

Popping My Collar: Applying Anthropology to the Field of Design and  
Marketing

By  
Kayleigh Helene Platz

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## **Author's Declaration Page**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the relationship between anthropological research methods and business, marketing and research design. It is based on participant observation and semi-structured

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“Life is infinitely stranger than anything the mind could invent...” (Arthur Conan Doyle).

## **Dedication**

To my mum and dad, and the light that was always at the end of the tunnel.

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## Chapter 1

Research in itself can be treacherous and misleading. Often people give answers they think the questioners want to hear or that they believe make them appear connoisseurs or scholarly thinkers. Women have been known to vow they would have nothing but the simplest, most modern design for their table silver, then in an effort to create an heirloom buy a rococo pattern that might have graced Marie Antoinette's dinner table (Dryfuss 1955: 65).

### **Introduction**

Ethnography is a hallmark of anthropological research. Even the term 'ethnography' can conjure up the image of an anthropologist immersing himself in an unknown region of the world surrounded by perceived natives of a tribe unknown to anyone but themselves. Once back from his stay, the anthropologist will publish a book that shares the stories of these people. This romanticized version of anthropology has been a mainstay of the field because it has allowed for a fully developed story of a culture to be researched, lived, transcribed and written about by the anthropologist. This image has captured the imagination of the public and academia alike both positively and negatively. The anthropologist enters the field open to all experiences, and does not enter the field intent on only answering certain questions that pertain to a focalized answer, although focalized answers will be found.

While this type of field work offers a clear cut picture of the experiences of an anthropologist, and furthers the understanding of a culture, tribe or grouping

of individuals, it often needs some alterations to be used outside of the realms of academia. The time constraints are often one factor that constricts the benefits of anthropological ethnography from being fully explored in other avenues that it could be useful in. Ethnographic methods are also limited by the very theory that grounds it as an art. For example, a good ethnographer is one who is open to the possibilities that surround her, and not focused on a specific end goal or result. An ethnographer must be able to see the whole picture as a puzzle, whether that be of a people in Papua New Guinea or a group of drug dealers in Harlem. While these skills are crucial to being a good anthropological ethnographer, the skills are not easily repackaged into other disciplines. Many other fields do not have the luxury, or grounding, to be able to be open to the experience of ethnography as described above. Rather, ethnographic methods are tools that are used as a means to the ends. It is the process of ethnography, rather than the experience of ethnography, that is most beneficial to other fields of study that incorporate the method.

The method of ethnography, alongside other anthropologically-based qualitative methods, is being selected as a tool to further understanding by many other academic fields such as English, communications studies, marketing, and business studies (See Kipnis 2006; Mariampolski 2006; Mead 2007). This is significant, not only because of the spread of anthropological methods into other



fields, but because while anthropological methods such as ethnography are being spread and used by other disciplines, they are also being consumed and assimilated by these other fields. The method of ethnography is being redefined and reutilized for and by other disciplines. As is seen in Mariampolski (2006) and Pruitt and Aldin (2006), this is a usurpation of the anthropologist's ethnography. Anthropologists, although watching their research methods become popularized and utilized in a wide arena of research, are experiencing their terms of research being altered and corrupted in meaning through these other fields.

It is significant to see the tools of anthropology being used in both a modern and practical application as is seen in Mariampolski. Anthropology, once the pop-star of the social sciences (see Mead 2001) in connecting public issues to the academic realm, has slowly been relegated to back hallways and forgotten buildings. Anthropological methods are seen as dusty and irrelevant by the freshmen of universities whom are more interested in Facebook, a flashy president-elect and global warming, rather than understanding the history of the world, the people in it, and the way today's cultures interact with each other in the global village of planet earth.

It is time for the field of anthropology to rediscover its own excitement. In order to do that, the discipline must refresh itself with what has made it so popular in the past and the reasons why. Anthropology is both a practical field,

and a field that has the potential to assist and advocate for individuals, groups and communities in the world. While anthropologists have been long-known to study the 'other' (and then relate the "other" back to his or her own culture) anthropologists are needed to study the dynamic complexity that is 'us'. If the world has become a global village, then the anthropologist is the traveller with an unlimited passport. We, as anthropologists, should and must study anyone that is of interest to us, regardless of where they are situationally placed in relation to ourselves. Study our neighbours, study our partners, study ourselves; this is the only way to reclaim a prestigious anthropological past that has been shattered by other disciplines and reassembled by these other disciplines.

This thesis was found in examination of the very process of the movement of anthropological methods away from the actual discipline. I am both a trained anthropologist and rhetorician. The seeds of this thesis were planted when I first began to use anthropological methods in my own rhetorical research, and then saw my research presented by individuals with neither anthropological training nor anthropological understanding. The people I speak of, and indeed quote further in this essay, are from the fields of media studies, law, business, English and communications to name a few, and they are best sellers in their fields as well as recognized as popular writers who can reach a mass audience.

Not only are these individuals utilizing anthropological methods to their own ends, but they are then teaching said methods under the guise of their own discipline. The most aggressive field to discover the importance and unique traits brought about by anthropological study is that of business and marketing. Anthropological methods have been claimed and repackaged by business scholars and savvy marketing professionals. These professionals know the value of ethnography, and know how to market it outwards.

Anthropologists must recognize the importance of what is occurring in other fields with anthropological methods and research. Not only is this stimulating research, interesting research and futuristic research, but can also be incorrect research, hurried research and flawed research. Anthropologists have, in many regards, defined themselves as an antiquated discipline, out of touch with the modern academic currency. Other disciplines are picking up the strengths in anthropology and redefining them. There is a place in the modern business world, for example, for anthropological methods. For the methods to be both successful and beneficial to public in general, anthropology must find its place in this new world.

There is a modification of meaning of ethnography in the business world that is closely related to a perceived value. There is a struggle between the value of an artefact and the value of a process which is stripping away some of the

intricacy, method, and ritual of the traditional anthropologist's ethnographies.

The term ethnography is used in the business world, and has been given a different meaning than that which is traditionally used by anthropologists (Mariampolski 2006).

This thesis aims to answer a central research question through both participant observation and semi-structured interviews. It will explore the role of anthropological methods in the private sector, specifically the market research, research and design, and marketing and advertising sector.

The relationship between quantitative and qualitative research is a major theme in this thesis. Through this thesis I have explored the similarities and differences between qualitative and quantitative research, and ultimately the powerful research results that stem from a considerate blending of the two research methods.

**Central Research Questions:**

What is the benefit of applying anthropological skills such as ethnographic analysis, participant observation, structured and semi-structured interviews to the business sector of marketing, market research, and design, and how are anthropological methods and theories being translated and utilized in the larger arena of the corporate culture? I aim to understand the perception of anthropology and how its methods are used in a corporate setting.

## Chapter 2

### Ethics

As a research anthropologist based in design and marketing, I believe that I do my research with the aim of making things easier for others. This same research can, admittedly, be used “to push people’s buttons” by other researchers and advertisers. However, I hope that my research will be used to design better products with a belief that my clients will continue to be ethical in their business approaches. Obviously this scenario must be thought of every time I agree to sign on to any private sector research.

While I can think of many circumstances that can result in an unethical use of my research, I have still not answered the question of whether it is ethical for individuals or companies to benefit from an anthropologist’s research. Do anthropologists sell out their informants by, in many ways, handing over private information to a corporation? My answer is maybe. It must be stressed that in these market research situations, where an anthropologist is being paid to be in the field by a major company, the informants are aware that there is some sort of end-result to be gained by a company from the interview the anthropologist is conducting. This is not hidden. However, each case needs to be evaluated in a case - by - case situation prior to an anthropologist to be able to sign up for work. The AAA states, “In both proposing and carrying out research, anthropological

researchers must be open about the purpose(s), potential impacts, and source(s) of support for research projects with funders, colleagues, persons studied or providing information, and with relevant parties affected by the research. Researchers must expect to utilize the results of their work in an appropriate fashion and disseminate the results through appropriate and timely activities. Research fulfilling these expectations is ethical, regardless of the source of funding (public or private) or purpose (i.e., "applied," "basic," "pure," or "proprietary")" (*Code of Ethics* 1998: 2). The AAA also notes that, "While anthropologists may gain personally from their work, they must not exploit individuals, groups, animals, or cultural or biological materials. They should recognize their debt to the societies in which they work and their obligation to reciprocate with people studied in appropriate ways" (*Code of Ethics* 1998: 3).

The anthropologist's role can sometimes be defined as the protector or the advocator of the repressed, the voiceless and the abused. Often the anthropologist is perceived as one who takes a stand against the big businesses, governments and militaries that are negatively affecting the afore-mentioned groups. I believe this role, which is still an active role for anthropologists, is crucially important in order to bring situations and scenarios to light in a manner that is safe for these victims, because so much of anthropology is conducted with anonymous informants who can share their stories without fear of attack, as well

as tell untold stories that have not been voiced before. However, I do not believe it is the only role an anthropologist should feel he or she can take in order to make an impact on people. An anthropologist may be just as effective, if not indeed more effective, working within an organization. If an anthropologist is able to do research that can create a better product, or aid in an issue such as speeding up waiting times at an hospital (Ervin and Holyoak 2006) than an anthropologist is still helping to better the informants that he or she has interviewed, regardless of the money transactions that may occur between the beginning of the research and the end results.

The private sector is addressed in the AAA's ethics manual. The AAA mandates that an ethical anthropologist must:

In all dealings with employers, persons hired to pursue anthropological research or apply anthropological knowledge should be honest about their qualifications, capabilities, and aims. Prior to making any professional commitments, they must review the purposes of prospective employers, taking into consideration the employer's past activities and future goals. In working for governmental agencies or private businesses, they should be especially careful not to promise or imply acceptance of conditions contrary to professional ethics or competing commitments. (*Code of Ethics* 1998: 5)

This offers a safe way for anthropologists to deal with entering the private sector and working well in the private sector with out harming their professional code of anthropological ethics.



## Chapter 3

### **The Public Issue**

#### **Significance of study**

#### **Breaking Through the Ivory Tower**

Applied anthropology is viewed as a distant fifth field in many anthropological institutes. Its academic rejection is based in the fact that it is not seen as deeply rooted in theory, nor does it further academic debate. Rather, many applied anthropologists work in the private sector where they are seen by other anthropologists as furthering corporate domination. Applied anthropology is defined as “the application of anthropological methods to social problems and the shaping of policy” (Calhoun 2002). The potential for anthropologists to be both academic and applied seems to trouble many academic anthropologists and is very difficult for applied anthropologists to achieve. Academic anthropologists can dabble in applied anthropology as long as they return to their academically funded research. Applied anthropologists that work in the corporate world may have difficulties achieving access to academic grants that would allow them to fund academic-based research. In their analysis of the history of applied anthropology, Rylko-Bauer *et al* notes that, “topmost on the list of ongoing critiques of applied anthropology is the assertion that it is atheoretical. This derives partly from the perception that applied documents, such as project

reports and evaluations, often focus on hard data, well-defined methods, and concise policy recommendations of use to decision makers; not surprisingly, theory used in such research is often hidden” (2006: 184). At its base it seems that applied anthropology must choose between academic theory-based work and real-world report-summary based work. Currently in applied anthropology you can not have your cake and eat it too.

