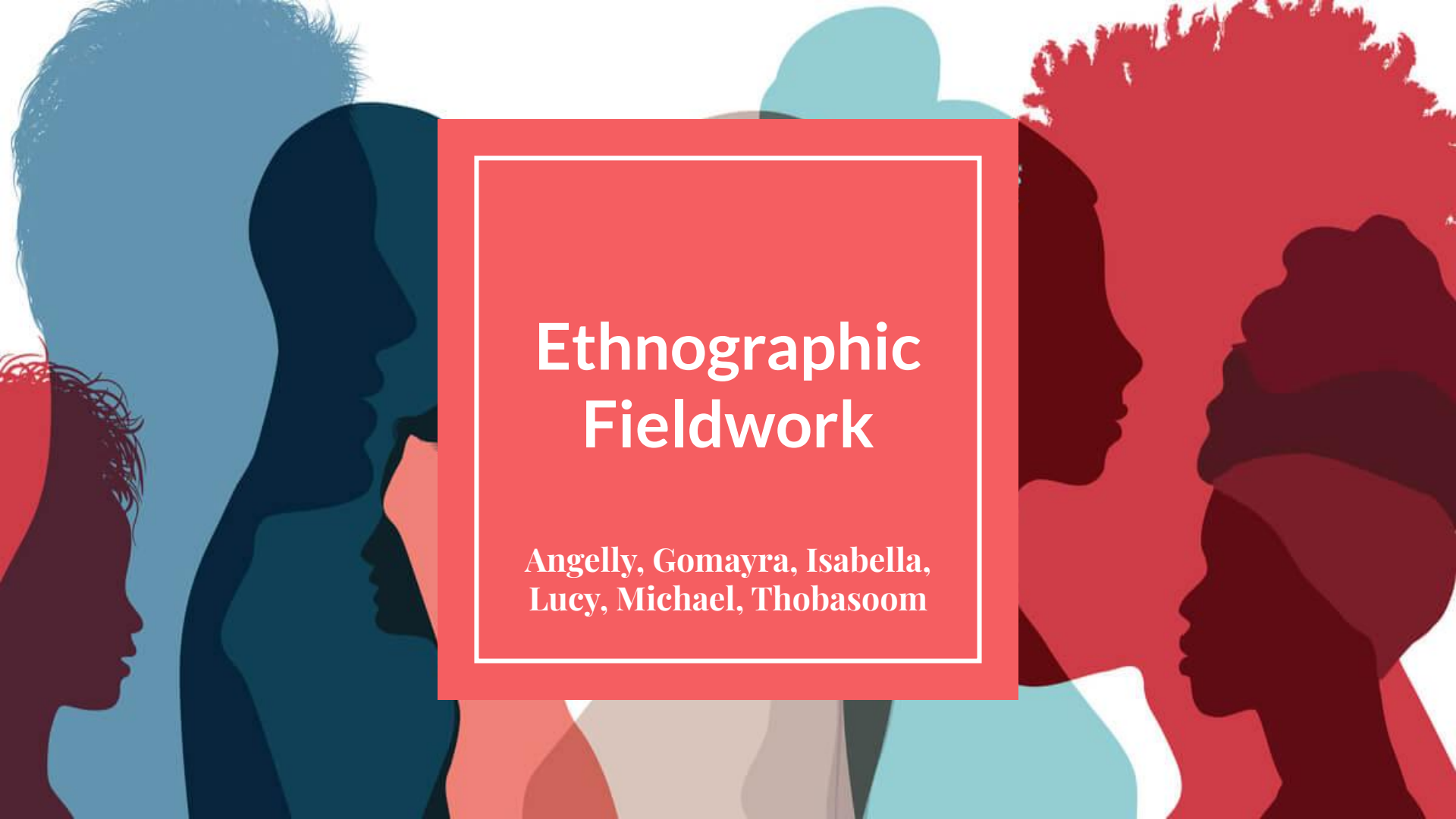


Ethnographic Fieldwork

Angelly, Gomayra, Isabella,
Lucy, Michael, Thobasoom

What is it?

