recognize and perform culturally appropriate communication (Dollar, 1995, 1999). Your abilities to recognize and perform a range of communicative practices, to avoid making blunders or mistakes in communication and to recognize violations when they occur, as well as to be playful with cultural language (e.g., jokes, teasing), all demonstrate your degree of membership (Dollar, 1995, 1999). Of course, recognizing these communicative patterns is different from being able to *perform* culturally competent communication such as interacting competently with members you do not already know or making a joke others in the culture will recognize and appreciate. Those competencies will be especially relevant if you are conducting performance ethnography since you will be trying to recreate verbal and nonverbal elements of communicative acts and events that you witnessed in the field, later, in your public performance(s). If you or your key informants cannot recognize or perform the subtle variations in cultural communication, then the plausibility of your interpretations about the situation or setting will be threatened.

Being honest about your own degree of membership and working to locate and build relationships with credible key informants are both related to faithfulness. Even if you and your key informants are members of the culture you study, lack of faithfulness can threaten your credibility as an ethnographic researcher. Let's take a look at what you can do to be a faithful ethnographic researcher.

Faithfulness

No matter how much training and experience you have as a researcher, no matter what your degree of cultural membership, inevitably there will be limits to your credibility. As the measuring instrument during field data collection, your memory, hearing, and recognition skills will all influence the credibility of the data you collect and the interpretations you make of those data. Even though some of these limits on your credibility are physical or biological (such as memory or hearing), some are limits of faithfulness, your steadfast commitment to represent the participants' (or your own) meanings fully and fairly. Recognizing and acknowledging these sorts of limitations is part of operating faithfully as an ethnographer.

Faithfulness is further achieved by spending enough time in the field, going over field notes many (rather than a few) times, maintaining close and trusting relationships with key informants, and searching for additional sources of data to corroborate those already considered (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Spradley, 1980). Your faithfulness paves the way for you to make plausible interpretations.

Plausible Interpretations

Recall that plausible interpretations are reasonable and likely truths—they are not necessarily *valid,* in the discovery paradigm sense, as one objectively verifiable truth. After reading this much of the chapter, you should already be able to articulate some ways that ethnographic methods work to develop plausible interpretations.

First, due to membership and sustained participant observation, you can refine your ethnographic interpretations over time, allowing them to benefit from insights you gain in additional data collection or analysis. Second, in your interviews with key informants, you will use participants' phrasing and vocabulary whenever possible, thus increasing your chances of tapping into the emic view of the situation and decreasing your chances of being misinterpreted by participants. Third, the everyday settings within which your participant observations occur should increase the relevance of the behaviors you observe, relative to more contrived settings like an experimental laboratory. Fourth, your self-monitoring process during data analysis requires you to continually question the data and your interpretations of it. All four of these advantages of ethnographic research were pointed out by LeCompte and Goetz (1982, p. 43) when they argued that ethnographic research had superior internal validity, relative to survey or experimental research methods.

In conducting ethnography, you probably will triangulate data as another way to ensure plausible interpretations so that you can compare interpretations of what things mean across more than one data source (e.g., self-reports and other-reports, behavioral observations, archival texts, or cultural artifacts). Interviews with key informants and participant observations will provide you with instances of verbal and nonverbal communication as practiced in the speech community; archival documents might also provide such instances but in ways that are more public and verifiable. Artifacts provide additional sources from which you can triangulate interpretations about participant meanings. Artifacts also suggest concepts that you should analyze because they seem important to participants.

When you embrace the idea of multiple subjective realities, you have to consider whether the interpretations you are making are believable or can be supported with arguments and reasoning (Dollar, 1995; Fitch, 1994). In the remainder of this section, we show you how to make two kinds of arguments about the plausibility of your interpretations: The first is that you have adequate and coherent evidence for making those interpretations; the second is showing that you've thought about alternative interpretations, in other words, that you can address counterclaims.