However diametrically opposed the situation may appear to many academic anthropologists, there is a movement for many public anthropologists to research and publish work that is both public and academic. Researchers are going knee-deep into the fields of business, commerce, health, and pop-culture, and they are arguing, with theory-based academics, that their methodology is just as sound and just as in-depth as quantitative based sciences (See Mariampolski 2006; Schultz 1995; and Goffee 1996). The movement of “studying up” (as it is termed) is challenging many academics’ views on anthropology as a discipline as well as challenging many corporations’ views on how to understand and utilize the social sciences to better their own profits as well as their interaction with staff and customers. By stepping into the field at an intense level, “practitioners can gain insights into policies and programs often only accessible to those willing to go ‘inside’. The question of whether one should work as outside critic or inside ameliorator within arenas of policy and power

remains a fundamental dilemma in anthropology. The former affords more rhetorical freedom but rarely results in significant social change. The insider role, in contrast, has limitations and risks (such as co-optation), but it does offer some opportunities for positive social impact.” (Rylko-Bauer *et al* 2006:183). The action of becoming an insider and an active participant is unique to applied anthropology, for in classical anthropology the role is to never become an insider but rather to always remain an observer. For many practicing applied anthropologists (or organizational anthropologists as called in the UK) often working for a company becomes just as relevant as researching a company (see Chapman 2001, O’Neil 2001, Parker 2001, Passmore 2006 and Benson 2001 on views of working for a company and researching a company).

Rylko-Bauer *et al* (2006) are deeply focused on the split between theory and applied work. They argue that there needs to be an acceptance by academic anthropologists of the anthropological theory that is utilized in applied work, as the anthropologists in question have had the same theory based training as academic anthropologists, which is what is needed for applied anthropology to be both accepted into the academic realm as well as to become far more useful and pertinent to the public sector. This will take a change in both mind-set and in the way anthropologists view each other. As Rylko-Bauer *et al* note, this movement will require “a willingness to take stands on pressing human issues,

to be ethically and politically subjective while methodologically objective, and to accept advocacy (however it is being defined) as part of a disciplinary framework that already values theory and research excellence" (Rylko-Bauer *et al* 2006: 186). The demand that Rylko-Bauer *et al* put forth is an anthropology that is willing to take a stand and break free from both the perceived academic boundaries as well as the shadow that academic anthropologists have cast against applied anthropology. Rylko-Bauer *et al* argue that the way to both strengthen anthropology as a field of relevance as well as to expand applied anthropology into sharing meaningful space within academic anthropology is to showcase important world-applicable research that is clearly grounded in theory. Public anthropology and applied anthropology need to reassess their focus from activist anthropology, which has garnered attention over the past few decades as a step between academic and applied anthropology and to recognize that anthropology has always been focused on public interest and the aid of public opinion.

Due to the varied ethnic backgrounds, range in economic stature and strong aboriginal population, many Canadian anthropological scholars have been naturally predisposed to applied anthropology due to the rich resources surrounding them in Canada. Medical anthropology for instance, is a growing field in Canadian anthropology (Ervin and Holyoak 2006: 138). And yet, as Ervin

and Holyoak note (2006: 149), the only applied anthropology that garners attention in the Canadian press, at Canadian universities, and in anthropological programs is advocacy anthropology. Ervin and Holyoak note that the scope of applied anthropology in Canada must be expanded beyond advocacy for aboriginal groups (2006:149) because although it is important work that must be fulfilled and researched, it is narrowing the perceived scope of applied anthropological possibilities. I feel that the dialogue that Ervin and Holyoak have begun can be furthered. Ervin and Holyoak want to utilize applied anthropology as a useful tool through the analysis of Canadian sub-cultures and the trade/farming dilemmas ongoing both out West and out East in Canada. While Ervin and Holyoak suggest beneficial ideas to Canadian academia, they both continue to support applied anthropology as an activism arena. I argue that activism comes through all anthropology and is an innate aspect of anthropology, and that applied anthropology does not need to focus on an activist arena in order to be seen as relevant. Rather, well researched and conducted applied anthropology situated in any cultural sector from homeless immigrants to the private business sector will be advocacy through working and standing for the public that anthropologists study. My research can help illustrate the role of applied anthropology in the business sector and corporate culture.

## Chapter 4

### Literature Review

#### Ethnographic Theory

Ethnographic theory is intimately tied to anthropological theory, and is indeed thought to be the founding of modern anthropological study (see Malinowski 1965 and Mead 2001). Ethnography, literally the writing of people, has a variety of methods which anthropologists are taught first to understand in early undergraduate courses, and then to practise, often only in senior anthropological courses. The many methodology books surrounding ethnography, such as *Anthropological Research: The Structure of Inquiry* (Pelto and Pelto 1978), *The Ethnographic Interview* (Spradley 1979), and *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing* (Wolcott 2008) are dense books which offer methodology, applications and case stories, which lead a reader through the process. Ethnographic theory must therefore be studied in order to be well-applied. Cultural anthropologists seriously train for ethnography, much like athletes train. An anthropology student is allowed to compete in the field of ethnographic fieldwork among strangers once prior books are read on the subject, prep courses in ethnography are taken, and in-class ethnographic exercises are practised.

There have been changes and alterations to the methodology of ethnographic field work since Boas first recorded his notes. Digital technology

has allowed for a far more precise recording of the ethnographer's experiences and interviews. Both audio and visual recording can be made of interviews, and indeed a picture of an informant or a recorded voice of an informant can be crucial in aiding the ethnographer to recall an interview after time has passed. The advent of new technology also gives rise to new types of ethnography. Visual ethnography and virtual ethnography are two newer subfields of ethnography which are both taking into account the new technology and its capabilities, as well as how humans are interacting with the new technology and living alternate lives with the new technology. To further the newer approaches to ethnography there are such books as *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Denzin 1997) which examines the modernist and postmodernist approaches to writing in other fields and applies these methods to anthropology. Most notably is Denzin's application of a Joycian reading to ethnography.

Other social science fields also utilize the methodology of ethnography, such as communications studies and sociology, which lead to books that explore the specifics of ethnography in a certain place, or offer a more specific stylisation of ethnography as may be needed in an alternative field. These books are often based in anthropological theory, and acknowledge this founding. These books seek to apply the method of ethnography to answer questions. Such books

include Moeran's *Ethnography at Work* (2006), LeCompte *et al.*'s *Analyzing and Interpreting Ethnographic Data* (1999), Erickson and Stull's *Doing Team Ethnography: Warning and Advice* (1998) and Clough's *The End(s) of Ethnography: From Realism to Social Criticism* (1992).

This broad range of texts creates the textual quilting of anthropology's ethnographic research methods and analysis. Because anthropological ethnography allows for a discourse between the researcher and the informants, as well as extended periods of observation and participant observation, it is a natural method to be applied to the fields of marketing, market research, and design. While ethnographic research methods are not the sole domain of anthropology, it is well-utilized by anthropologists as a complement to other anthropological research methods. Designing new products is a hands-on project that requires a designer to recognize a need or a flaw in an original artefact and then make it better. The field of design ethnography, therefore, was a natural progression of ethnography to the world beyond the industrial revolution.



## Design Ethnography

Anthropologists were, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century often hired to aid in research and design projects. In Henry Dreyfuss' *Designing for People* (1955), anthropologists are mentioned as a key member in research projects he worked on. *Designing for People* is a mini-history of the industrial design process in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century United States, for Dreyfuss began his career as a designer in 1920 (1955:28). Dreyfuss helped design telephone models for Bell and plumbing equipment for Crane. While his book is written as an autobiography, with his own sketches printed in the margin of the book, it still offers insight, methodology and instructions that can be used both in the classroom and in the field. Indeed, Dreyfuss even used early persona work to design his products. The hypothetical end-users Joe and Josephine, as he called them, were created by "many years of research by [his] office, not merely into their physical aspects but into their psychology as well" (1955: 28-29, my brackets).

Design anthropology seemed to lose its popularity through the 1960s to the 1980s, which, throughout my interviews, was said to be addressed due to the rise in computer technology and an associated desire for pure scientific data to govern design as it governed computer technology. New material is being published, however, that is beginning to apply anthropological research to the design process once again.

My thesis supervisor, Gray Graffam, is one of the anthropologists who is actively beginning to apply anthropological research to the design process again. In his paper, "Towards a Design Anthropology" (2008) Graffam explores the history and meaning of design anthropology and focusing on the uses of design anthropology in a real-world business setting. Having business experience and an anthropological background, Graffam pulls from his own experience to expand the role of design anthropology into relevant and real world examples.

Heather Horst and Dan Miller use ethnography to study consumer patterns and consumption. In their most recent book, *Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication* (2006) they explore how one design has had such a large impact on how individuals now communicate with one another.

In *The Design of Everyday Things* (2002), Donald Norman analyses design and consumer behaviour. He relies on ethnographic research to conduct his design process and centers around human-centered products and services. While he may not be 'doing anthropology' he relies on anthropological research method to create better and superior designs.

A new book, *Do You Matter? How Great Design Will Make People Love your Company* by Brunner and Emery (2008) is a high-tech design book that somewhat re-invents the wheel anthropologically speaking. Clearly aimed at other

marketers and designers it illustrates how ethnography can make both a product and a brand more relevant to consumer's lives.

This return towards anthropological research becoming a relevant aspect of the private sector offers new opportunities for ethnographic theory to further develop and be refined as the needs and demands of ethnography as a practise change and shift to reflect the new "tribes" that anthropologists are studying.

## The White Collar

Corporate culture is not a new phenomenon in today's industrial world. Indeed, corporations have been in existence since the development of city-states in Mesopotamia. A class-structured society that is differentiated through economic and political control has led to the development of corporations that control the business sphere of industrial countries. Economists, throughout the last forty years, have widely studied these corporations. Social scientists have been seemingly remiss in studying the large class of corporate, white-collar business culture and the tactics used by these corporations to become successful and remain successful. Looking at the ethnographic expose, *Barbarians at the Gate*, by Burrough, shows how anthropologists and social scientists have begun to examine corporations in order to better understand how today's developed countries are experiencing life working for corporations and these corporations affect their daily lives. Major corporations now control much daily life for many humans in developed countries: the milk you drink in your morning coffee is manufactured, packaged and marketed by corporations, as is the car you drive to work, the computer you work at during your day, the sandwich you eat for lunch, and the magazine you pick up for leisure reading on your way home from work. Corporations and the marketing they employ have become an integral

part of our daily lives and cultures in developed countries such as Europe, the UK, the United States, Australia and Canada.

Specifically, anthropologists and other social scientists trained in anthropological methods have begun to analyze corporations and the marketing of corporations cross culturally in works such as Mead's *One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding* (2007), Schwartzman's *Ethnography in Organizations* (1992), Nicholson's *Executive Instinct Managing the Human Animal in the Information Age* (2000) and Hamada and Sibley's *Anthropological Perspectives on Organizational Culture* (1994). These books each examine a specific organization, such as Mead's analysis of the wedding industry and the marketing of fantasy to a culture, as well as a more general theoretical base about how corporate culture is being viewed through the anthropological lens.

Another branch of examination worth mentioning is the publishing of books that explore the use of anthropological methods in marketing as well as in corporate culture in general. Such examples range from Neuhauser's *Tribal Warfare in Organizations* (1989), and Wilcock's *Hunting and Gathering in the Corporate Tribe* (2004) which examine social archetypes and the representation of tribal structures in corporate culture and how these archetypes can be used to better both employees experience as well as their productivity. Wilcock also emphasises how important it can be to teach employees to understand the

different behaviours of their employees in hopes of creating a more secure cultural environment for the employees. I hope to expand the literature in this field by filling the gap that explores how anthropological skills and methods themselves are being utilized by major corporations not just using anthropological theory as a tool to examine the corporate cultures. I aim to link an examination of research methods and a hands-on ethnography of applied anthropology.

