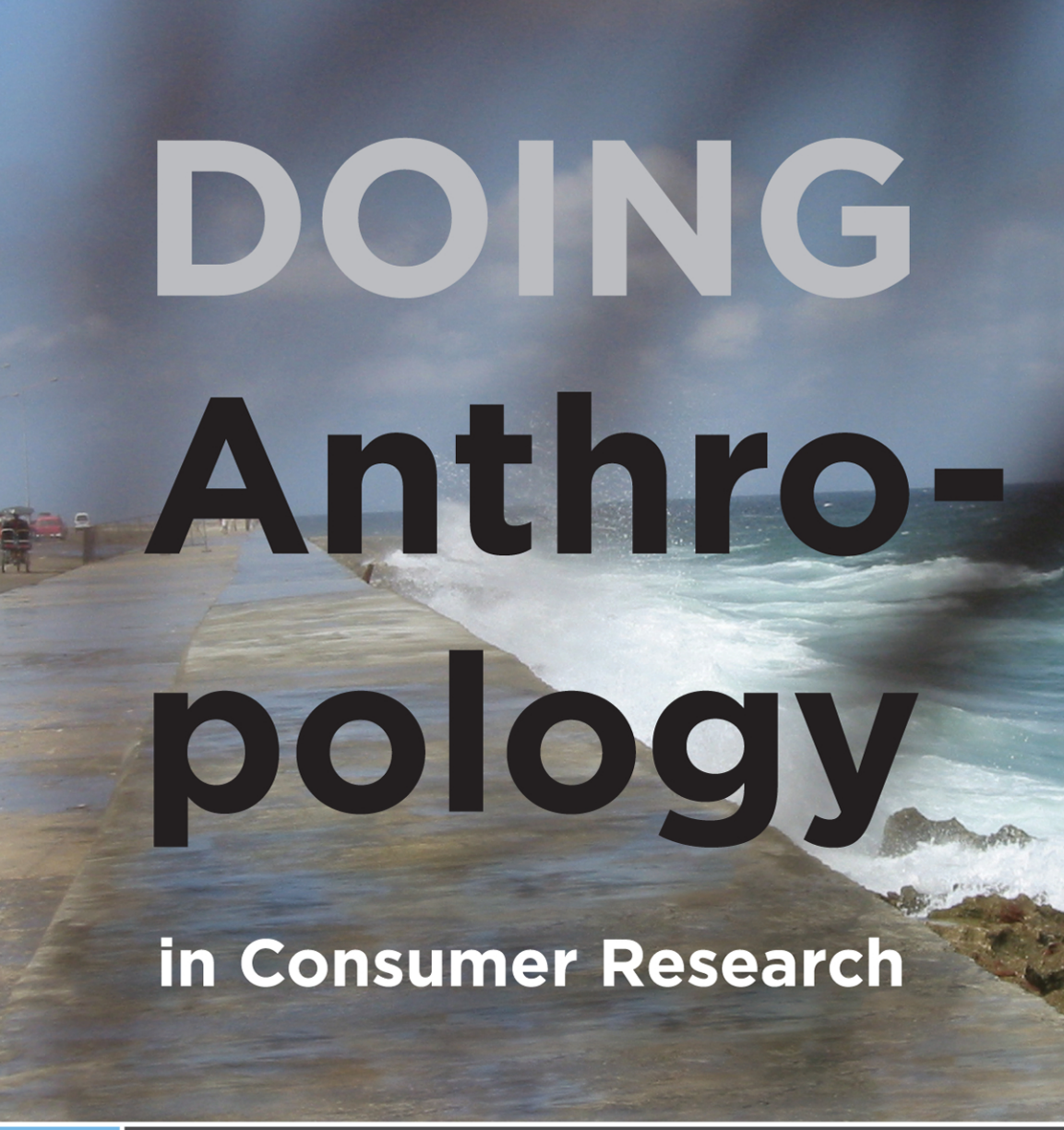

PATRICIA L.
SUNDERLAND

RITA M.
DENNY

ROUTLEDGE

DOING ANTHROPOLOGY IN CONSUMER RESEARCH

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DOING ANTHROPOLOGY IN CONSUMER RESEARCH

Patricia L. Sunderland and Rita M. Denny

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Dedication

To Mekonnen and Steve
Two of the most patient and supportive souls this world has ever produced.

To Sarah
A master of the nuanced cadences in her mother's replies (grunts) to her home-from-school greeting, "How's the book?"

With love and thanks.

To our research participants and to our teachers, our muses throughout.

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Preface: Ethnographic Consumer Research and Anthropological Analysis

We have been conducting ethnographic consumer research for corporate and institutional clients since the 1980s. We have worked with the producers, suppliers, and advertisers of consumer goods ranging from drain cleaners and power drills to 24-carat-gold ingots and fine art. We have worked with financial, healthcare, and educational institutions, retail conglomerates, energy and emerging technology industries, and governmental nonprofits. Our cultural analyses have helped clients to brand and market their goods and services in relevant and resonant ways as well as to think about entirely new products and services.