Ethnography:

- A type of qualitative research
- Involves one to immerse in a particular community to observe their behavior and interaction up close

Ethnographic Fieldwork:

- How anthropologists gather data
- Fieldwork is the process of immersing oneself in as many aspects of the daily cultural lives of people as possible in order to study their behaviors and interaction

Examples of ethnography fieldwork:

- Observing a group of kids playing
- Observing a group of people getting coffee

Activity 1

Argonauts of the Western Pacific

~ Bronislaw Malinowski

Summary

Relying on informants or documents prevent people from observing real behavior behind what is said, the conversations, actions, and emotions not mentioned. The small details are essential in understanding a culture. Assimilating into a culture is crucial when making observations to better understand the way it functions. For example, knowing when “an event is ordinary or an exciting and singular one”.

Unbiased observations:

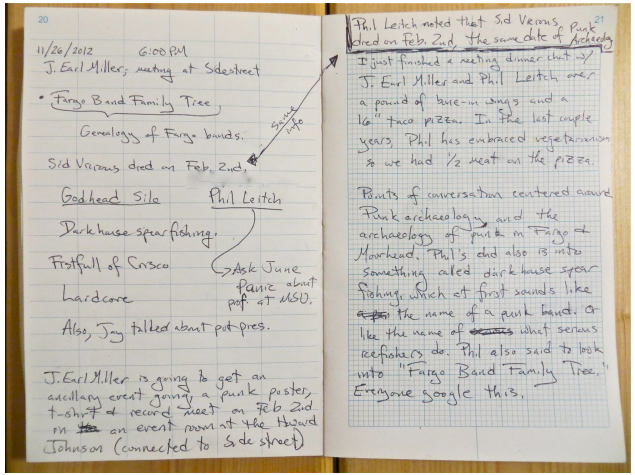
- ➔ Willing to follow native life with no other intentions
  - ◆ Ex: influencing them in some way

What is *"imponderabilia of actual life"?*

- "A series of phenomena of great importance which cannot possibly be recorded by questioning or computing documents, but have to be observed in their full actuality" (Malinowski 18)
  - Factors you cannot see through research, the things you need to observe or experience yourself
  - Trying to obtain the full picture & understanding the way a culture functions
  - Behavior, conversations, emotions, friendships, disagreements

How does Malinowski suggest that ethnographers should observe and record this imponderabilia during fieldwork?

