Theory and Evidence in Cultural Anthropology

Chapter 3
Anthropological Theory

- Hypothesis:
- (Ember) …predictions of what might be found.
- …things or quantities that vary.
- …an *empirically testable statement* of relation between two or more variables.
Anthropological Theory

- Operational Definition
- How would you operationally define the statement (Ember) - ...(Whiting) societies with a low protein diet would have a long postpartum sex taboo.
- Amount of protein in the diet (Text pg.39)
- Length of postpartum sex taboo
- Chagnon Article -
Anthropological Theory

- Theory:
- ...explanations of laws and statistical associations.
- ...a comprehensive explanation of observed relationships between variables.
- Levels of Theories-
- Grand, Local, Middle Range
Anthropological Theories (Grand)

- Evolutionism
- Diffusionism
- American Historicism
- Functionalism
- Structural Functionalism
- Psychological Anthropology
- Neoevolutionism
Anthropological Theories

- French Structuralism
- Ethnoscientific
- Cultural Materialism
- Interpretive Anthropology
Evolutionism

Edward B. Taylor & Lewis Henry Morgan:
...all societies pass through a series of stages.

Edward B. Taylor- Posited that all cultures evolve from simple to more complex forms.

- Savagery
- Barbarism
- Civilization
Evolutionism

- Lewis Henry Morgan:
- **Lower savagery** - Earliest forms of humanity subsisting on fruits and nuts.
- **Middle savagery** - Discovery of fishing technology and use of fire.
- **Upper savagery** - Invention of the bow and arrow.
Evolutionism

- Lewis Henry Morgan:
  - **Lower barbarism** - Began with the art of pottery making.
  - **Middle barbarism** - Began with the domestication of plants and animals (OW), and irrigation cultivation in the New World.
  - **Upper barbarism** - Smelting of iron/iron tools.
Evolutionism

- Lewis Henry Morgan:
- Civilization - Began with the invention of the phonetic alphabet and writing.
Diffusionism

- Grafton Elliot Smith/W.J. Perry:
- **English School**-
- ...held that all culture traits found anywhere in the world were first invented in Egypt and subsequently spread to other parts of the world.
Diffusionism

- Fritz Graebner/Wilhelm Schmidt:
- **German School**-
- ...suggested that a small number of different cultural complexes called culture circles, (Kulturkreise), had served as sources of cultural diffusion.
Methods in Research

- Preparing for fieldwork:
  - Obtain funding
    - Social Science Research Council
    - National Science Foundation (Scientific Merit)

- Health Precaution
  - Inoculation against major diseases in host country.
Methods in Research

- Permission/clearance from host government (Visa)
  - Not be an embarrassment, politically sensitive
- Language Proficiency
  - Should learn language (when possible) before leaving
- Personal Business/Details
  - Insurance policy, home, family
Data Gathering Techniques

- Participant Observation-
- (The technique which is used most extensively in Anthropology)
- …living among the people being studied-observing, questioning, and taking part in the important events of the group.
Participant Observation

- Problems with Participant Observation:
  - The very nature of participant observation precludes a large sample size.
  - Hard to code and categorize. (HRAF)
  - Problems in recording.
  - The Obtrusive Effect - you thrust yourself into the culture-change what is taking place.
Types of Data Gathered

- **Census Taking:**
  - Population, age, sex, marital status, household composition, age/sex relationships

- **Mapping:**
  - Locate people, material culture, (villages, fields, pasture, livestock), environmental features, (rivers, lakes, mountains)
Types of Data Gathered

- **Document Analysis:**
  - Public records, newspapers, diaries, missionaries, scientific publications.

- **Genealogies:**
  - Writing down relatives of informants, kinship relationships, how they are referred to, addressed and treated.
Types of Data Gathered

- **Photographic Data:**
- **Proxemic Analysis:**
  - ...how people in different cultures distance themselves from one another in normal interaction.
- **Event Analysis:**
  - ...documenting an event as it takes place.
    - (Fight, puberty rite, cooking, marriage, etc)
Narrative Ethnography

- Recent trend in ethnographic fieldwork-
- *Narrative Ethnography*-
- …focuses on the interaction between the anthropologist and the informants.
- *Into The Heart* – Kenneth Good
- *Spirit Of The Rainforest* – Mark Ritchie
- *Savages* – Joe Kane
- *Tales Of A Shaman’s Apprentice* – Mark Plotkin