Over these twenty years, we have witnessed what one could call a seismic shift in the location and integration of ethnography within the consumer research world. The arena shifted from one in which "ethnography" was an esoteric term and as a mode of research was only rarely commissioned, to one where ethnography has become so commonplace that virtually every company offering qualitative consumer research has had to incorporate ethnographic work into the toolkit in one fashion or another. Advertising agencies and other business corporations have hired ethnographic specialists, and many have created entire departments dedicated to ethnographic inquiry.

As anthropologists, it is difficult not to applaud these developments. Ethnography has been the hallmark methodology of cultural anthropology for almost a century, and to see the methodology move beyond the bounds of our arguably niche academic field is to envision the influence of anthropology in a wider sphere. However, there is also no question that it is one-handed applause. Traditionally, for anthropologists, the applause might have been one-handed because anthropologically based insight was being incorporated into corporate pursuits. But the troubling reality of the situation is that this is precisely what has not always happened. The misuse and misappropriation of ethnography in consumer research has been part and parcel of its use. A myriad of research

techniques within consumer research (from the few-minute in-store intercept interview, to the one-hour "depth interview," to the online focus group) have become redefined as "ethnographic" with barely any change in the underlying assumptions regarding method or analysis. Researchers have transformed themselves into "ethnographers" with few changes in practice beyond the name. In moments of need or desperation, clients have embraced ethnography as a crystal ball or magical resolution of their business problems, rather than as a mode of understanding and analytic catalyst for business-relevant ideas.

The truly troubling side of the proliferation of ethnography in consumer research, then, has been the relative absence of an accompanying proliferation of anthropological cultural analysis. Within anthropology, ethnography as a methodology has been honed in the service of understanding sociocultural phenomena and practices. "Culture" and "society" are at heart concepts with long histories, and long histories of disagreement among specialists. In the last decades, anthropologists have been active in combating notions of culture as static phenomena or as geographically located entities. There have also been strong efforts against cultural essentialism, or the "the X do this because of their culture" school of thought. In current anthropological conceptualizations, individuals are not pawns of the social or the cultural; rather, they are simultaneously its agents and its pawns, its creators and its destroyers, its advocates and its adversaries. Despite theoretical differences and disagreements, what anthropologists have generally maintained is an interest not only in the individual but in the extra-individual. The social milieu or metaphoric space that supports, catalyzes, organizes, and transduces, as well as confounds and constrains, individual thoughts and practices is seen as crucial. But in the use of ethnography within consumer research, the problem one frequently witnesses is that the goals of the research do not include any understanding or interest in analyzing the lived context of people and brands, that is, in the shared or contested cultural meanings and values imputed to brands or products and the common (and contested) cultural practices that surround categories or brands of products. Rather, ethnographic inquiry is too often embraced as simply a means to obtain a deeper psychological understanding of a target audience. In essence, even when the "new" methods of ethnography have replaced the traditional focus groups and other qualitative techniques within consumer research, ethnography has simply been subsumed as another technique of psychological research. An implicit paradigm and theoretical framework that assumes individual motivation and make-up are the key to consumption practices has been left intact.

Among anthropologists in consumer research, one can see the implicit expectation and interest in cultural issues in the names given to firms and departments—for instance, "Cultural Connections," "Cultural Discoveries," "Cultural Research and Analysis," and the like. Our goal in writing this book is to help make these implicit anthropological expectations and interests explicit. In so doing, our desire is two-fold. On the one hand, we want to provide a means for the increased appreciation and use of anthropological analysis in corporate consumer research circles. On the other, we want to bridge the gap between the corporate and academic consumer research realm and academic anthropology. Within academic anthropology, there appears to be a renewed and increasing interest in applied anthropology generally and applied consumer research in particular. In recent years, both the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (NAPA), the American Anthropological Association's designated subdivision for practicing anthropology, and the Society for Applied Anthropology have considerably increased their general visibility as well as their specific attention to and embrace of corporate and consumer research. Within academic circles, consumption has also been incorporated as a topic of interest and theoretical import. Still, as a rule, practicing and academic anthropologists and academic consumer researchers are talking within their own separate circles.