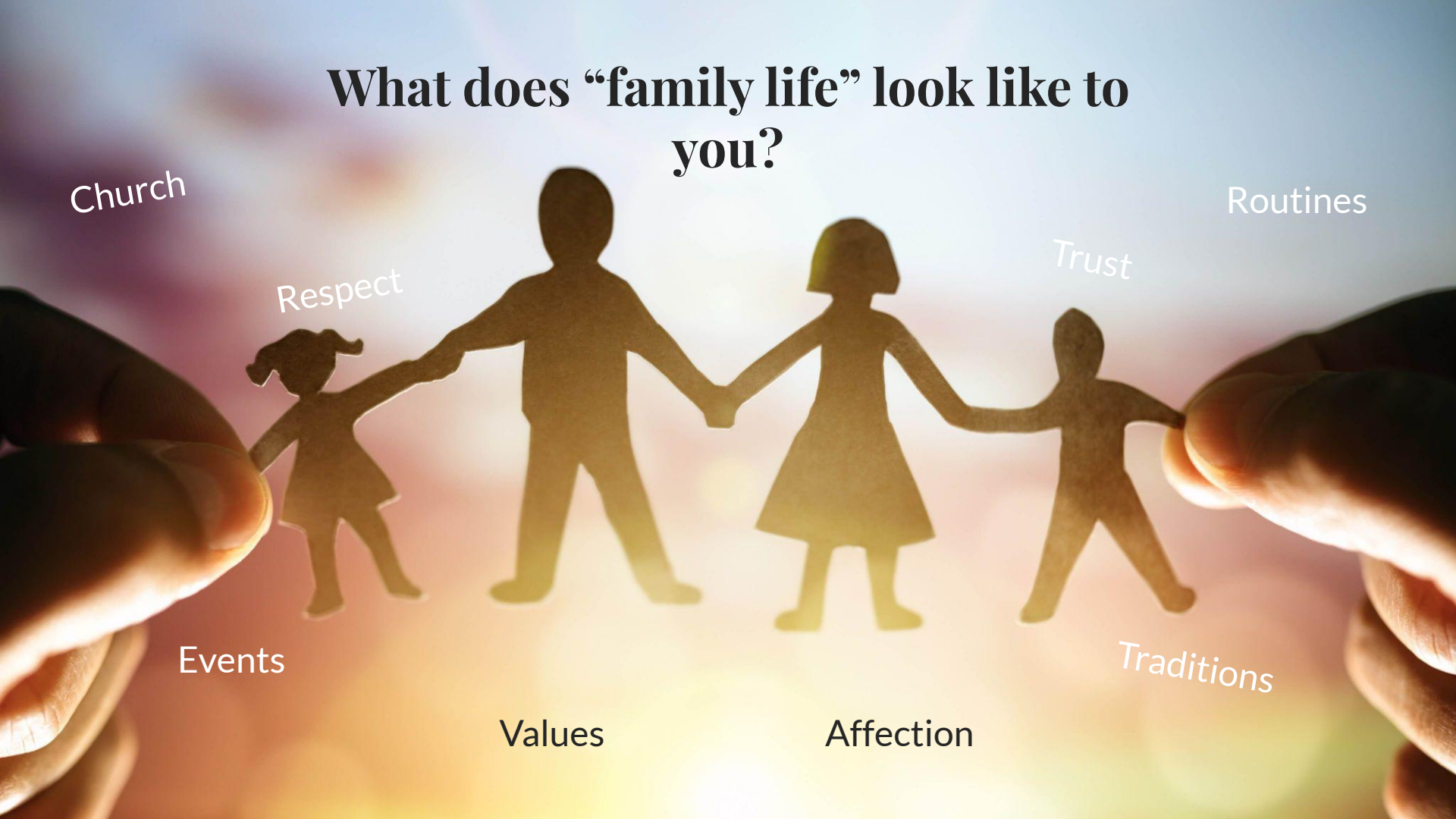
- Use an ethnographic diary
- Repeated actions should be noted down at once
- Become knowledgeable about the basics or local conditions within a culture → deeper observations
  - ➢ Things will begin to stand out
- Record traditions and customs, but also the actions from both the actors and spectators



According to Malinowski, why is it good for the ethnographer to put aside their notebook and camera?

- Taking part in a culture is important when making observations
- You get the most out of a culture when you are involved
- Observations become more transparent and understandable

What does “family life” look like to you?



Family Life

Everyone has a different view of what “family life” looks like for them

- Affection
- Preferences
- Mutual interest
- Routine interactions & activities

Ethnographers go beyond a general idea, they look for the details. There’s an intimate side of everything.

Onions Are My Husband

~ Clark

Summary

Gracia Clark, an anthropologist who studies economic life and gender in West Africa, discusses the experiences of observing the Asante people of Ghana and the trading network in Ghana's largest open-air market place.

Agbogbloshie Market

How did locals respond to the presence of the anthropologist?

- Courteous yet cautious
- Feared she was a police informant
- Were hesitant to discuss details
- Viewed her as “inefficient”

Why was it not possible to tape interviews?

- Government officials frequently confiscated things from the marketplace
- Voices on tapes could be identified
- Information could be used to implicate traders in crimes

What unexpected problems did the ethnographer run into?

- Difficulties with “cross-gender research” due to the sex-segregated friendships in the Asante culture
- Mistrust from locals believing Clark was a government spy
- Lack of social etiquette
- Rise of political tension

How did the ethnographer overcome the suspicions about her intentions?