Adequacy and Coherence of Evidence

The evidence you present in support of an ethnographic claim should be based on an adequate selection of the total corpus of data (Fitch, 1994). You will be arguing from the examples that you amassed in interviews, observations, and field notes, but having some part of your ethnographic data come from publicly accessible observation records will help you to bolster the plausibility of your interpretations because it will allow other people to check your subjective interpretations of the data against their own. In addition, you will need to include your consideration of "inferences and interpretations as well as concrete phenomena" when you report your data analysis (Fitch, 1994, p. 36). For example, when you present examples from interview transcripts as evidence of an interpretation that you are making, you will be allowing the reader of your research report to see the communicative phenomenon of interest, how that event was represented in the data set, and your analytical inferences. That will allow your readers to "decide for themselves whether or not to believe [your] account of what it is that a particular group of people are doing at any given time (McDermott, Gospodinoff, & Aron, 1978, p. 245).

Philipsen (1977), the scholar most associated with EOS and EOC, has suggested three questions that you can ask yourself to test "the adequacy of statements which purport to represent the native's view" (p. 49):

> First, does the report use the native's own terms or verbatim description? Second, and failing the first test, do the ethnographer's terms or descriptions refer to something that the native agrees is a recognizable feature of his social world, and if so, can the native person give it a name? Third, does the native person agree that the ethnographer's insight enables him (the native) to better understand his own social world? (p. 49)

Of course, ethnographers always allow room for more than one plausible interpretation of a situation or phenomenon. Paying attention to other possibly valid interpretations is another way to ensure that your interpretations of ethnographic data are plausible.

Negative Case Analysis

The second way to ensure plausible interpretations in ethnographic research is to deal with **counterclaims**—other interpretations that could be supported by your data. Considering what other claims your data might be used to support is especially relevant when you are coding or reducing data into categories or themes. As you organize instances of talk into categories, consider all the instances of talk that don't fit into any one of your categories. If there are too many of those instances, then perhaps your overall data set does not support that interpretation adequately. Perhaps another interpretation will make better use of the data (Agar, 1983). You might try playing with more than one category scheme to see which one better fits your total corpus of data.

You should also search out disconfirming observations, if they do not readily appear in your analysis of the data, to ensure that your interpretations are plausible. Refer back to our discussion of negative case analysis in chapter 6, "Warrants for Research Arguments." Consider whether you need to collect more observations using deviant case sampling (Patton, 1990), that is, returning to the field and trying to find instances of data that do not fit the interpretation you have tentatively identified. To the degree that no such instances of communicative data can be located, your interpretations are warranted as plausible.

Now that you have some idea how you might demonstrate the plausibility of your interpretations, you will want to think about the degree to which your findings are transferable, the last warrant for interpretive ethnographies.

Transferable Findings

Interpretive researchers have as a goal "producing meaning-centered investigations of social life that can be coherently tied to other such investigations" (Fitch, 1994, p. 36). In this section, we help you think about whether, and how, the insights from your ethnographic study might transfer, or be applicable to, another group or culture. In addition, we consider how insights from your study might transfer to public performances for performance ethnography.

The confirmability, relevance, and generality of your interpretations and inferences all contribute to transferability. Let's look at each of these concepts in turn.

Confirmability means that the findings you posit, based on your analysis of data, can be substantiated by another person who had similar access to the same data or evidence. This is somewhat akin to *agreement among judges*, a form of content validity we outlined in chapter 6, and that is used by discovery researchers. Fitch's (1994) argument that researchers ought to try to make claims for which at least part of the data come from publicly accessible observation records comes in part from the desire for confirmability. You can use Carbaugh's (1988) *performance tests* (which we first mentioned in chapter 6, "Warrants for Research Arguments") to establish confirmability. To do so, you will need to return to your data collection setting and ask members to explicitly confirm the terms, forms of address, or other interpretations you have developed from the data. Alternatively, you can simply try out those interpretations in conversation with members; if they seem to understand your performance, or do not show any signs of objecting to your performance, then you have some evidence that your findings are confirmable.

Relevance means that your interpretations are germane or salient to the people in the group or culture that you are studying. An interpretation or conclusion is only relevant if it matters to the participants. You should be able to show how participants orient to and signal others about the communication practices that you are describing, interpreting, or evaluating (McDermott et al., 1978). Perhaps members reference the context for their own behaviors; they may hold one another accountable to proceed in contextually appropriate ways, or their collective positioning and actions may indicate what they are trying to accomplish together. Your ability to represent these matters in your research report will make your interpretations relevant and more likely transferable as a result. For example, if you can show how one participant orients to the immediately preceding action of another member, as a way of making sense of culturally situated behavior, then your insight may be relevant to a conversation analyst who is working at a microlevel to understand that particular bit of *sequence organization* (Schlegoff, 2006).