With this book, we would like to bring the various divided conversations of the consumer research realm and academic anthropology together. To do so, we use a series of case studies. We see these case studies as a means for the increased appreciation and use of anthropological analysis in corporate consumer research circles as well as an introduction to the intricacies of doing anthropology in the corporate arena for those within academic anthropology. We have specifically chosen *not* to write this book as a how-to primer on methods. There are already many good texts of ethnographic research methods. Recent works of note include Karen O'Reilly's *Ethnographic Methods* and Hy Mariampolski's *Ethnography for Marketers*, which, as its title suggests, is specifically geared to the corporate consumer research realm. It would be difficult to significantly surpass the contributions these authors have already made. Rather, our aim with the present book is to show what it means to re-attach cultural analysis in ethnographic consumer research using first-person case examples. In so doing, this book tells "how to" but, more specifically, "how to apply and appreciate cultural analysis in the practice of consumer research." We want to show that the real magic and difference of ethnography lies in the cultural approach and analysis, not in a different kind of data gathering. We will show, in fact, that one can do anthropology even in context of the focus group room.

Organization of the Book

To provide readers with a better sense of the background and context surrounding current practices, we begin with a brief chapter on anthropologists and anthropological outlooks in consumer research. This introductory chapter is in some ways itself an experiential case study, as, in addition to written sources, we have drawn on discussions with business colleagues and our own personal experiences. We focus largely on developments in the United States, where our own consumer research practice has been based, but also footnote some developments in the United Kingdom and France, again drawing on discussions with others and personal experiences as well as written sources. Chapter 2 then introduces readers to the specifics of what we mean by a cultural approach and analysis. Chapter 3 builds on this foundation by focusing on some of the methodological considerations that motivate the research process. We do so through the presentation of a "what is coffee?" exercise we have used to train corporate clients as well as other consumer research professionals. We show how coffee, its consumption, and its meanings are cultural matters that can only be understood with attention to cultural context, whether in Benton Harbor, Michigan, or Bangkok, Thailand. We also demonstrate how a cultural analysis can be generative for clients while simultaneously illustrating that ethnography as a method is inherently multimodal and analytic (e.g., about listening as well as observing, about actions as well as artifacts, and about analyzing as well as asking).

The book includes a number of forewords by other authors. Our purpose in including these forewords is to help bridge gaps and tie strands of the varied fields together. In the section "Engaging Approaches," the major case study section of the book, we begin with forewords by anthropologists Donald Stull and John Sherry. Their unique vantage points and bases of experience in applied anthropology and academic marketing, respectively, help bridge the divided conversations of anthropology and marketing. Chapters 4 through 7 thereafter provide readers with in-depth examples drawn from our own consumer research practice. The first of these, "The Social Life of Metaphors: Have We Become Our Computers?" calls attention to the ways metaphoric understandings are frames with which consumption and other life endeavors are imagined and enacted. It builds on multiple research projects and analyses and examines how metaphors of computing have entered into American cultural definitions of self, other, work, and play. This chapter also demonstrates the way attention to small details in how people organize the everyday spaces of their lives gives clues to highly salient cultural matters.

Chapters 5 and 6 illustrate the integration of ethnography with text-based analyses or semiotics. These chapters, a cultural reading of trans-Tasman identities and an examination of the cultural constitution of emotion among young people in the United States, United Kingdom, and New Zealand, draw on work carried out over a number of years with partners and colleagues in those countries. In discussing these projects, which included examinations of the semiotics of moving and print ads, we also want to show how semiotic analysis is inherently a cultural analysis, ideally paired with ethnographic inquiry. Chapter 7, "Diagnosing Conversational Details," draws from an even more traditional consumer research technique—the focus group—and demonstrates how this research context is also a site for cultural analysis. Viewing the focus group setting as a conversational event, we look at how people talked about and framed their expectations of utility companies as the clue to their implicit expectations of relationships with these services. Using insights from linguistic anthropology, we show how the ways individuals choose to talk reflects—and creates—those implicit relationships.

The next chapters, 8, 9, and 10, form the "Engaging Entanglements" section of the book. These take a different tack as case studies in that, rather than focusing on a particular research method, question, or project, these chapters focus on recurrent issues we encounter in the course of our work as anthropologists in business. Our goal in this section is to make the entanglements of differing epistemologies, politics of power, institutionalized exigencies, and practicalities ethnographically explicit. The issues we have chosen to focus on—matters of ethnoracial consumer segmentation in Chapter 8 and visual representation in Chapters 9 and 10—are further contextualized through a foreword by Vilma Santiago-Irizarry and Frederic Gleach, anthropologists at Cornell University, and the foreword by Russell Belk, professor at York University's Schulich School of Business, who, along with Robert Kozinets, has been a primary ambassador and advocate of visual representation in consumer research.

In Chapter 11, the concluding chapter, we provide a few final words regarding what we see as the possibilities and promise of a re-attachment of cultural analysis in the practice of consumer research. We suggest that playing in the interstitial spaces between anthropology, academic marketing, and practice not only has great merit, but also has benefits. Convergence between the work—academic and applied—of consumer research/researchers and anthropology/anthropologists has the power to enrich both academic and applied thinking and practice.

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Our understanding and perspective has been mediated by a polyphony of voices and thus we, and the existence of this book, owe much to many people.