## **Finding Popular Support**

An area where applied anthropology has gained both credence and popularity is through pop culture ethnographies such as *The Female Thing: Dirt, Envy, Sex, Vulnerability* by Laura Kipnis (2006), and *One Perfect Day* by Rebecca Mead (2007). What many readers read without even realizing it is anthropology is dismissed as 'fluff' by many in the academic realm. While we certainly no longer live in a world where anthropologists are like celebrities to the media and the popular culture like Margaret Mead once was, it does no good to treat the authors of popular culture ethnographies as second-rate academics. It is important to remember those authors are the ones with higher readership outside of academia, and whose message is getting past the academic institute. For anthropology to become applied to the real world, the field must first remind many people exactly why anthropology is so important as a discipline to begin with. Anthropology has a lot of work to do in order to catch up with such pop culture dominants as social psychology. A main aspect of my intended research is to, like Benson (2001) and Passmore (2006), illustrate to both the academic world and the chosen applied setting exactly what is so unique to anthropological theory and training that other social sciences are not able to fulfill. It is interesting to note that both Benson and Passmore work in the private

sector, and both feel that they are able to fulfill their anthropological interests more fully in the private sector rather than in the academic sector.



## Studying Up

The art of writing ethnography has been linked with anthropological methods as a differentiation tool between anthropology and the other social sciences. Ethnographic research is beginning to be used in corporations as a tool to better understand clients and customers as well as to examine the actions behind a large customer base. Ethnographic research as a tool is being used to teach marketers how to better understand their customers in an interview study as well as how to read the information surrounding customers such as decorations, body language, architecture and design, *etc* (Mariampolski 2006). Ethnographies can be seen as a way to teach marketers anthropological skills as a tool to understanding cultures or sub-cultures that differ from them in order to better serve the customers. Examples of this include Mariampolski's *Ethnography for Marketers: A Guide to Consumer Immersion* (2006). This text looks ethnography in general as well as at corporations that utilize it as a research tool and how the corporations do so. These texts work hand in hand with such works as Nader's *Naked Science: Anthropological Inquiry into Boundaries, Power, and Knowledge* (1996) and Schultz's *On Studying Organizational Cultures: Diagnosis and Understanding* (1995) which use anthropological methods to study the culture of an organization. These two groupings of texts could be combined into one book that examines a corporation as a culture as well as looking at how that

corporation uses anthropological tool-sets in their business life. I believe this combination of the two modes of analyzing a corporation both through the methods the corporation uses to study their clients, as well as an analysis of the corporation through an anthropological lens will offer both a unique and rich reading of how corporate life and culture impacts the many people touched by them.

My thesis will contribute to the growing literature on applied anthropology related to the white-collar Canadian and American culture of social marketing by examining the very environment of organizations that use marketing, advertising, and research and design as well as how anthropological theory is being utilized at a private sector level, often by people with no background in anthropology.

## **Design and Marketing**

Why do the business researchers fare better than anthropologists in 'marketing' anthropological methods to fellow individuals in the business field? Is it that the business field perceives anthropologists as 'socialist hippies'? Has the anthropologist's own reputation endangered our transference of skill into other fields that makes it necessary for others to become expert in our own field in order to sell it better? One major reason may be simply that there are not enough anthropologists to fill the required need. Because of this lack of trained anthropologists, there are other disciplines stepping in to fill the void with their own version of the required work. For instance, market research, a discipline often used by business researchers, and the only branch of the social sciences where there is a need to make valid predictions, which can be seen by some to be a more scientifically sound research discipline than the other social sciences (Mariampolski 2006). Market research has a type of checks and balances that is relatively unknown to other branches in the social sciences. This is relevant, for it becomes a quantitative method due to the black and white boundaries that are necessary for it to be such a rigid field. I believe that this quantitative aspect of market research is what makes it appealing a discipline for individuals trained in quantitative analysis to begin with, although it is important to note here that anthropologists are trained in both qualitative and quantitative research

methods, and many marketing disciplines, while traditionally quantitatively focused, have begun to value qualitative research methods as well. Quantitative based market research does not allow the informant to become the central aspect of the research, whereas anthropological research almost demands it. I believe that, with design, and user design, becoming more central to market research, anthropological research methods will be central in better understanding how users experience and use the world around them.

To conclude my literature review, I must offer a final book, which although does not fully fit into the scope of my literature, theory or indeed thesis in a concrete manner, has been influential in the way I have arrived at my thoughts throughout the research and writing of my thesis. The book is Daniel Pink's *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers will Rule the World* (2006). The book was mentioned to me early on in my research by several of my informants. There was such intensity of support for the book that I too had to read it. The book's main thesis is simple; mainly there is a movement currently in the developed world where those trained in creative and humanistic disciplines are becoming more meaningful as employees in the workforce and in the world in general. This is, according to Pink, the age of "heart and art" (2006: 247). Pink believes that a Conceptual Age (2006: 49) is dawning which will require creators and empathisers, pattern recognizers, and meaning makers (2006: 1) to further

innovation and design. Pink notes that many holders of many jobs, which used to be praised for their job security and practicality, such as engineers, lawyers and accountants are now finding that their jobs can be outsourced, as the knowledge becomes outsourced (2006: 36). What is left, and what is meaningful, is that of the researcher, designer and educator. These individuals are not as easily outsourced because their knowledge is not learnt by rote, rather it is both culturally and value-based as specific to that culture.

Pink's thesis is a complete reversal from such books also currently popular such as Stephen Baker's *The Numerati* (2008), which focuses on the power of the number crunchers who market our on-line interests through complicated algorithms which track our every move and our every interest (2008: 14). I mention Baker's book because I think it is significant of the change of social interest occurring from quantitative numbers and facts, to Pink's book about holism and empathy. The discourse between quantitative research and qualitative research is occurring in mainstream literature as well as in the realms of academia.

What Pink is describing is a movement away from linear thinking and moving towards abstract thinking. This is big picture thinking, and thinking that requires an understanding of human motives, behaviours and desires. This is a movement towards the anthropological way of thinking.

## Chapter 5

### Methods

The main component of my research was carried out during the summer and fall of 2008. My research question was examined and answered through qualitative methods. These chosen methods are specific to an anthropological research method because they highlight the delicacy and thoroughness that anthropological methods allow in comparison to the sometime more static and number-focused results from quantitative methods. While sociologists also utilize qualitative methods in much of their research, as well as anthropologists, sociologists focus on society, patterns of social relationships and social interactions whereas anthropologists examine culture, and patterns of cultural relationships. It should be noted that for the purpose of this paper, culture is defined by Tylor's definition as, "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Welsh and Endicott 2003: xii). While the differences, in general, may be subtle, there are specific differences in the gathering and treatment of data between the two fields. Sociologists often utilize works such as focus groups, surveys and short interviews, and anthropologists tend to use such methods as life-history interviews, participant observation, and

ethnographic analysis, although it must be recognized that both social sciences do utilize both sets of techniques although not universally.

## Research Constraints

There have been several research constraints that I have had to accept and manage during the course of my research. I wish to address these constraints here and discuss how they have affected the outcomes.

Firstly, due to financial constraints, I offer a narrow perspective of both marketers and designers, who are using anthropological methods in order to research, refine and create artefacts. My research sector, centred on south-western Ontario, Canada, should not be seen as reflective of the entire global field of market research and design anthropology.

Secondly, time and interview scheduling constraints have limited the number of individual interviews that I was able to conduct during my chosen interview time. I planned on interviewing individuals in the corporate world whom often rescheduled interviews, or were unable to meet for several weeks on end. Sometimes, in order to get an interview, I had to alter my interview type, and depended on e-mail answers for several informants that allowed them to answer the questions at a time that best suited their schedules. While this is not the best option for an interview, it still delivered interesting results. I do not feel that the research suffered due to this approach.

I also cut down the number of interviews that I conducted. As it was harder than I had foreseen to schedule interviews with my informants, I had



choices to make once it became apparent that I would not meet my prescribed number of interviews in my given timeline: I could either extend the interview timeline, and therefore my research project in general; or alter my timeline in order to still complete my research project at the deadline. With the guidance of my thesis committee, I chose to end my interviews early, as it was felt by both me and my committee that I had been given a sufficient amount of information, and had reached the stage in my interviews where answers were becoming similar. It was felt that it was not necessary to continue interviews from the same pool that I was drawing from, and in order to expand the answers that I was receiving I would have to travel away from my area of research, which was not possible due to the afore-mentioned financial constraints.

These two research constraints have altered my perceived scope of the research project, but not the quality of my research.

## **Process**

My research was two-fold. I have conducted both participant observation of a market research project, and also conducted ethnographic interviews on my topic in general.

## **Participant Observation**

My participant observation was conducted during a six month period while I was employed on contract as an ethnographer for a local market research and advertising agency company, Quarry Integrated Communications. I was a member of a team researching user-behaviour media for a major telecommunications company. My thesis supervisor was the lead qualitative researcher on the team, and was influential in helping through the research process. I was intimately involved in conducting ethnographic interviews for the project, and then analyzing and writing up the interviews and final presentation to the client. During my research it was known to others that I had an interest in this type of work from an academic stand-point, and that I would be using parts of my experience in my thesis

I recorded my personal observation by hand. Indeed, due to required privacy constraints, I was not able to tape record any client-company meetings, or any team meetings. I respected the mantra “steal with your eyes and ears” in order to conduct my participant observation. I had to make sure that no

information would be included in my observations which would be able to identify either the client or the company and that no individual associated with either would end up in my research.

The main goals of my participant observation were to firstly gain real-world experience in conducting and applying anthropological research. I used this experience as a way to better understand what kind of role I would be required to take outside of academia. This was my first time conducting field work outside of the confines of the university that I am associated with, and was significant in that it showed me how the methods that I have learnt and studied for years must shift and evolve in order to meet requirements that arise in the field, which is an experience every researcher experiences the first time truly in field. This experience was invaluable in making me a better interviewer and a better observer.

Secondly my other goal in participating in this research project was to build my network of business contacts. Due to demands from the Research and Ethics department of my university, I would not be able to cold-call any individuals or companies that I desired to interview for the second part of my research; rather I had to gather informants through introductions and snow-ball sampling. My first rounds of contacts were many of my thesis supervisor's contacts who had worked with him on similar research on different projects.

These contacts were interested in my research and willing to share their own contacts and experiences. And often led me to other contacts

Finally, I was paid for this research, which makes me financially involved in the research. In my research I have aimed to be as unbiased and as neutral as possible, however I was not able to completely avoid being self-reflexive in some of my writing as I was both a paid participant in the research project as well as an unpaid observer.

## **Ethnographic Interviews**

I interviewed employees at local high-tech companies, both design and marketing based, that utilize ethnographers, or who plan to use ethnographers in the near future, in order to better understand the positives and negatives of the research from their perspective. I conducted 8 interviews. These interviews have helped me gain further understanding on how the terms 'ethnography' and 'qualitative research methods' are viewed by a non-academic research based group of individuals who utilize anthropological methods and claim them as their own. The work I will discuss pertains to anthropological approaches used by businesses and corporations, whether or not actually conducted by people trained in anthropology. My ethnography is based around formal and informal interviews from 8 people. I began by interviewing two contacts I had made at the local marketing company where I conducted my participant observation. From those contacts I requested to be connected with other individuals who had experience in the themes and methods which I was exploring. I chose not to limit my interviews to a certain type of employee; instead I sought out a varied group of individuals who all worked in the same field and used the same methods but for different end results.

While I interviewed my contacts at the marketing company I had worked for, I used this opportunity to ask questions about the research process which I

had not been able to ask during the actual research. I also asked my series of interview questions which I posed to all of my informants. I wanted to understand whether the process I had been a part of was the process as is normally conducted by such an organization. Although I had wanted to interview more people from that corporation, I was unable to make my schedule fit with theirs. I was also denied access to interview the major telecommunication client that I had just completed work for. It was felt that, as the work was still being discussed between employees higher up than me, and the client, that it would not be appropriate to interview the client. The marketing company also did not want me to change the way the client viewed the experience and the resulting data.