- Created the persona of a “genial loafer”
- Established rapport with locals
- Avoided discussing topics that would lead others to believe she had ulterior motives
- Showed a willingness to learn and humility

Rosters of the God

~ Textor

Summary

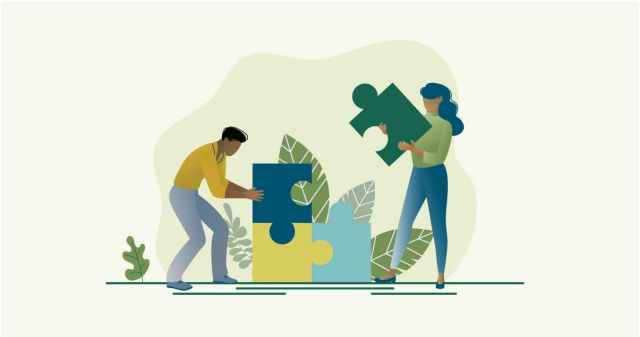
Robert Textor along with two informants study one major sub-domain of the total domain of religio-magical belief and behavior in Bang Chan, a rural village in central Thailand. Textor shows how villagers make choices among supernatural objects culturally available to them as they seek to achieve a particular reward or avoid a particular punishment.

Describe the relationship between the ethnographer and his informants

- Very close relationship
- Took fieldwork very seriously
- Cross questioned each other to avoid bias and get a clear understanding
- Never took the questioning to heart (i.e never felt their knowledge was being challenged)
- All wanting the best and clear description of research

How critical were the informants to completing the ethnographic research?

- They were very critical
- Made sure everything was correct when checked back
- Understood more of the language
- They had some jobs while Textor was away
- And cross examined notes to be precise and truthful



Do you think that learning the local language is essential for doing fieldwork?

- Having some sort of understanding of the language is important
- Important to know how to word things to be as clear in research
- Having someone that speaks the same language is important if a researcher doesn't
- Helps avoid miscommunication due to a language barrier
- You want to be able to present the research as accurately and unbiased as possible

Sovereignty And Symbol:

Indian-White Conflict At Ganienkeh

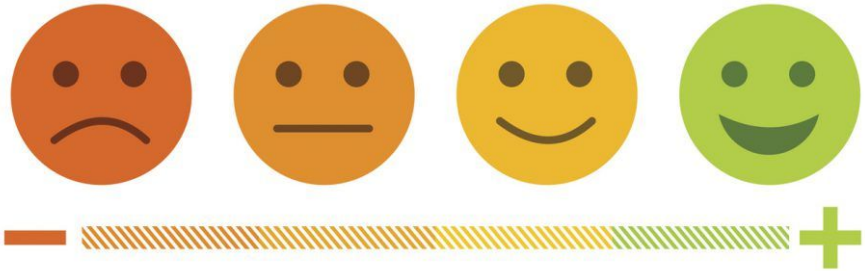
Taking notes with Informants

Summary

Gail H. Landsman goes upstate New York to learn more about **Ganienkeh conflict**. She ran across a large barrier of residents refusing to share their side of the story due to their prior experiences. To overcome this barrier, Landsman had to find ways to break that barrier that is hiding the authentic details of the Ganienkeh conflict. There are two primary groups of informants that were referred in this research. One group is the **Natives of Ganienkeh**. The other group is an organization called **Concerned Persons of the Central Adirondacks (COPCA)**. The purpose of this organization is to prevent the natives from taking their land back.

How did the emotions of informants/research participants impact the ethnographer's fieldnotes?

- Fear of being misunderstood
  - Already misrepresented by media
- Realization of desiring trust
- More sensitivity=more information
  - Building trust is key



How were historical, archival, print, and photographic materials utilized in their study?

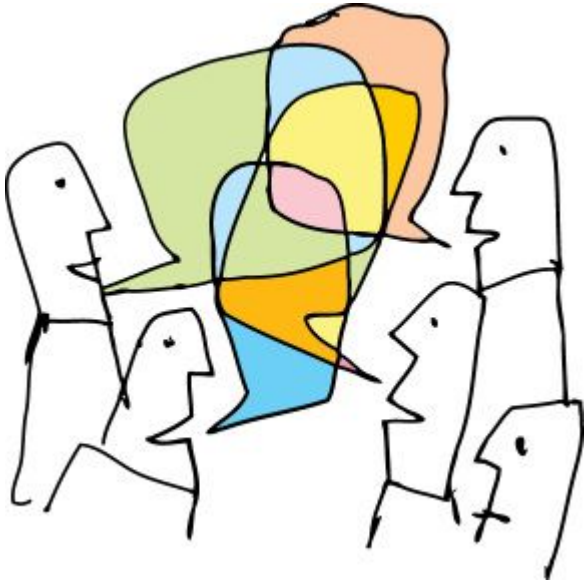
- Landsman used what she think she knows about the Ganienkeh Conflict to get a better understanding from the participants' POV
  - Learn the political context on surface level
- Looked for newspaper articles involving exchanges between COPCA members and the residents of Ganienkeh
  - Visited newspaper offices

How did informants assist with this?