For the questions, conundrums, projects, and perspectives that have inspired us over the years, we particularly thank Michael Angelovich, Ellen Arnold, Bruno Asselin, Steve Barnett, Mike Bean, Marlene Bellis, Karen Blu, Liz Boyd, Don Cass, Cathy Dowdell, Craig Dunaway, Starkey Duncan, Patrick Duquesne, Kathryn Fields, Frank Gaynor, Erving Goffman, Cari Groppel, Anne Gudwin, George Hay, Jen Josephson, Herb Leff, Rachael Lovelace, Tom Luke, Owen Lynch, Tamara Maier-Jones, Maryann McCabe, Dick Nelson, Bill O'Connor, Lee Pavach, Ernie Perich, Ellen Plusker, John Prevost, Michael Silverstein, Jacqueline Smart, Roz Rago, Lisa Robinson, Donna Romeo, Patrick Roney, Bambi Schieffelin, Dan Sygar, Roger Thompson, Tom Townsend, Russell Tuttle, Brian Van den Hurk, Lisa Wilcox, Connie Williams, Julie Wittke-Smits, and Judith Wright, as well as Bud Causey, long an ardent supporter of our ethnographic approach, who once, in inimical style, labeled us "ethnogeeks."

As our cultural understanding is often constituted through visual media, we also wish to thank Matthew Belanger, Mark Cassar, Sarah Teitler, and Nelly Trillon, who, as editors, have brought there own sensibilities to bear in illuminating ethnographic sojourns. Kaleb and Belain Eyob, Dennis Frank, Byron Kelly, JoanE O'Brien, Robert Moïse, Bruno Moynié, Mark Pirro, Maria Rosenblum, and Sarah Teitler, as videographers in the field, have energized, supported, and sometimes saved the ethnographic endeavor—whether as anthropologists, professional videographers, filmmakers, or simply astute observers. To our clients who have held cameras for many an hour, you, too, have been muses.

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Dominique Desjeux, Michael Donovan, Adam Drazin, Daniel Eyob, Ayala Fader, Vanessa Hayward, Doug Holt, Cate Hunt, Angela Jenks, Mekonnen Ketsela, Hy Mariampolski, Grant McCracken, Saúl Mercado, Hartmut Mokros, Ian Phillips, Annie Rorem, Paitra Russell, Charlotte Sector, Hannah Shakespeare, Irina Carlota Silber, Jaqueline Smart, Robert Spector, Gigi Taylor, Sarah Teitler, Susan Terrio, Christina Wasson, and Bob Yovovich.

Our goal to bring in multiple trajectories of scholarly writing would not have been achieved without the help of Luther Elliot who took the spirit of our task to heart. Annie Rorem did yeoman's duty in mastering Endnote for us. Meredithe Applebury, who otherwise lives a life of a molecular biologist, stood in at all hours as technical support to neutralize our deficiencies in electronic referencing.

The foreword authors, Russell Belk, Fred Gleach, Vilma Santiago-Irizarry, John F. Sherry Jr., and Donald Stull, we cannot thank enough. We are deeply grateful, not only for their very careful readings, written contributions, perspectives, and powers to orient, but for the generosity of spirit with which they donated both their time and attention to gently correct our oversights, answer our questions, and simply to help us out. We thank Jennifer Collier, our editor at Left Coast Press, who has shepherded us through this process without ever losing her sense of humor or balance. Jennifer's insight and advice has made this a better book, as did the thoughtful, careful comments of our reviewers, and the copyediting of Ginny Hoffman. Of course, all errors, oversights, and lapses of judgment in this book—no matter how large or small—are our own.

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Writing amid densely packed work schedules is an exercise in the creation of time. It has been situated in interstitial weeks, days, hours, and moments. To our families, and to our friends, who have nurtured our illusion that time can in fact be created, we thank you for your unequivocal support in the endeavor, recalibration of time on our behalf, and patience with our whining. We owe you many days, not to mention dinners. And we owe you laughter. For those

of you still wondering why we haven't written the blockbuster bestseller (after all this effort), we duly sympathize. Perhaps next time.

To Thelma and Louise, many, many thanks. We had no idea what it would take in time, effort, tenaciousness, efficiency, and heart to write this book. It has been a collaborative effort from the start, made possible only because of friendship, shared vision, great trust, and huge respect. We have traded off taking the lead in getting ourselves into messes (okay, new territories) over the past ten years, and this book, the topics written about, and the writing of its chapters are no exception to that tradition. It was shocking to discover that it has become impossible to know who wrote what. This somehow is fitting, as even clients of longstanding mix us up.

Many of these chapters have drawn on prior published work in thought or deed. We are grateful to the following publishers for permission to excise liberally:

Patricia L. Sunderland (2006), "Entering entertainment: Creating consumer documentaries for corporate clients," in Russell W. Belk (ed), *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing*, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, pp. 371–383.