I then requested interviews from the main contacts I had formed through the company. These interviews sent me into a variety of different companies and toward employees with varied backgrounds, experiences, and views on what qualifies as good research. I continued to request contact with other individuals at the end of each interview. The people in this research community were eager to share their knowledge and experiences. I still have a list of contacts that I could conduct further research with, however at the time I was conducting my research many of them were unable to meet up with me for an interview. Many

of these contacts whom I did not contact were also outside of my geographical scope of interest.

I then branched out to interviewing specific personnel in research and marketing departments in local tech and marketing companies. Depending on the size of the company and the size of the research department which I was interviewing, I attempted to average one or two interviews per company in order to better reflect the size of the companies. Larger companies obviously had more specific job descriptions, and therefore had more people doing more specific research and application, while some of the smaller companies I required had one individual performing multiple roles.

My interviews averaged around an hour in length, as that was often the most amount of time which the individuals could spare from their offices. In only one situation did I meet an informant and conduct an interview at his or her place of work. For all other interviews I met the informants at local coffee shops or diners. The informants were not reimbursed in any manner, other than when I purchased a coffee or drink for them.

I used a digital recorder and a digital camera when applicable such as during interviews. The digital camera was used to capture images of my interviewees specifically to attach their picture to their file in order to allow me to have a clear image of the person during the writing of my thesis. My

interviews were recorded with hand-written notes. After a day in the field, it was highly important that I took the time to write out my observations as soon as possible. The interviews and data that were collected through e-mail were archived and printed into hard data. I have backed up all of my data, both audio as well as word documents, on a regular basis. The back-up data is stored at the University of Waterloo for security reasons.



## Specific Goals

My specific goals center around the need to understand how a corporation both contacts and interacts with the larger corporate culture it is supposed to represent. I have aimed to analyze and understand through my research:

1. How can anthropological methods be applied to a real-world corporate study?
2. How does “studying up” influence anthropological methods?
3. What does an anthropologist offer to the business world that is unfulfilled by sociologists and psychologists, which are regarded as the two ‘hard science’ social sciences that offer the most reliable data to the business world in general?
4. Is there room in the business world for insights gained from qualitative data that are not learned from quantitative data?

## **Chapter 6**

### **Research and Findings**

The two parts of my research are presented in the order that they have been conducted.

## Chapter 6.1

### Part One: Participant observation

My participant observation occurred throughout a seven month period between January and July 2008 at a marketing and advertising agency in South-Western Ontario. I was hired as ethnographer to do research for a major communications company. I was, with the aid of a lead ethnographer, to create, conduct and analyze 30+ interviews. With a unique twist on traditional research methods, this research would then be the starting grounds for a quantitative, nation-wide survey, which would be conducted after my research had concluded. After both the qualitative interviews and quantitative survey were completed and analysed I would then create a suite of personas for the client. The contract was a six-month contract, with 12 weeks set aside for the qualitative and quantitative interviews. The ethnographer would go 'out in the field' with another researcher, an individual trained in qualitative research methods from the market research company. This individual, while not anthropologically trained, was to have an interviewing background.

The research project was assigned a tight dead-line by both the project manager as well as the client-care manager, although both agreed that the six month contract was a long time for a project, even one of this scope. The client, as is standard, was involved in deciding what was appropriate for the researchers

in regards to number of interviews, the interview scripts, and the cities and towns that would be visited and recruited from. We wanted to make sure that the client was getting to address all of his concerns and needs before he set us free into the research field, as it was not our desire to need to alter research part-way through the process because we seemed to be missing a key element.

The project, due to illness, over-scheduling, and a difficult recruitment process fell behind schedule, which required a shift in the time-line. Both the quantitative and qualitative research portions would be sped up, and the analysis time was shortened. In order to meet the still assigned deadline, it became necessary for the ethnographic portion of the project to be shortened to two months, in order for the quantitative portion of the project to still have an appropriate amount of time as well as the analysis. This meant that 54 interviews now had to be conducted in 8 weeks instead of the original 12. For an arbitrary reason, which in hindsight none of the team is sure of, the team had always separated the qualitative and quantitative research sections into two separate phases. As the research was conducted, we decided that this split was not necessary, and that there would be a natural time in the research process where the survey could be conducted and analysed even while the in-home interviews were being conducted.

## **The Interview Process**

The interviews themselves were mainly conducted by an anthropologist and a marketer, and monitored by the lead qualitative researcher. The first few interviews differed from any interview I had ever conducted under an anthropological guise. While the consent forms, audio recorder and note taking were familiar, not much else was. Firstly, there was a cash reimbursement involved in the completion of the interviews. This incentive meant that sometimes the interviewees were more interested in the money than the reasons behind the interviews, which could make the interviews slow, difficult, and short. While this sometimes occurred, we often stumbled upon people welcoming us into their homes and treating us with hot coffee and an eagerness to talk. It was a humbling experience to be so openly invited into people's homes, and have them share moments of their lives with us.

The research team consisted of three anthropologists and three marketers with interview skills. Their combined skills of the two skill sets led to a data-rich set of interviews. The marketers were skilled at conducting interviews that were focused and tight. While there were differences in how the traditionally trained anthropologists and the marketers conducted interviews, it didn't affect the quality of the work. Indeed, because of different backgrounds, each researcher

read each situation differently and we each often picked up on elements that the other alone would not have.

Half way through the qualitative time period, it became apparent, due to scheduling difficulties and illness that the interviews would not be completed and analysed before the quantitative team was to begin their research. On the advice of the lead qualitative researcher, the team decided to try a new approach to the research, and begin shaping the quantitative surveys around the partial qualitative research. This was an exciting point in the research project for many on the team, as we would be figuring out how to best fold the two aspects of the research together while not biasing the qualitative part of the research. The lead qualitative researcher decided that we would continue our qualitative interviews as previously planned, and begin to present and update the interview information to the qualitative team focusing on the basic information that they needed to know, including possible motives, values and experiences which were affecting the people's experiences. For example, the qualitative team was very focused on the fact that the purchasing habits for entertainment were often value-laden depending on what type of family structure the interviewee had. Interviewees who were heads of families often put more value on certain options which made their life better while single interviewees made different choices.

The creation of the survey would start with input from the qualitative research team.

The first step towards beginning to shape the quantitative part of the project was for the quantitative researcher to sit down and be fully briefed by the ethnography team. While the quantitative researcher had been present at team meetings throughout the research project, he had not yet had time to sit down and fully explore what the ethnography team was doing at a more concentrated level. Together we pulled out key factors, motives and trends we saw appearing in the interviews and which would be relevant to a quantitative analysis. The quantitative researcher then applied his research methods to turn my research into survey-based questions. It was a wonderful experience to watch the data the qualitative team had gathered, even in a raw form, be utilized to aid in constructing further research. Throughout this process, he was constantly sending the survey to me to ensure that all important motives were being represented in the survey. While the research team was supposed to be helping the quantitative team with their research at this time, the revisions and clarifying of the survey absolutely helped the research team become more comfortable with the research we were still conducting. This process also allowed us to catch uncertainties in our own research. We were then able to address these gaps in further interviews. This kind of double-checking at such a deep level only

occurred because of the way we were blending the two sections of research. The survey was then conducted by an outsourced recruitment team while I completed the qualitative interviews and began to code the data.

When I began to code the qualitative data and shape it into patterns, I found I often had to manage the data twice: first I would code the data in a manageable way that made sense to me; then I would have to reformat the data in order to make it more presentable in order to be presented to the rest of my research group. I had developed a cryptic formula for taking notes, and this process pushed me to become very comfortable with my research. The process of sharing the ethnographic data was a key element in the research project, and everyone in the team worked diligently to ensure that research notes and summaries were quickly available for the team to read after an interview was conducted. We utilized an on-line file-sharing network which allowed us to post our notes and access them at anytime on a secure network. Obviously I did not conduct all of the interviews personally, and where I did not, I was dependant on others' notes as well as verbal summaries of the interviews. In order to properly code the data, I decided to code it as I felt it should be by reading the data, asking the individuals who conducted the interviews to code the data as well, without seeing mine, and then interviewing the individuals on the interviews they had conducted as well as their reasoning behind how they coded the data in order to



gain a better perspective on these interviews. This process was helpful in creating a solid data bank that we could all draw from during the analysis period.

During this time, the lead qualitative researcher and I were beginning to share the qualitative data with the rest of the team, and while the surveys were already being conducted, we were still finding and highlighting interesting and, what we felt to be, significant behaviours and motives that would need to be further analysed once the quantitative data was fully gathered. For instance, we began to focus on the value of luxury and relaxation in how it related to the product we were examining. There were many people whom we interviewed who wanted the biggest and best equipment they could afford in order to enhance their experiences. These people seemed to feel that the better the experience was the more relaxed and entertained they would be. This finding differed greatly from other individuals who desired a stripped-down and bare bones experience in order to only get what they needed from the experience instead of a relaxing experience. These findings were easily transferable to quantitative research questions which helped us focus on the user's value of the experience process both specifically and in general in comparison to the rest of their lives. The quantitative analyser would make notes to look at certain questions on the survey more closely, as we now felt that those questions would

have some sort of significance when coding the quantitative data and merging it with the qualitative data.

During this process the surveys were still being conducted. However, as in every research project, there was a struggle to fill the required number of surveys. The client initially requested that 2000 surveys be completed. In the end, due to budget and time constraints 1700 surveys were completed. However, at this point in the research, the quantitative team felt that there was a lot of data to draw from, and that while the remaining interviews would have been nice to have; the research would not be jeopardized without the other surveys. Once the quantitative analysis was completed, it was time for the quantitative analyst to read and code the data both manually and using a program called Tableau. I then was called into help him read the data and the patterns. We then began to compare the qualitative and quantitative data to search for overarching patterns. Finally, before our team presentations and brainstorming sessions, the quantitative analyst blended the quantitative data with the qualitative data through a computer program in order to have concrete images to present to the team we were working with. The software programs he used were fascinating as he was able to alter the way the data was presented depending on how people preferred to see the data. This was an important element for me personally as I

do not always like reading charted data, and yet the quantitative analyst was able to make the data accessible and readable to me.

## **The Quantitative Focus**

While the client was interested and intrigued by the interviews I had conducted, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that the client was very interested in how the qualitative observations 'stacked up' quantitatively. They were undoubtedly more familiar and more comfortable with the statistical orientation that the quantitative surveys would present once coded and 'read' to the client. The client was interested to see how the team had blended the two parts of the research project into one. The presentation process was also a chance to show the client how the two sections of research worked together to answer the questions they were asking, and why we needed to use two different types of methods to gather this research. While what made money was obviously a focus of the clients, they also wanted to know where, whom and why. The where and the whom are quickly and easily answered by quantitative data, as well as easily formatted. While to find these answers through qualitative data is not impossible, it is often not the main focus of a qualitative interview process; often the motive, or the 'why' is what is answered well through an ethnographic interview. We were able to develop a full explanation of the meanings and motives behind the reasons of the 'why' through the qualitative sections of the research project and then expand on these areas in the survey section of the research. We had begun, in qualitative research, to notice trends of certain types

of households giving more value to a certain service or option. Often trends of desires were not one household specific, but were a desire which was rooted in the households' general needs and the value of the experience in general. These findings were then proved with the nation-wide quantitative research which picked up on these same trends existing in hundreds of households. While well-done ethnography can make for a fascinating read; it is not always easily accessible and easy to package to people outside of an ethnographic zone. A common gap that I saw arising throughout my work with this market research company was the fact that anthropologists need to better share such an amazingly detail-rich artefact as ethnographic research to more people in a more concentrated form without losing the attention to detail that makes an ethnographic study so unique and powerful. By blending the qualitative with the quantitative we embraced both and brought ethnographic insight forward. While each section of research stood on its own, they were both made stronger and more meaningful when brought together.