- Covered topics based on what Landsman know
  - Role of state government
  - Involvement in the dispute
  - Reactions to public statements
- Had to earn the informants' trustworthy
  - Attend to private meetup at a restaurant
- From private meetings to informal interactions in their homes.

How critical do you think informants are to conducting ethnographic research?

- They are the cornerstone of the research
  - Reveals unique point of views
  - Real inside look of society/culture
- Can only go so far from an etic perspective



Rural Hausa: A village and Setting

~ Polly Hill

Summary:

Polly Hill was a British social anthropologist of West Africa. Hill went to the village of Batagarawa in the vicinity of Katsina near the border of Nigeria where he analyzed socio-economic affairs using the theme of economic inequality. He analyzed that as poverty involves inactivity, it cannot be studied through participant observation. As people in poverty are less likely to be in areas easily observable, surveys are often unable to cover the entire population, leaving them out. The general fear of extreme poverty often leads to stereotypes and condescension even when third parties are more forthcoming than the victims themselves.

What do you think the author means by "the poor are usually unobserved"?

By “the poor are usually unobserved”, the authors means that:

- The survey often doesn’t cover the entire population, for which people in poverty may be left out
- Disadvantaged people might not be open and talk about their experience due to the fear of being stereotyped or judged

Are there some types of insights that are difficult or impossible to ascertain through participant-observation? Why might this be the case?

- The researchers can be biased
- Participants can change the way the act
- Can miss some important information
- The participants can lie about a situation

How do you think anthropologists should deal with sensitive information or vulnerable members of a culture?

- Address personal biases
- Think before acting or responding to situations
- Build a trusting relationship
- Obtain permission from participants to ensure they feel comfortable being observed
- Give them the freedom to disclose as much as they want

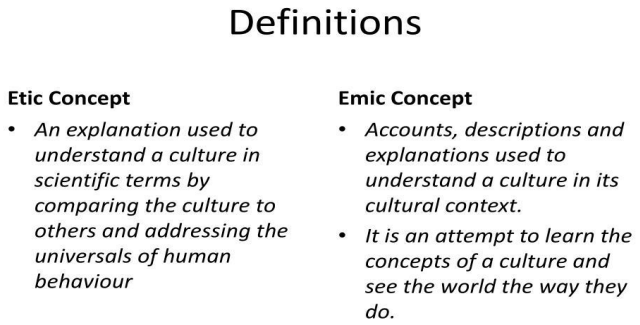
Activity 2

Emic and Etic

Emic: The insider's perspective. It comes from within the culture that is being studied and where the project is being performed.

Etic: The outsider’s perspective- how an anthropologist would classify behavior.

Reflexive approach: acknowledges that no researcher can be 100% objective due to unconscious bias.



Winfield Street Coffee

Fieldwork Experiment- Coffee Shop

Members of the team visited local coffee shop in Stamford and observed patron interaction for 30 minutes.

Initial observations upon entering:

- There were very few people sitting closely together.
- People who were with someone were usually seated outside. We believe this was for both privacy and courtesy to the other general patrons.
- People that were seated by themselves were faced in a uniform formation that faced away from others, to avoid unnecessary eye contact.
- Usually, patrons would quickly glance at new people who would walk in or walk past them. They would generally give a brief nod of acknowledgment, yet turn their head away or avert their attention to something else if the same person walked past them or they made eye contact with them again.
  - We also noticed that we ourselves were prone to the behavior stated above, as while noting our observations we also participated in avoiding eye contact with employees and patrons alike.

Reflection Questions

- What is ethnography?
- What is ethnographic fieldwork?
- Can you list some examples of ethnographic fieldwork?
- What is the difference between emic and etic?

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