Rita M. Denny (2006), "Pushing the boundaries of ethnography in the practice of market research," in Belk (ed), *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing*, pp. 430–439.

Rita M. Denny, Patricia L. Sunderland, Jaqueline Smart, and Chris Christofi (2005), "Finding Ourselves in Images: A Cultural Reading of Trans-Tasman Identity," *Journal of Research for Consumers*, www.jrconsumers.com, Issue 8.

Patricia L. Sunderland and Rita M. Denny (2005), "Connections among people, things, images, and ideas: La Habana to Pina and back," *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 8(3):291–312 (http://www.tandf.co.uk).

Patricia L. Sunderland, Elizabeth Gigi Taylor, and Rita M. Denny (2004), "Being Mexican *and* American: Negotiating ethnicity in the practice of market research," *Human Organization* 63(3):373–380.

Rita M. Denny and Patricia L. Sunderland (2005), "Researching cultural metaphors in action: Metaphors of computing technology in contemporary U.S. life," *Journal of Business Research* 58:1456–1463.

Rita M. Denny and Patricia L. Sunderland (2002), "Strange brew: How semiotics became au fait with au lait," *Research*, Issue 438:21–24.

Patricia L. Sunderland and Rita M. Denny (2002), "Performers and partners: Consumer video documentaries in ethnographic research," in *Qualitative Ascending: Harnessing Its True Value*, Amsterdam: ESOMAR, pp. 285–303.

Rita M. Denny (1995), "Speaking to customers: The anthropology of communications," in John F. Sherry Jr. (ed), *Contemporary Marketing and Consumer Behavior*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 330–346.
Patricia L. Sunderland and Rita M. Denny (2003), "Psychology vs anthropology: Where is culture in marketplace ethnography?" in Timothy Malefyt and Brian Moeran (eds), *Advertising Cultures*, Oxford, UK: Berg, pp. 187–202.

For permission to use the "office" illustration that starts Chapter 2, we thank Robin Jareaux; we are indebted to her for her willingness to redraw the original illustration and to Matthew Belanger for recreating the original caption.

Part I
Introduction

USA TODAY

Money

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 1999

THE NATION'S NEWS...

SECTION B

Business Travel Today

By David Field

Strike watch: America West and the Association of Flight Attendants will begin 30 days of intense negotiations to try to reach a contract by March 19. The flight attendants union has threatened to begin wildcat strikes or sickouts after that date if no agreement is reached. America West says it will provide refunds or place passengers on other airlines if trips are canceled because of a job action.

Airlines with the best on-time arrival for 1998

TWA	78.3%
Avg.	77.2%

Source: Transportation Dept.

By Quin Tian, USA TODAY

New menu: Sun Country Airlines announced new meal service starting March 15. The emphasis will be on fresh foods such as sandwiches, fruit and muffins.

Frequent-flier alliance: Members of Aloha Airlines' frequent-flier program can now earn miles simultaneously on Aloha and United Airlines. Members now earn 500 United miles per flight, up from 250 miles, starting Friday through December.

Free upgrades: TWA is offering Elite and Elite 1 members of its Aviators frequent-flier program unlimited domestic upgrades starting March 1.

Hot asset in corporate: Anthropology degrees

By Del Jones
USA TODAY

Don't throw away the MBA degree yet.

But as companies go global and crave leaders for a diverse workforce, a new hot degree is emerging for aspiring executives: anthropology.

The study of man is no longer a degree for museum directors. Citicorp created a vice presidency for anthropologist Steve Barnett, who discovered early warning signs to identify people who don't pay credit card bills.

Not satisfied with consumer surveys, Hallmark is sending anthropologists into the homes of immigrants, attending holidays and birthday parties to design cards they'll want.

No survey can tell engineers what women really want in a razor, so marketing consultant Hauser Design sends anthropologists into bathrooms to watch them shave their legs.

Unlike MBAs, anthropology degrees are rare: one undergraduate degree for every 26 in business and one anthropology Ph.D. for every 235 MBAs.

Textbooks now have chapters on business applications. The University of South Florida has created a course of study for anthropologists headed for commerce.

Motorola corporate lawyer Robert Faulkner got his anthropology degree before going to law school. He says it becomes increasingly valuable as he is promoted into management.

"When you go into business, the only problems you'll have are people problems," was the advice given to teen-ager Michael Koss by his father in the early 1970s.

Koss, now 44, heeded the advice, earned an anthropology degree from Beloit College in 1976, and is today CEO of the Koss headphone manufacturer.

Katherine Burr, CEO of The Hanseatic Group, has masters in both anthropology and business from the University of New Mexico. Hanseatic was among the first money management programs to predict the Asian crisis and last year produced a total return of 315%

"My competitive edge came completely out of anthropology," she says. "The world is so unknown, changes so rapidly. Preconceptions can kill you."