## **The Qualitative Effect**

Throughout the research project, the lead quantitative researcher was not only fully appreciative and interested in the qualitative work he was basing his own work on, but found that the entire process pushed him to discover different aspects in his research that would not have been found if the survey had been created, written and conducted before the qualitative work began. The quantitative researcher felt that the depths of his survey would not have been possible without such a supportive qualitative base to dive from; by switching the order of the research process from the traditional survey first, qualitative interviews second, to performing the interview first, the quantitative research felt he was able to ask the right questions based on actual human motives rather than on supposed motives, which if incorrect would have had a massive influence on both the survey results as well as the qualitative interviews which would have been based on the survey results. Often quantitative surveys use 'proxies' for measured of meaningfulness; here the measure of meaningfulness was already known and visible. In comparison, the process of working along-side the quantitative work pushed the qualitative team to better read their own work.

## **The Data Analysis**

The analysis of the gathered data was an interesting experience because, although the coding of the data and the discussions surrounding that were similar to work that I had already done, other members of the team who were not as comfortable with the coding procedure. This meant that I sought a more extended verbal briefing of the interview from the team members, read the transcripts, and relied on the page summaries of each interview that were to be written up after each interview. Then the team worked together to decide where we would place the data on the binary graphs we were creating in order to organize the data in comparison.

The analysis of the data is a culmination of all of the processed work that has been done: it is a time to pull together ideas and create pictures from words and numbers. This feeling was nurtured in the other team members, often by the skilled lead ethnographer who recognized that some of the other team members were not as experienced in this process. The actual data coding of the ethnographic interviews was placed on a set of scales derived from the key motives the team felt were being represented by the interviewees, either consciously or unconsciously. The scales were of binary value, and the individuals represented by the interviews were placed on the scale in comparison to one another. The survey data was coded separately by the

quantitative researcher, and would be presented to the rest of the team at the same time that the qualitative information was also presented. The quantitative researcher was using the same set of motive scales as we were using, and there was the obvious hope that the qualitative small picture scales would roughly match the patterns seen in the quantitative big picture scales. We assumed this would have meant that we either did something really right or were reading both the trends and the experiences of people and asking the right questions, or else we were really incorrect and were asking all the wrong questions, which would have still led to interesting patterns. The question we focused on when reading the quantitative data was whether or not the quantitative survey found a measure of significance around the dimensions which we had highlighted. We felt that the survey did find significant meaning in connection to the qualitative research. Because the coding of the qualitative data is rough, and not an exact science, this work that we were doing would not be easily shareable to the clients, who preferred the assumed solidness of the number based quantitative work, however the qualitative data coding was invaluable to the next step of the team's work as it helped lay a foundation of understanding below our persona creation.

The data we were set to analyze revolved around homeowners viewing and product-experience habits. We were searching to analyze how users were



using an existing product, and what they were searching for in their use. At the end of the research process the entire team found their views of the product, how others utilize the product and even how we each used the product was far more involved and far more meaningful than we imagined.

## Persona Creation

Personas are a popular marketing tool which is based mainly on ethnographic and other qualitative research, although they can also be based on quantitative research, although often with less success. Personas are basically a fictitious profile based around real world data and research (Pruitt and Adlin 2006). A persona is not a stereotype; it is far more in-depth and multi-layered than a stereotype. A persona is an abstract construction that will present have a belief system, values, morals and an ethical code. Personas can be very useful for marketers and advertisers, and is also used with great success by designers trying to understand how a user may act or react to a user interface, for example. I have created and used personas before in different elements of my work. I find properly and well done personas to be a useful tool to create and use in a research based environment. A persona allows researchers to have an individual in mind when conducting research or factoring in reactions to certain processes. A persona is an unreal individual whom you know a great deal about. Based on true-life research, a persona can allow a researcher to answer questions, such as how would the persona respond to us taking away his car? I also understand how useful a tool a persona can be in the business sector. Persona creation is a blend of art and science. It is a creation that is grounded in facts, motives and values based on qualitative and quantitative research, but written and drawn so

that a reader may feel that he or she is reading about a real person, perhaps a neighbour or a friend. A good persona is believable and shares human qualities with other people. A poorly written persona can sometime be nothing more than an over-blown stereotype that is neither believable nor fully rooted in the real world.

The creation of the personas began with a series of full team meetings, where both the qualitative and quantitative information was officially presented to everyone on the team. This was a significant moment in the research process because it clearly illustrated how well the two sides of the research worked together, and like two sides of a penny, worked to create a whole. The team meetings were intense and lengthy and demanded a high level of discussion and exploration. During this time there was an intense reading of the data. The quantitative researcher and I worked closely to both read the data to each other and to present the findings to the rest of the team, and then also answer the questions that other team members brought up. It was imperative during these meetings that everyone was on the same level regarding the basic data and the cause and effects of the data. A comfort level was required between all of the team members in order for the issues to be fully developed, discussed and argued.

The creation of the basis of the personas and their families, etc. was not a one person job; instead the creations were a full team effort that was the culmination of 24 hours plus of team analysis. The writing of the personas also turned out to be a team effort. Although I was responsible for the actual writing up of the personas, they then had to be fact checked, data checked, and checked for general accuracy. Other team members were involved in this process, and were also involved in double-checking that I was representing the data accurately. The design, layout and persona images were also created by the team as well as a graphic designer brought onto the team for this purpose.

Once a second draft of the personas was completed, they were then shared with the client. The client was willing to be an involved player in the process and worked with the team to ensure that it fit the presentation standards that the company had in place. The client needed to be comfortable with the research and results because he would then be acting as presenter of the data to other members of the company. Having someone outside of the research project read the personas was helpful as it ensured that we were not caught in any biases of our own.

## **Participant Observation Summary**

In anthropological research, whether an independent study or part of a larger transdisciplinary research project, the research often is controlled by the research committee. While outside boards or committees will have an effect on the research, such as ethic committees, grant committees and the researcher's department, the research ideally will still be mainly influenced, created and controlled by the involved researchers who both have a background in what they are researching, and in results they publish. When an anthropologist, or an academic in general, puts his or her name on a journal article, book, or presentation, they are actively stating that this work is his or her own, and that he or she will stand behind both the research and results.

This statement cannot be so fully made in the private sector. As I have seen, there are often multiple players involved in both the research and result process of a given project. The research can be seemingly lost by the researcher. This role, however, is also shared by anthropologists involved in policy research etc. I had to learn to view this transition of research as 'mine' to 'theirs' not in a negative light, but rather in a frame of view that I had conducted good research for a client, and they would now take the research and make good results from it. Through my research I would be able to effect change and help people

understand other people's behaviours and motives better, which is the root of anthropology after all.

This is not the main point of this discussion, however. Rather, my main focus, and concern is the research process that I experienced. The process of the research was stimulating for everyone involved, and created further developments in how the members of the team viewed research methods. I feel that this process helped illustrate my thesis that there is indeed room to blend qualitative and quantitative research together in order to create new research opportunities. Blending in-home interviews and survey research together demanded a lot of work for the research team as a whole, but the intellectual challenge created a strong fabric of data which has allowed for the possibility of further research and quality data sets to be gathered from the research. The process also helped cement in many people's mind how flexible anthropology can be, as well as how important it is for people to try to become 'fluent' in many different research methods.

## **Chapter 6.2**

### **Part Two: Ethnographic Interviews**

#### **The Pen Names**

In order to better situate the reader into the ethnographic interview, I feel it is necessary to give you an overview of the varied individuals I interviewed during my research process. These individuals are all called by fictional names which hide their true identities but the brief descriptions offer a glimpse into their professional identities. I was careful to not over interview people with similar jobs, as I was attempting to interview a diverse field filled with multi-faceted individuals who often played multiple roles in the fields of research and development, marketing and advertising, and product design. My cast of players, is therefore, are presented with a brief synopsis of each member.

#### **Greg Harrison**

Greg is an individual working in client care at an advertising and marketing agency who must balance client needs with his company's needs. The everyman of a project, he is required to understand a little bit about every aspect of a project, and be prepared to step into any spot and participate if needed. Greg has a history in rhetoric and a need for order. Greg uses a blend of qualitative and quantitative research methods in his daily work life, and feels that his work would not be as successful without an immersion of the two research methods.

### **Nathan Day**

Nathan is a partner of an advertising and marketing agency. He is a big thinker and used to having his ideas listened to and followed. A relative pioneer in the field of qualitative research and marketing, he is used to pushing the envelope. Nathan is, as his job demands, continually both client-focused and outcome oriented. Nathan is skilled in business strategy and also is continually able to think holistically, and doesn't shut in his mode of thinking to one discipline.

### **Claire James**

Claire is the only woman I was able to find to interview in a field that is mainly male-oriented, perhaps because of the high-tech orientation of the field of research. Claire has worked globally as an experience design researcher with major companies aiming toward better product and product design through user experience research. Claire likes to be ahead of the curve, and feels that there is a gap in a lot of design research that the traditional methods of analysis are not properly filling, but is hopeful about the up and coming trends of a blended method which utilizes both a strong qualitative and quantitative bent.

### **David Budd**



David has worked as a product designer for several high-tech advertising and marketing agencies as well as in research and development departments.

David is currently applying all of his experience into creating a superior artefact based around the user, qualitative research, and design. David is trained in both qualitative and quantitative research and has some anthropological background that still impacts his work.

### **Henry Holmes**

Henry is a professor who, although still associated with a university, has felt the need to leave the realm of academia in order to further the realm of research into more publicly accessible research arenas outside of academia.

Henry is currently working to align local high-tech companies with his research through his department. Henry chose to enter the private sector in order to accomplish more meaningful research which was directly related to his field of interest.

### **William Hawthorne**

William has recently returned to the city after working as a design researcher at an internationally recognized company known for its innovation and design. He has returned to a company that, although renowned as well, is more renowned for its engineering prowess than its design prowess. William is frustrated at his job because he can recognize the design flaws his company is

making, he feels unable to make any changes because his superiors in the hierarchical company put little value in a design before engineering concept, and even less value in qualitative data, especially in comparison to his previous job.

### **Edward Potter**

Edward has worked both as a researcher and in jobs that require him to apply the research to a product. Edward has a lot of experience in all aspects of research and design as well as marketing and advertising. He is schooled in the scientific method, and finds he uses it regularly in his job, although he feels that there are often instances where a more qualitative method of research would be more beneficial for the client as well as result in more meaningful research.

Edward is critical of the market research industry and feels that it has become its own worst enemy.

### **Stephen Gray**

Stephen is an academic who works mainly in the academic realm, but has some private sector experience. Stephen is versed in both qualitative and quantitative research methods, although his work is more theory based than practise based.

## **The Interviews**

The interviews took place over a three month period in the autumn of 2008. These interviews allowed me to talk with a variety of individuals in a variety of companies, with a common thread of qualitative research to link them all. I spoke with client care individuals, user-experience researchers, partners in market research firms, and product designers. While my participant observation was focused on the use and application of fairly traditional anthropological methods in a corporate setting, my interviews allowed me to firstly view how anthropological methods, especially the act of ethnography, is valued in a marketing and design world, and then analyze how anthropology can be used to better the processes that are being conducted within the fields of market research, business ethnographies and design.

I chose a specific geographical area to conduct my research. The area is an up and coming high-tech and research town that is drawing the attention of major corporations world-wide. The town is relatively small in terms of population, and still retains a small-town feel even though it is now internationally known. Because of this, the individuals I interviewed often knew each other or knew of each other. Indeed, many of the individuals I interviewed had heard of my research through the high-tech gossip channels. My snow-ball

sampling method of interview recruitment was therefore a perfect avenue to find people both qualified to interview, and willing to be interviewed.