Finally, to establish **generality** means that you try to make interpretations and inferences that apply to more than one participant (or moment) in the communicative group or culture you studied. One way to do this is by faithfully basing your claims on the total corpus of data rather than one or two isolated observations within a data set. Another way is to use the same descriptive framework in more than one study, so that the findings from multiple studies can be compared with one another, as EOS scholars do with Hymes's (1962, 1974a)

SPEAKING mnemonic. In this way, general interpretations about communication in more than one group may be discerned either by you or by other researchers using the same framework you used in your study.

Coherence and Researcher Positionality for Critical Ethnographic Research

As we mentioned at the start of this chapter, ethnographic research in communication bridges the interpretative and critical paradigms: EOS and EOC studies nearly always follow interpretative paradigm assumptions and values, but autoethnography and performance ethnography can correspond to either the interpretative or critical paradigm.

If your ethnographic project includes claims of evaluation and reform, you should integrate the values and standards of the interpretative and critical paradigms. In this section, we give you some examples from published works to show you how the critical paradigm warrants of coherence and researcher positionality can be demonstrated in critical ethnographic research.

Coherence

When you conduct a critical empirical study of communicative action using ethnographic methods, you evaluate communication and suggest how it might be changed to interrupt hegemonic power relations. In that case, you will need to show clear and logical connections between the data you analyzed (participant observations, interviews, texts) and the power relations you aim to change. A theoretic perspective may help you to make those connections. For example, Y. Y. Kim et al. (1998) began their analysis of communication among Oklahoma Indians with two broad categories of identity, Berry's (1990) identity modes and Kim's (1995a, 1995b) cultural-intercultural continuum. Similarly, Mayer's (2005) essay on the role of whiteness as a concept absent from most ethnographic audience research used poststructuralist theories (see chapter 15 for more on poststructuralism) to argue that ethnographers have essentialized whiteness as either a form of structural dominance or as an individual vulnerability. If you read Y. Y. Kim et al. (1998) or Mayer (2005) in full, you will get a better idea how using one or more previously developed theories could help you to establish clear and logical relationships among different forms of evidence in your ethnographic project. Of course, as a critical researcher, you will have to ask yourself, "*For whom is my narrative coherent?*" A critical essay or a piece of performative writing (e.g., a poem) undoubtedly will be more coherent for some audiences than for others.

Researcher Positionality

Carolyn Ellis (2004) is one well-known autoethnographic researcher in communication studies. C. Ellis's (2004) methodological novel about autoethnography, *The Ethnographic I: The Methodological Novel About Autoethnography,* exemplifies the standard of researcher positionality as a warrant for ethnographic research. C. Ellis has been applauded and chastised for revealing a great deal about herself in her autoethnographic writing, for making friends with the people she studies, and for fictionalizing characters in the novel based on some of the students in her autoethnography course at the University of South Florida. Each of those choices, and other researchers' freedom to disagree with them, make C. Ellis's position as a researcher explicitly relevant in her writing and underscore critical researchers' values of voice and liberation.

In fact, autoethnography demands that you make your positionality as a researcher explicitly available to those who read your critical essay or attend performances based on your data collection and analysis (Pelias, 2003). So even if your autoethnographic claims do not include explicit evaluations or suggest reforms of communication, you should disclose your standpoint (i.e., your material, social, and symbolic roles in the situation or group you are studying). For example, A. F. Wood and Fassett's (2003) autoethnography of identity, power, and technology in communication classrooms included quotes from student e-mails, as well as italicized reflections of the authors' thoughts and feelings, in the published research report.

In addition to disclosing your standpoint as a researcher, you may want to disclose your reasons for doing a critical ethnographic project as a way of warranting researcher positionality. Crawford's (1996) essay on personal ethnography provides an illustration: He recounts a swimming game among five Peace Corps volunteers in Africa, that ended in the death of one volunteer, who was eaten by a crocodile; that experience made Crawford "take the ethnographic turn" as a researcher (p. 161).