Companies are starving to know how people use the Internet or why some pickups, even though they are more powerful, are perceived by consumers as less powerful, says Ken Erickson, of the Center for Ethnographic Research.

It takes trained observation, Erickson says. Observation is what anthropologists are

Figure 1.1 *USA Today*, February 18, 1999

1

Anthropologists and Anthropology in Consumer Research

The headline pictured at left, "Hot asset in corporate: Anthropology degrees," appeared in the business (i.e., "Money") section of a February 1999 issue of *USA Today*.[1] Popular press articles detailing the virtues of anthropology, and more specifically those praising the value of ethnography as a tool for consumer research, flourished around that time. Articles featuring ethnography as the "new" means for companies to "really understand" consumers appeared with an almost predictable regularity in the decade from 1995 to 2005. A wide variety of publications, not only *USA Today*, provided this attention—*The New York Times*, *American Demographics*, *Fast Company*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *Harvard Management Update, The Wall Street Journal*, *Fortune Small Business, Newsweek, The Smithsonian, The Financial Times*, and many others took part in spreading the news.[2]

Radio, television news and documentary, and video snippets on the Web also played a role.[3] Highly visible among these was "The Persuaders," a 90-minute documentary that initially aired on public television's *Frontline* in November 2004.[4] This portrayal of the market research industry was clearly fascinating for many. And it also appears to have made Clotaire Rapaille—well known in corporate arenas for his research work associated with Chrysler's PT Cruiser, and variously cited in the media as "medical anthropologist," "psychiatrist," and "car shrink"—a bit of a celebrity.[5]

Within business circles, the interest in anthropological viewpoints and ethnographic research is real. Many Fortune 100 firms do hire anthropologists, whether celebrities or not, and as we write this in 2007, ethnography is a standard offering of qualitative consumer research firms in the United States.

Theorists and practitioners alike have located much of the business interest in ethnographic methods to a shift in marketing's focus—from the production of things to a production of experiences in the marketing of brands.[6] While it can be argued, and we would, that consumers have always encountered experience with products and brands, i.e., creatively produced meanings and experience in the act of consumption, there is no doubt that focus on "experiential marketplaces" (Disney to Nike Town to ESPN Zone to Starbucks) spurred marketing managers and advertising researchers to consider new models and alternative methods of research.[7] There is also no doubt that crowded shelves, the unending array of products for sale, the widespread availability of credit, and the loss of "loyalty" to brands (a standard metric in the industry) also produced a sense of urgency for marketing managers to find a way to make their products stand out. The use of ethnography has often become a kind of Holy Grail quest in the effort to sell one's brand.

Without question, many of the ways ethnography has been understood, as well as implemented, in consumer research have not been in line with the ways in which most anthropologically oriented researchers would frame their work. As we discuss further in Chapter 2, quite often ethnography has been embraced as simply "observation" and combined with an individual-oriented frame of analysis both in the United States and in the United Kingdom.[8] In the hands of unskilled and/or creative market researchers, ethnographic efforts have also, at times, careened toward the absurd, be it maddening or comical. Some of these developments have undoubtedly been driven by the passion of the quest, and as Intel anthropologists Nafus and Anderson have trenchantly noted, "There are quacks in every profession."[9] Nonetheless, a crucial result of this heyday of ethnography in applied consumer research has been the flourishing of high-quality, theoretically informed ethnographic work carried out by serious practitioner-scholars—many of them working, quite explicitly, as practicing anthropologists.

Our goal in this chapter is to provide a bit of context surrounding this movement of anthropologists and anthropological outlooks into consumer research. In doing so, we want to illuminate relevant strands in academic consumer research (generally carried out by researchers in business schools), as well as among anthropologists engaged in the practice of applied consumer research. We do so, necessarily, from our vantage point as anthropologists engaged full-time in the practice of applied consumer research, and in the spirit of ethnographic inquiry, we want to show some of the lived realities that comprise this movement. There seem to be a number of activities currently aimed at melding academic anthropology, academic consumer research, and applied consumer research together in the United States. A question for a later history

is whether these activities will actually forge a meaningful and durable bond. Our contextual review has the vantage point of U.S. developments, but the world of consumer research is carried out on a global stage and cannot by any means be seen as limited to the United States, nor necessarily from this point of view.

Popular Attention: Incipient Norm or Irregularity?