I interviewed people with a range of backgrounds, from science and engineering to rhetorical English and business. No one I interviewed had an anthropological background, although many of the humanities based individuals had taken some sort of social science course or research methods course. Most of the people I interviewed had worked with anthropologists before, however, and their views on working anthropologists were varied depending on the experiences. I did interview other academics in other fields that were now working in a private sector environment and using anthropological skills in their research. Through these interviews I wanted to listen to the 'other' who was certainly talking to anthropologists although with seemingly little effect as my literature review clearly reflects.

My question set that I created for the semi-structured interviews was loosely based on my experiences "in the field" at the market research company that I conducted ethnographic research from. The questions I asked my interviewees were questions I felt were unanswered for me during my observations and which seemed to need answers. The questions were also questions I recognized from the literature I was reading at the time, as well as

questions that I felt were not answered in the literature in a sufficient manner, or was not asked at all in the literature.

While I realize I could easily write a thesis based on my personal observations, I feel that the interviews were necessary in expanding both my views as well as the anthropological literature. I have found no evidence of an anthropologist interviewing people outside of his or her field who use anthropological methods in such a way in order to explain the process that others go through for this research through an anthropological lens. While this type of research has been done in other arenas as mentioned earlier, none of the authors researched this type of activity through an anthropological lens although often using anthropological methods. To me, it is important to analyze how other people are utilizing these methods in order to address the gaps both in academia as well as in the private sector. The gaps I experience throughout my ethnographic research, and highlighted in my personal observations, are what I aimed to fill through my series of interviews.

## **Interview Themes**

### **Qualitative and Quantitative**

While one of the main goals of my thesis was to explore the benefits of blending qualitative and quantitative research methods, as anthropologists perform them, in the larger business and marketing sector, I found myself continually placing qualitative and quantitative research in opposition to each other. This binary construction of the two general types of research methods was not my original intent, and indeed I feel that the strongest research methods, or indeed the methods that discover the most interesting, holistic and inquisitive results grow from a blend of research methods. I still found myself placing the two research methods in opposition to one another, especially when I was interviewing. Part of this is because some corporations, and indeed some that I made contact with, tend to organize their researchers into two separate camps: one that is focused on more qualitative research and on that is focused on more quantitative research. Such separation is more for the ways the researchers are organized in projects in the corporation and not because a qualitative researcher is incapable of quantitative research.

Each interview explored the definition, value and meaning behind the terms qualitative and quantitative. I felt these terms were necessary to be defined by my subjects because their own experiences with the terms would be

paramount to how they viewed the different data sets that was created by the two terms when put into practise. I safely assumed that most people who I would be interviewing would have had some sort of experience with both types of research.

I was correct on this assumption, as was I correct that each individual would have different experiences that would define how they viewed their terms. While there are definite definitions of the two terms, which are found in many an anthropological dictionary, they seemed to become value-laden once put to work by people outside of the academic arena.

There is a preference for quantitative data, because, as a client care interviewee said, “the quantitative is perceived to be accurate, and is something that can be worked with”. As in any sort of business, numbers are perceived as hard data, and therefore more valued than soft data that may be rooted in emotions and personal values. Several individuals, especially ones with a business background, brought up the point that numbers are just as prone to taking a rhetorical slant as qualitative data is. The rhetoric of numbers, indeed, was brought up multiple times as a data set that is given far more trust than is truly warranted by clients, customers, etc. People seem to find security in a number set, even if the numbers do not seem to tell a lot to the client. For instance, Greg also noted that people who are dependent on numbers can often

miss out on the bigger picture, because numbers often mask the richness of variations and extremes that is garnered from qualitative research.

I bring this up as relevant information because I see it as reflective of a more common idea that numbers are to be trusted. Numbers are safe because they seem to reflect a truth, a black or white ideal that can be trusted. However, perhaps a larger issue on hand is the fact that people may not fully understand qualitative research as a method, and feel a sense of security with quantitative research. I saw first hand, with my own experience, that quantitative data creates a safety net that is not perceived in qualitative data. For instance, when I conducted 50+ ethnographic interviews, the data, although of great interest by the client, was validated by the quantitative data. While the client trusted the qualitative data, the simple act of combining the qualitative and quantitative data offered the client a richer understanding of the people and trends we were experiencing. I'm not sure that the client would have witnessed such a rich picture by only using one of the methods alone. The blending of qualitative research and quantitative research made for a better and stronger piece of research as a whole than it would have been if had been conducted by either method alone.

Greg shared a similar story. While he had mainly a qualitative background he felt that his work was not taken seriously as that of those that



were doing quantitative work in the same field as he. He felt that the subjective data that he was creating through qualitative data did not give him a strong and credible ethos. Through his experiences, Greg witnessed that during times of failure of a project or information, qualitative data, and therefore the researcher, is more open to attack if it leads to a sort of failure. In comparison, quantitative based research led to an acceptance of the failure with little blame laid onto the research or the researcher. While the qualitative researchers, he perceived, were blamed for defending their subjective opinions, any errors in quantitative research were attributed to the data itself and not to the researcher. A combined research approach could, therefore, allow for an exploration of qualitative research with a safety check of quantitative research.

David shared similar stories to those of Greg. David personally prefers ethnographic research over quantitative human research, such as focus groups. David feels that ethnographic research, such as in home interviews, participant observation, extended in-field studies for example, asks both the researcher and the interviewees to discover what the right questions are, for a product, behaviour or service. Quantitative research, on the other hand, measures the questions that are being asked. He too, however sees that clients feel that there is a credibility that is a given from numbers that qualitative research, no matter what the numbers may say or be based on. He calls the apparent credibility of

numbers to be an “allusion of neutral objects”, where numbers are implicitly trusted because they are seen to be a safe zone and objective. David sees an inclusion of more quantitative research into qualitative research as a way to further the comfort zone of people not yet comfortable perhaps with qualitative research methods and also as a way to extend the safety zone of quantitative analysis into qualitative research almost like a fact checker works with a writer.

William has worked in several major high-tech companies who have all addressed research and development in different manners. His experience is expanded by his background which is based in engineering. Although William has worked in several different companies, his current job, at a high-tech company, best illustrates the cultural differences that have been established between disciplines rooted in a qualitative analysis and departments rooted in a quantitative analysis. He has been a part of attempts to explore qualitative research from people with a mainly quantitative background. In his current company, he is called in to the production team late in the production development period. Indeed, he is called in after the product is researched and a prototype is already produced. Most of this pre-research is done through quantitative analysis. William must then perform research to, as he says, prove to the engineers that they chose a correct design for the product regardless of the goals and motives of the product or user. It is normally too costly by this point to

redesign a product. His research is therefore goal focused on how to better the user experience of the prototype as it needs to be used rather than how the engineers may see it being used. Much of the research is conducted through lab-based interviews and some focus groups. While William has conducted in-home interviews, he finds that they can sometimes be artificial in set-up and in the answers that he receives as a researcher. William prefers to have the opportunity to conduct site visits concerning his research, where he is able to bring the whole team along to see how people actually utilize the products they create or are trying to create, outside of a lab setting. William knows that in his current company the odds of this occurring are slim because there is a lack of top-down support from his management to develop products earlier on in the design process with the aid of the design researchers and their more qualitative analysis methods than the engineers who are currently entrusted with designing the design developments utilize. For instance, in the last application created by the company that he worked on, William joined the team after the application had already been put into beta testing and flaws were found. These flaws were user related, and seemed to stem from the different way that the programmers approached using the application in comparison to how an individual without software background would use the application. If this flaw had been caught pre-beta testing, it would have been easy to fix, however, as the product was

heading into manufacturing, William was not able to fix the product at a programming level and send it back through testing, but rather had to figure out how to solve the problem on a more superficial level which would not require programming changes. If a design researcher was brought into the design process while the programmers were creating the product, William feels that these types of fix-it scenarios would happen a lot less, and that more focus could be put onto expanding the user experience of the applications.

William has also worked alongside design anthropologists, defined as an anthropologist “employed across all design methods in the design and making of things , most commonly in projects dealing with what designers call divergence and convergence – the understanding of new problem space and the prototyping of improved design space (Graffam 2008: 3) and he has not always enjoyed the experience. Some of these factors may be personality clashes, he admits, however in general he has seen several patterns emerge that illustrate why anthropologists often have a tricky time fitting into the business sector. William makes several points critical of the work of a design anthropologist as it is currently conducted in a couple of mainstream, brand-recognized high-tech companies. Firstly, a design anthropologist can be viewed as a “diva” by the rest of a research team. Design anthropologists often work on an adaptive path based around long-term research that may not always match up with the research the

rest of the team is conducting on a short-term time span. Because the design anthropologist is often focused on long-term, multi product research, he or she is not as flexible as the rest of the team, and is not always helpful in “linking up” with the rest of a research team. There is a gap between the traditional methods of anthropology and what is needed in the real world.

The three situations I have just discussed do not cover the full scope of experiences I heard about during my interviews regarding how qualitative and quantitative research are both viewed and used in a business setting. These three were relevant, I felt, in analysing how anthropological methods are being utilized and judged in a business setting. There is an obvious need to expand the role of qualitative research in marketing, research and design. The methods are already being used on a fairly regular basis by many business people, as has been seen, however the methods deliver a variety of results, which I think is based on the variety of levels of understanding of the concepts that different people bring to qualitative research based on their varied backgrounds. It seems that the basis for someone to be “trained” in qualitative research is to have some sort of liberal arts background. Many people’s ethnographic training seems to have happened while “on the job” and therefore on a client’s bill. The outcome of the ethnographic research therefore directly affected how the client will feel about the value of ethnographic research in the future, as well as how the company that

did the research feels about the process. Someone who is able to bring money in to the company will be allowed to continue to do that type of work; someone who doesn't may be encouraged to follow more traditional marketing and research processes.

One trend that I noted was that although there was often an individual, or a team, devoted to quantitative research and analysis, there was never an individual solely devoted to qualitative analysis. People with varied backgrounds of rhetoric, marketing and psychology all work in the quantitative field and some pick up qualitative research in their working careers.

Interestingly enough, many of these disciplines do not necessarily teach qualitative research. An anthropologist, therefore, has a unique skill toolset because an anthropologist is taught both qualitative and quantitative methods and analysis. An anthropologist is trained to think in both numbers and words, as many anthropologists are also trained in statistics. Indeed, undergraduate anthropological research methods classes focus on both qualitative and quantitative research methods which must be part of every anthropologist's tool kit. There are many anthropology programs that have required statistics courses. This training is valuable because it allows an anthropologist to be adaptable in many career paths as well as invaluable for the working anthropologist to be able to gather and read research in a multitude of different ways. While I realize

many anthropologists neither know nor care to know statistical research methods, this skill must be emphasised by anthropologists that work in the business field. I believe that a blending of qualitative and quantitative analysis is what will be required in future research methods. The ease of this blending will depend on the comfort level of individuals who are conducting the research an analysis. The anthropologist is at an advantage here, and it is important for anthropologists to see this, and not simply become type-cast as an ethnographer or story teller.

## Success Stories

While I am clearly calling for a movement of action by anthropologists into defining our own roles in the business world in order to make more successful and meaningful research, which will necessitate a new type of research, I was also interested to see how successful research has been conducted so far. I asked all of the interviewees to share examples of successful research projects based around anthropological methods as they defined the methods. Obviously the results were varied as the interviewees' experiences were varied. There was a definite trend however, that the more successful qualitative projects were given a strong top-down support by managers, directors and partners in companies. No matter how skilled an ethnographer or qualitative researcher was, if his or her work was not supported, it was too easy for others to cut necessary costs from his or her budget, or to not support the research with the clients as strongly as was perhaps necessary. This is obviously linked to the background of many people in management at these businesses currently, who are schooled in engineering, computer science and the like. Here is an example of Pink's thesis at work.