Finally, your ability and willingness to articulate your standpoint will demonstrate your reflexivity as a critical ethnographic researcher: For instance, what has led you to collect particular kinds of evidence or to favor certain interpretations of the data? Obviously, a good *audit trail* and faithful, detailed field notes will help you to recover these concepts and represent them in your critical essay or performative writing.

Ethnographic Research Summary Table

Paradigm	Claims	Data	Warrants	Manuscript Format
Interpretive	Describe and interpret how cultural groups coordinate social actions and accomplish shared meaning	Participant observations, interviews with key informants, and texts/ artifacts collected in a social setting or situation	Researcher credibility, plausible interpretations, transferable findings	Research report (including selected data samples)
Critical	Describe and evaluate how cultural variations in speech codes implicate power relations and suggest how those relations should be reformed	Participant observations, interviews with key informants, and texts/ artifacts collected in a social setting or situation	Coherence, researcher positionality (i.e., standpoint + reflexivity)	Critical essay (i.e., empirical study of communicative action based on ideological critique)

Key Terms

Archival documents
Artifacts
Autoethnography
Case study
Coding
Codeswitching
Comment sheets
Communal function
Communication code
Communicative resources
Confirmability
Counterclaims
Culture
Data logging
Deviant case sampling
Emic view of culture
Emic vs. etic perspectives
Ethnographic interviews
Ethnography
Ethnography of communication
Ethnography of speaking
Etic view of culture
Explicit cultural knowledge
Explicit vs. tacit cultural knowledge
Face sheets
Faithfulness
Gaining access (or entry)
Gatekeepers
Generality
Grounded theory
Group
Interviewer training
Key informants
Macroethnography (vs. microethnography)
Naturalistic inquiry
Participant observation
Performance ethnography
Rapport
Relevance
Researcher credibility
Speech community
Sponsors
Tacit cultural knowledge
Transferability

Discussion Questions

1. Think about the cultures to which you belong. What interpretations are "common sense" for members of those cultures?
2. What do you think it means to "make the familiar strange"? What are some of your familiar messages or ways of interacting that might be "made strange" for ethnographic analysis?
3. Make a list of the speech communities to which you belong. What are some of the rules for speaking, and interpreting the speech of others, in one of these communities? Compare your list with those of your classmates. Do you see any commonalities?
4. Think about the groups in which you participate and communicate. Does codeswitching occur in those groups? How frequently? When do members switch from one way of speaking to another "code" and why?
5. Write a short essay describing the communication practices in your family of origin. Use the warrants described in this chapter (i.e., credibility, plausibility, and transferability) to evaluate your description. Is it adequate?

"Try It!" Activities

1. Participate in and/or observe a group or cultural scene for about 30 minutes.
   (a) Write down three research questions that you think might be investigated about the communication in this social situation (Spradley, 1980).
   (b) If you are a member of this group or culture, note what patterns or processes are likely to be misunderstood by an outsider in this situation.
   (c) If you are an outsider to this group or culture, try to notice what you do *not* understand in this setting.
2. Spend 2 or 3 hours visiting one of the social situations that you are considering for your ethnographic research (Spradley, 1980).
   (a) Try to identify 1 or 2 people that you suspect might be *key informants* in that setting and describe what led you to identify these people.
   (b) What initial topics or questions might you want to talk about with these key informants?
   (c) What artifacts or archival documents might you be able to use to triangulate your interviews with key informants?
   (d) What would you need to do to gain access to this setting?
3. With one of your classmates, take separate field notes in the same setting and then compare your notes with one another: What different observations did you record? How did those differences affect your interpretations of the situation? You might read Trujillo's (1999) "teaching ethnography with collaborative learning" for more on this.
4. After you have collected some ethnographic evidence and begun to write your research report, select one key interpretation that you are making of the situation or setting for this activity. See if you can complete these questions, regarding that interpretation:
   (a) Regarding Philipsen's (1977) tests of adequacy: Does your research report use the participant's own terms or verbatim descriptions of the communicative event or act that you are interpreting? If not, would the participant(s) at least recognize your terms or descriptions as referring to something they recognize in their social world?
   (b) Are there examples or instances in your entire data set that support very different interpretations than the one you have chosen for this exercise? If so, how might you account for those alternate examples (or counterclaims) in your research report?