The attention in the popular media to the commissioning of ethnographic research and the hiring of anthropologists in business during the 1990s may seem a clear indication of the impending normalization of ethnography and anthropologists within the business world. On the other hand, the flourishing of attention in the popular press might simply be an indication of the fact that ethnography and anthropology remain non-normative cultural and research practices. As Sidney Levy, a professor of marketing recognized in academic marketing for his enduring contributions to symbolic analysis, maintained in a masterful essay on the history of marketing and consumer research, "Regardless of the long history I am describing here, it is a sign of the irregular situation of qualitative research that examples of its application still turn up in the press as if it were some remarkable newcomer."[10] As he reminded readers, "reinventing the wheel is a common occurrence."[11]

Notably, in September 2006, the *Journal of Advertising Research* published a special issue devoted to ethnographic research. This issue was co-edited by Joseph Plummer, the chief research officer of the Advertising Research Foundation. In an editorial that introduced the issue, Plummer wrote of his embrace of ethnographic work, maintaining that he felt "pleased to see an approach that was so valuable to advertising early in my career enjoying such a resurgence" and hoped the interest would not be "a passing fad."[12] Plummer's early advertising career was spent at the Leo Burnett advertising agency in the 1960s. Plummer recounted that he had taken several courses in anthropology in graduate school, was "smitten" by ethnographic methodology, and then had been inspired to incorporate "ethnographic thinking" into his research work for Leo Burnett when he attended a talk given by Burleigh Gardner "on the value of personal observations of rituals and symbols apparent in consumption or purchase of consumer goods."[13] After an initial ethnographic study in the late 1960s successfully led to Kellogg's trademark "A Kellogg Kind of Morning" campaign, Burnett often used ethnographic research. Ethnographic research was applied, per Plummer's list, to develop advertising for detergents, beer, washing machines, homeowners insurance, and air travel, before it was "abandoned by agencies and marketers" and replaced by focus groups.[14]

Crucially, part of the long history that Levy described in his essay were his activities in the late 1940s and 1950s at Social Research, Inc. (SRI), a Chicago company founded in part by anthropologist Lloyd Warner, along with Bill Henry and Burleigh Gardner, whose talk had inspired Plummer to apply ethnographic methodologies. SRI, which provided organizational consulting as well as consumer research for advertising agencies and companies, was, as Levy pointed out, dynamically infused by the charged intellectual climate of the University of Chicago at the time. The interdisciplinary Committee on Human Development, in which Levy was a graduate student, and the departments of sociology, anthropology, and psychology provided both people and ideas to SRI. The climate at the time included the teaching and ideas of not only Lloyd Warner, but also, among others, Carl Rogers, Robert Redfield, Everett Hughes, Herbert Blumer, David Reisman, and Donald Campbell. Among Levy's fellow graduate students and friends, peer interlocutors in philosophical, topical, and methodological debates, were Erving Goffman, Herbert Gans, Anselm Strauss, Lee Rainwater, and Gerald Handel; the latter two also became core members of SRI. Brand image was one of the concepts that emerged from SRI's work, along with groundbreaking studies on the social symbolism surrounding consumer behavior and products ranging from cigarettes (at the time symbolic of virility and potency) and television (then relatively new) to Coca-Cola, soap, the telephone, baseball, flowers, and cars. Levy described his ten years of work at SRI, which entailed living "SRI from breakfast until bedtime, brooding over methods of data-gathering and seeking penetrating insights" as "among the most exciting and intensely absorbing" in his life.[15] These years also led to Levy's influential articles "The Product and the Brand" (coauthored with Burleigh Gardner) published in 1955 and "Symbols for Sale" in 1959, both in *The Harvard Business Review*.[16]

Disdain-Induced Separation (Exceptionally Transgressed)

If the decade of the 1950s was a time of acknowledged links between applied consumer research and the academy, as well as between anthropology and consumer research applied to business, these links were subsequently both obscured and severed. As Levy, again trenchantly, put it, "The receptivity to qualitative research by business offends people who despise business and those who study consumers on its behalf."[17] Levy hinted, citing Veblen, that this disdain-induced distancing from the "base" world of actual marketing and selling is not, culturally, a novel idea either, and it exists *within* as well as outside of marketing departments and business schools. One need only attend a few sessions of an Association for Consumer Research (ACR) meeting to

realize that this is true. ACR meetings are comprised of academics who work (for the most part) in business schools. As someone looking into the field with the eyes of an anthropologist, the naïve expectation might be that there would be a celebration of consumption in the context of business practices. An embrace of consumption practices does reign, but the affection frequently resides squarely in the "pure" pleasure of the analysis.

Certainly, within U.S. anthropology, the cultural and professional climate of the 1960s and 1970s produced great efforts among anthropologists to symbolically distance themselves and the field not only from business, but also from business schools. This sentiment was perhaps heightened for anthropologists because of the covert research scandals of the 1960s, resulting in the 1971 American Anthropological Association (AAA) Principles of Professional Responsibility that prohibited anthropologists from undertaking research that could not be openly published (business research is often proprietary, at least in part).[18] But distancing practices were very strong and have had enduring impact. For instance, despite studying anthropology at the University of Chicago and New York University, universities with prominent business schools, as students we had no contact with the business schools, and (implicitly) learned to think of business dismissively.[19] At the University of Chicago in the early 1980s, anthropology graduate students could look out their office windows on Friday afternoons and down on the business students having their usual Friday barbeque in the quad. We often did; it was a matter of smug pride to be working while others played.