The success stories that were shared with me, often centred on research projects in both design and marketing, based around ethnographic research,



which was actually implemented in a real world setting. Successful and interesting research is not specified as a success in the business world.

An example of a successful research project that was given to me by Claire fulfills the demand that the research was used in a real-world application after being conducted. It is also, at its core, very traditionally anthropological, which is why I believe it was such a success. Working for a global research and development team, Claire was a lead team member in a two year long ethnographic project. The research was concerned with improving a product used in hospitals. Throughout the two years, Claire and her team would submerge themselves into their interviewees' schedules for long chunks at a time, and then follow-up with in-depth interviews based on their participant observation. The interviewees shifted over the two years as some people that Claire was observing left their jobs. Claire felt that part of the success of the projects derived from the fact that all team members were brought in for participant observation in order to see how the products they were trying to better were actually being used instead of how they were assumed to be used as imagined by the engineers. Claire also worked with and alongside the engineers at the end of her research in order to help guide them to create a better product, a product that is now used in hospitals and helps save lives. Instead of working

from preconceived notions of how a project is assumed to be used, the designers and engineers were able to design from research data.

Another reason for Claire's success is indeed an element that is greatly mentioned by anthropologists, but was not mentioned by any other interviewees that I talked with. Claire spoke about preparing for her two years of research prior to the research beginning. She felt that it was important to "know the landscape coming in." She believes that "the researcher is the student" and must always enter ethnographic situations, or qualitative research situations in general, being prepared to learn from those that the researcher will be watching.

Claire also made a specific point to "learn the language" of those she was observing prior to entering the field. Being able to understand certain jobs' jargon is crucial, she feels in not making the interviewees feel frustrated, or patronized when the observer must break observation to ask linguistic questions. Claire then made sure this knowledge was shared with others on her team.

A final, and significant point of success from Claire, which is one that she did not mention as a part of the success of this project but is one that I gleaned from what she left unsaid, is the fact that her team remained on board with the rest of the team after her research was complete. After research has been submitted and approved by the company or client that the researcher works for, it seems that the researcher ceases to have an active role in the rest of the project,

whether that is working with designers to create or alter a product, or with marketers to build or shape a marketing campaign. While this is often mainly because, once again, keeping a researcher on a payroll can be expensive, the removal of a team member can hinder team development and leave the researcher feeling and being regarded as a second-rate member of the team, and one who is easily expendable. This does not appear to be the case with Claire, as she mentions being a key developer in sharing her input with product designer and engineers, and then also following up the research with product testing both in lab-based focus groups as well as returning to her participant observation locations to test the product in real time. Being fully involved in the project from beginning to conclusion, in all aspects is a key reason for the success of the project which was considered a success by the company Claire worked for, as well as the client and Claire herself.

While Claire's successful experience is perhaps unique in the level of success that it attained, and this was the only example of an individual below the level of an executive who was able to participate in the entire research project, I was told that this was company policy from the company that she worked for, in circumstances when both time and money allowed. This process that I described was considered necessary to the company because it created an excellent

outcome that met the company's high expectations and standards of research and development.

While my other success stories are not perhaps as successful in the scope of research, application, and result as Claire, I did notice a trend that existed in every success story that was shared to me. It was not, however, often the main foci of success for the individuals. Indeed, only one of my interviews called it out as being relevant to the success. Indeed the concept seems so inane simple that I did not recognize the importance or significance of this point until reviewing my notes in a whole. This simple, but significant, key element for success is partnership. In every discussion I had on successful ethnography or qualitative research in general, the act of partnership was brought up again and again. Here I mean partnership as a relationship between the researcher(s) and rest of the team. Communication is an obvious element for any relationship's success. The partnership I am defining here is regarding the role of the researcher with the rest of the team. Examples of strong partnerships are: having the qualitative and quantitative research work together or at the very least share in-depth information between each other in order to make sure both sides are clearly understood; having the researcher attend as many team meetings as possible, this is especially important if other individuals on the team are also performing research because the data must be shared using the same terms in order to leave

no room for confusion. Finally, a final example of partnership and one that seemed to guarantee the success of a research project is to bring both the team and the client into the research, which I and my team witnessed in our own research project with good success. Often, and this was quoted by several individuals, clients feel that qualitative research is a good idea, but have little idea to what their money is going towards, and often the outcome seems like a disappointment because the client had no expectations and then doesn't know what to do with the data. Bringing the client along on ethnographic interviews or participant observation can obviously be fraught with dangers for both the researcher and the client. However, if boundaries are pre-arranged, the inclusion of another person into a research arena will not affect the data but can be a moment of realization from the client, or for the other team members involved.

Although the levels of success I received when I asked about successful qualitative research projects varied from the project being completed rather than shelved to claims the project was influential in saving lives, the crucial element to the success of a project is that of accessibility. If the research is accessible to the team, the team will be more likely to be accessible to the researcher and more open into drawing the researcher into the team.

## Unsuccessful Stories

I was also interested in discussing anthropological based projects that were unsuccessful. It was more difficult to encourage people to talk about perceived failures, as often these failures were not always methods based but sometimes team based. If an individual on the team did not approve or have sufficient training in an anthropologically based method, it could often mean some sort of failure to the project. As well, there was often a sense of frustration surrounding individuals who were not supported on the research attempts by other people they were working with on a project.

As always, there was a definable range of non-success when the question was brought up.

An unsuccessful research project had happened to everyone who I interviewed however, although some individuals felt it was remiss to talk about the actual experiences behind the lack of success. As Nathan carefully stated, “Many market research projects are unsuccessful – not for lack of insight – but for lack of application. Sometimes it is not very convenient to modify business practices, processes, investments and constructs in response to fresh insight on the customer – so to defend the status quo, the research is relegated to a filing cabinet.” For Nathan, there is never unsuccessful research; rather it is the application alone that can be qualified as unsuccessful. I felt that this rather

utopian view on research was perhaps masking actual failures; Nathan did not want to discuss actualities of any sort of research failure.

Interestingly enough, another employee at the same firm, Greg, was also reluctant to discuss any unsuccessful attempts of a research project. The only unsuccessful project he could think to discuss was one that, although based in “good solid research” was not well-received by the rest of the team and the research application led to an unsuccessful product launch. Greg was discussing a project that occurred at a previous company, and the product launch occurred as he was leaving the company, and no longer part of the research team, so he felt that he was unable to share any further information as he was not a part of the situation as it unfolded. Greg was very clear to stress that the research had been well-conducted and well-packaged for the rest of the team; the project only fell apart once the research had been handed over to the advertising and marketing team and the researchers walked away from the research. Here I see that one of the main flaws may be surrounding my earlier point for a conscious partnership. Perhaps this project could have been a success if the research team continued to be involved in the project past their research arena. I also realize, however, that even in the non-business social sciences researchers often make explicit or implicit recommendations that will never be taken into consideration for reasons that the research team will never know.

Not everyone was reluctant to share unsuccessful stories however. David had an experience where he was a lead researcher for a project, which he felt was unsuccessful. The end result of the ethnographic research did not have much impact on the design process which was the end result of the project. David felt that that project was so unsuccessful because the research process and the design process were two separate entities, and the two were not encouraged to mix and blend ideas and information. David read this experience as a learning experience, however, and has since then insisted on researchers and designers working together, or at least working alongside one another with plenty of planned meeting that allow the two areas to share information and ideas.

Henry has a lot of experience, and has found common trends between projects that will be successful and project that will be unsuccessful. Henry, as an individual who works on contract for companies rather than as a full-time employee, has discovered that he must learn to see the idea of research through both the company's and client's perspective instead of just through his own lens. Henry recognizes that that way he defines research, especially qualitative research, is not acceptable in the business world as it is often too long-term, unfocused, and focused on the experience rather than the results it may bring. As Henry says, "companies do not pay for research but for answers." Henry has seen research that he views as successful be judged as unsuccessful by a client or



the company that he works for due to its perceived inaccessibility beyond academia.

To further his evidence of the precarious balance that is required to be a good academic researcher as well as a good private sector researcher, he discussed a user research project where he was lead researcher. The research was regarding a user's experience on touch-screen computer screens. The client wanted the research to be conducted through eight one hour focus groups, Henry felt that it may be a challenge to conduct focus groups based around individual user experiences, and suggested that there may be more a more streamlined research option focusing on one on one in-house or at-home usability testing. The client insisted on a group usability testing with a grouping of 15 testers. Henry and his team of researchers had to think of new strategies which would please the client and still allow for valid and meaningful research to be conducted. While in some regards the research was a success because it satisfied the client and resulted in some diverse and interesting results, Henry still recognizes this research project as a failure because the client put a popular method that they felt would should garner interesting results over the possibility of conducting interesting research conducted through a method that may not have been as popular in mainstream, private sector research at the time, but which might have resulted in far more meaningful and specific research results.

Edward has also had several experiences with unsuccessful research and research application. In one instance he was working with a team of researchers trying to figure out consumer buying habits that were not making logical sense. The researchers wanted to do a series of focus groups. At the end of the research process, a report was submitted to Edward who outlined the findings in a logical and precise manner, but did not offer any suggestions on the reasons behind people's actions, or offer any insight into the motives for people's actions. The report was, according to Edward, a transcript of the research instead of a summary of the research. Edward believed this to be the main goal for the research; however the researcher felt that his job was to deliver the research to Edward, and not to "translate" the research for Edward.

Edward has seen a lot of unsuccessful research projects balance around the difference between a researcher and the individuals that need to use the research. Edward sees a gap between the researcher, who is most interested in the research, and the business person, who is more interested in the problem and solutions. Where researchers may be focused on theory and the bigger picture, business people are often concerned with details that lead to a solution. However, as Edward notes, "the business person can sometimes miss the forest for the trees." For Edward, there is need for more dialogue between the two

areas of work; there is also need for the academic research to become more accessible to the layman looking to use the research.

An unsuccessful research project or application can obviously have many points of failure. There is no one circumstance where a research project will automatically fail, ultimately any research conducted will often further knowledge. Whether the research is meaningful and applicable is an entirely different situation, and is indeed the main definition of an unsuccessful private-sector based research project. A solution to this problem is to build a clear arena for discourse. Conversation must be able to go two-ways, and a researcher, especially an anthropologist trained to think holistically, must ensure that whatever the results are, that they are both applicable to the problem that the anthropologist has been charged to research and also capable of being translated into action. A 200 page write up of the research done by an anthropologist is meaningless in the business world if it does not at least offer possible solutions, or a real-world reading of the data and the motives and values behind the research and its implications.

## **Information Presentation**

One area that I felt was crucial to be explored was that area of how to share anthropological information, in any form, with other people, especially other people who may not necessarily be schooled in the value of said research. No matter how valuable the research done by an anthropologist may be, if it is not understood or misunderstood by others in a private sector workplace, then it will never have an effect in that arena. The ways information is therefore shared, can be significant when relating the value of the information. If it is poorly shared, it can be received as of little value. Qualitative data is not easily shared in a spreadsheet format which can be emailed out to an entire team; qualitative data often needs to be presented, discussed and compressed in order to be made relevant to a team. Raw qualitative data can be expansive in its notes, recordings, interviews and general data. Often most members of a team will not want to read transcriptions of interviews that discuss everything from the brand of tea a subject drinks to the magazines a subject reads while in the bathroom. Often these notes, although crucial to anthropologists in aiding in understanding the actions, motives and reactions of a subject, lose their value in the private sector. It has become apparent to me that a succinct writing style is crucial for anthropologists to develop if they want to thrive and be beneficial outside of an academic arena. Those that use and utilize anthropological methods must also be

aware of these factors and the limitations to the research that are more easily breached when dealing with qualitative data.

I, therefore, have sought to find how others in the field have presented anthropological, or qualitative, data in general, to others such as clients, others on a research team, and people who need to be able to use the data for other work or research. The suggestions are as varied as the individuals that I interviewed.

Nathan, an individual who has a long and varied experience with anthropological data, favours more of a journalistic approach when presenting qualitative data to others because it allows the facts to be presented easily, but also can stress the story quality of ethnography. Nathan also utilizes modern technology in ways that stress that factual level of evidence that qualitative data can bring to a study. For instance, Nathan strives to use audio and video recordings of subjects during actual ethnographic interviews to not only illustrate how ethnographic research is conducted and performed, but also to show how the research is gathered. This 'real-world' evidence leaves little room for argument from people who do not believe, or do not understand, the benefits of qualitative research as a tool, especially as compared to quantitative research. A video brings the human connection of research home in a presentation format. The overload of numbers that quantitative research can result in has the negative

effect of desensitising researchers to the human aspect of the research. A video or audio clip firmly places the human aspect of the research front and center in the research team's minds.

Edward has found that presenting research needs to be rooted in a problem-solution discourse that quickly shows the clients that the research that has been conducted has an application which validates the money and time they have spent on the research. While the theory and the methods behind the research needs to be included in a formal report, it should not be the basis of a presentation according to Edward, rather suggestions for how to apply the research are far more beneficial and more proactive for both the research and the client.

There are a variety of ways that researchers use to present their information. Indeed, other examples I was told about included such varied presentation styles as scrapbooks and portfolios being created to represent the research and create a tactile presentation form of the research. Overall, there seemed an agreement that, to be well presented, qualitative research must often be pared down and presented in simple, action-oriented language. Clear communication makes the research more meaningful to the individuals who may not have a history of involvement in the research.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Anthropologist for Hire**

A final question in most of my interviews concerned how an anthropologist can aid in furthering the discussion and application of anthropological methods in the private sector outside of academia. This question became the basis of my findings. It is here that I turn to conclude my research, as the question so often concluded my interviews. There is a natural progression between discussing the pros and cons of current research, to looking ahead at what is next in the research trend, and what need is there to be filled.

My research, which became less of a research project on methodology and more of a research project on the experience and the end results of the blending of anthropological research methods and market research methods, led me to several important conclusions. Firstly, there is still a lot work that needs to be done on this subject. While clearly this is not a new application of anthropological research, as Dreyfuss suggests, the application, and benefits of anthropological research in both design and marketing has been forgotten throughout the last century which saw a movement towards a more specific-variable oriented process of understanding human nature, which Edward links with the advent of computers. Computers are able to calculate and

store massive amounts of data, but they can never understand human emotion, values, belief systems or motives. In today's media saturated world, the need for good design is less questioning how far the human can go to replace himself with a machine, but rather more about better design that can help people in daily life.

However, there are still a lot of negative feelings attached to soft data that is created from qualitative research. I believe this results mainly from a situation of misunderstanding. There is often no formal training available for researchers interested in qualitative research outside of the academic realm. Many of the individuals I interviewed talked about learning how to conduct research on the fly, or from others in their company who also learned more through osmosis than through any formal training. While this method can be effective as a short-term stopgap, it can lead to varied results from individual to individual. It is obvious why there is a perceived sense of distrust of the research from individuals who have been trained and work in a more quantitative based research format.

There is a gap between academic and the companies they are hired to work in. This gap will probably always exist, as individuals who have been trained to work in an academic setting, and eventually return to the academic setting after working in the private sector will always have a slightly different



approach to how the world exists than someone in the private sector. Many anthropology programs, and much of the academic writing in the field, are hostile to business and capitalism. I have first hand experience in regards to the negative feelings, although was lucky to find a supervisor and committee which openly supported my capitalistic interests. I believe that such negative attitudes that exist in the academic world leave anthropologists in a difficult position to try and work and exist in the business world. This sense of hostility results in a loss for the anthropologists and business practices.

There is also a gap between the designer and marketer. This gap seems to be both a communication gap, and a philosophical gap, as my research has shown. Indeed, it should be no surprise that, in my experience, the anthropologist and the designer tend to work better together than the anthropologist and the marketer. Perhaps it is the way both the designer and the anthropologist are trained in their craft; we are both taught to analyze and understand human nature as well as possible, and to eventually help improve people's quality of life and living experiences, whether it is through a designer making a building more wheelchair accessible, or an anthropologist aiding in land claim debates to ensure that people's livelihoods are not lost. It should be no surprise that it is the designers I interviewed who all recommended Pink's book to me to read.

I do not know that the gap between the design or researcher and the marketer will ever close; an anthropologist working in a setting that requires these two fields to work together can become a line of communication between the two however. As anthropologists we are trained to think like a designer, and we can also analyze like a marketer. These skills need to be emphasized and embraced. However, as a warning, I do not think that an anthropologist will ever completely share a marketer's philosophy in theory or practice. This is an obstacle to an anthropologist's success in the marketing arena that lies in the root of the anthropological discipline. While it is not insurmountable, it does need to be noted.

There is a gap between the magic and intangibility of the ethnographic research that can be conducted, written up, and presented; and the reliability of the data, action plans and tangibility of numbers that is perceived and stable in the business world. This gap grows as researchers separate themselves from the people who will eventually work with the data that they gather. Here is a gap that is crucial to both developments in general and, specifically, to the future use of anthropologists in business research. Here is a gap that an anthropologist, trained to observe and understand human interaction, can fill. The anthropologist's training is not only directed to the ethnographic and anthropological research that a client may request, but also towards the

balancing and controlling of the delicate relationship between client and researcher. This balance must be achieved in order to further the importance of anthropological research. Right now marketers do not truly understand the value of the work an anthropologist does for a client or project. This lack of understanding can cause an anthropologist's work to be perceived as unnecessary or secondary. I think as anthropologists we must remember that qualitative data offers a value of richness in the data that quantitative data can never match.

What is needed now, according to Henry, is an individual who can move back and forth between qualitative thinking and researching and quantitative thinking and researching. No matter how pretty our qualitative results may be, we must remember that companies do not pay for the research but that they pay for the answers. It would be valuable to foster individuals who are fluent in both research styles. Not only would this ensure that gems of data are not lost between the shift from a qualitative research team to a quantitative research team, or vice versa, but also that both types of research are kept methodologically honest.

There is a gap between marketing and designing, as well as between research and accessibility. Right now, the design and marketing world does not need another research theory, but rather it needs anthropologists who can

effectively straddle the line between research and theory, and methods and action. Anthropologists must realize that there is a difference between theory and practice, and that experience is necessary for the practice to be effective. In academia, anthropologists can prepare future researchers more effectively by offering case-based research methods classes; a format which works well in legal studies and business programs because it clearly shows the effect of theory in the real world. There is a need to think in a project based and problem based mode for an anthropologist to clearly and effectively work in the private sector, and to make anthropology relevant to the private sector. Anthropologists are well-situated to fill the gap that exists between designers and marketers, because at the base of all our training is to be a facilitator and listener to both what is said and done.

## **Reclaim and Retrain**

Perhaps the biggest comment I have received from my research, both as a participant and observer as well as an interviewer, is that anthropology as a discipline is viewed as slightly archaic and inaccessible to the average person. However, the skills that an anthropologist are trained to develop are sorely needed in today's world. These skills, those of a holistic observer, a listener and a recorder are still relevant in the engineering and computer world. To become more publicly accessible may mean to become more mainstream, however, in a world where the educated elite now appear in mainstream magazines perhaps it is time for anthropologists to reinvent themselves into being influential to both the ivory tower as well as to the everyday Joe. Helen Fisher does not need to be the only anthropologist that America is on a first name basis with! Indeed, in this age of human behaviour discovery, the questions being asked of academics are getting bigger and bigger, and a multi-dimensional approach to thinking and clarifying ideas and experiences is needed. Anthropologists are trained to be both multidimensional and holistic thinkers.

In conclusion I feel that I have effectively found answers to my central research questions. Through my slightly untraditional research methods of combining an ethnographic based participant observation synopsis of my hands on experience, I have been able to experience a real-world application of

anthropological methods as it is currently conducted and that to compare my experiences and interactions with that of individuals who have worked in the roles I observed. I feel, in reflection, that the combination of these two methods, although unusual, has offered a more understanding than either of the two would have offered as a stand-alone project. I also feel that my prior experience in marketing and research offered me credibility to my interviewees. I do not believe that some of my interviewees would have spoken so honestly to me about situations and experiences had I not been able to bring experience and understanding, such as it was, to the interview.

I feel that there are multiple benefits to be gained by both the business world and the greater world by applying anthropological skills to the business sector in a more structured and method-based way. Good design can make people's lives easier, more efficient, and more productive. Good design can also enrich people's lives and offer hope and sustenance in bleak times. Good marketing and advertising can support good design by making it accessible to a large population. One illustration of the benefit of design and marketing to the world is the One Laptop per Child program (<http://laptop.org>), which at its base aims to expand the accessibility of education to children worldwide. This program, which has benefited many children all over the world, is based on academic research, and has depended on strategic advertising in order to become

such a success. The One Laptop per Child program was, “extensively field-tested and validated among some of the poorest and most remote populations on earth” (*One Laptop per Child*:<http://laptop.org/en/vision/mission/index2.shtml>) and has branched out from being an academic idea to being a program which is supported by major companies, governments, and researchers around the world. Anthropologists are, at the root of the discipline, watchers and recorders of human cultures. The way to spread our knowledge is no longer solely through academic tomes, but also through working alongside other disciplines and even outside of the academic realm in order to continue to watch and record today’s global cultures.

There is no doubt that anthropological methods and theories have been utilized and claimed by other disciplines and fields. There is also evidence that the methods that other fields are using are not necessarily delivering the desired results to companies. One of the main flaws is that there is a lack of training and qualification required for an individual to conduct ethnography, for example. While there are definite checks and balances for individuals to conduct quantitative research and analysis, there is no set method to control the level of understanding required for non-anthropologists to conduct “good” anthropological research. I have no solution to suggest for this dilemma other than that it is necessary for anthropologists working in the private sector field to

actively illustrate their research in an actionable way which demonstrates the skill that is required to conduct good research.

Finally, there is still work to be done to address the perception of anthropology outside of the social science departments of universities. Part of this is, I think, a public relations need, and part of this is that anthropology, as a discipline, has quietly faded into the background of public interest as sociology and psychology have become viewed as being more relevant to people outside of the field. Indeed the number of undergraduate students enrolled in a psychology course as compared to the number enrolled in an anthropology course is proof enough. Anthropology is currently viewed as irrelevant and out of touch with what is occurring world-wide. Anthropologists need to break the assumed reputation of being studiers of lost tribes, and fortune hunters who experience real-life adventures similar to that of Indiana Jones. It should be no surprise then, that while many businesses may think that there is a benefit to anthropological research as a methodology, the actual field of anthropology is seen as outdated. It is time for anthropologists to reclaim their identity as a relevant and public-oriented field of study. Anthropologists must also become their own marketers and retrain the public to see the benefit and understanding that an anthropological scope can bring to the private and non-profit sectors.



Throughout my exploration of anthropological methods in the design and marketing industry, I have seen many areas where an anthropologist can flourish in the private sector, and I have seen places where an anthropologist needs to do further research. If anthropologists can discover what is required of them, this is a chance for anthropologists to expand their meaningful work into vast areas of public issues and act as perpetrators of change instead of just recorders of change. "Story is just as integral to the human experience as design;" (Pink 2006: 101) it is time for anthropologists to remind the world.

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