This culturally produced sentiment has carried through years and generations. In the mid-1990s, while teaching an undergraduate course in linguistic anthropology at New York University, one of Patti's students who was such a pleasure to have in class and so clearly delighted in and enjoyed the material, was also studying business. As he discussed one day after class how he felt about the fields, he maintained that while anthropology was interesting to him, business was not; his study of business was based solely in matters of practicality. Moreover, not only did anthropology have the courses he liked, they were more intellectually challenging and required more work. He may not have liked his business courses, but he did not have to work at them either; they were easy. In other words, again, a form of double disparagement—business (in the abstract, at least), though practical, was not only boring, it was stupid. Anthropology was for the more intellectually inclined. About ten years later, at the meetings of the Society for the Anthropology of North America, after Patti had given a paper discussing consumer research in anthropology, a graduate student in anthropology approached her. This student had an MBA, had worked for many years in business, and had quit her job to go to graduate school

in anthropology. What perplexed (and annoyed) her was the way business was so frequently characterized in such simplistic terms among anthropologists, and meanwhile anthropology was conceived in different, but equally simplistic, terms by her business friends. Straddling and aware of both worlds, she could not help but be troubled because she knew that neither caricature fit.

This does not mean, however, that a few pioneering anthropologists did not navigate the terrain of business schools and/or business. In the late 1970s anthropologist Steve Barnett was a vocal proponent of anthropology's methods and theory in applied consumer research. Arguably, it was Barnett who made anthropology visible to Madison Avenue during these years through both his consulting practice and his column in the trade periodical *Advertising Age* in the 1980s. His column enlightened on issues such as why cultural beliefs sunk issue ads, why lifestyle was a myth that deserved debunking, how consumers had become performers, and the ways "I seem, therefore I am" had become culturally true. By charismatic force, a discourse of "symbols and meanings" in proposals as well as reporting, a savvy awareness that to be heard cultural analysis needed at the time to coexist with survey results, Barnett demanded that clients consider an alternate way of knowing.[20] Trained at the University of Chicago, Barnett introduced others into commercial practice during the 1980s, including us.[21]

In 1984, anthropologist John F. Sherry Jr. was hired by Northwestern's Kellogg School of Business, not coincidentally into a department chaired at the time by Sid Levy. Since that time Sherry has worked—tirelessly it would seem—to incorporate (or perhaps more accurately, to help reinstate) a cultural, anthropological frame into consumer and marketing research. And the epistemological grounding of marketing's consumer culture theory has clearly felt the impact of work by Sherry as well as colleagues Belk, Hirschman, Holbrook, Wallendorf, O'Guinn, Schouten, Venkatesh, and others—a collaboration forged by the Consumer Behavior Odyssey project in the mid-1980s.[22] The Behavior Odyssey project was a collaborative venture undertaken with the conscious intention to break away from the hardening mold of quantitative research at some remove from "the real world with real people."[23] Nonetheless, academic marketing as a field still takes significant cues from statistics, economics, information processing in particular, and experimental, quantitative paradigms in general—the frameworks that have maintained, in Sid Levy's words, "the irregular situation of qualitative research."[24]

Since the mid-1980s, Grant McCracken has also successfully and consistently inhabited a liminal space between anthropological theory, academic marketing, and marketing practice. He has held positions at Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, McGill University, Harvard Business School, Convergence

Culture Consortium Laboratory at MIT, has an ongoing consultancy that includes Fortune 100 companies, and, throughout, continues writing about consumption and brands, both theoretically and practically.[25] At the time of this writing, though, anthropologists engaged with academic marketing remain in short supply. Even though anthropologists Eric Arnould, Annamma Joy, Janine Costa, and Barbara Olsen also all found independent paths to positions in business schools in the 1980s and early 1990s, anthropologists and the anthropologically oriented on the whole do not necessarily have an easy time within business schools due to their "irregular situation." Anthropology and marketing continue to be oppositional fields, and anthropologists, as a group, continue to keep their distance.

Stigmatized and Shameful

In the crucible of anthropological time and place in which our professional identities were formed, the label "applied" was stigmatic. No doubt resonant with an entrenched dichotomy of theory versus method and practice, and broad cultural distinctions and preoccupations about thinking versus doing, applied work was deemed as less theoretical, less sophisticated, and ultimately less valuable. Once again, the same dichotomous reasoning that allowed anthropology in general to be deemed valuable because of theoretical sophistication and business as less so and simplistic was in action. The ingoing assumption about applied work was also that it was less "pure" and always a little compromised. Moreover, if "applied" in general was "dirty,"[26] consumer research or "marketing" was filthy—wickedly so, in fact. And, discursively, at least in terms of certain industries, it clearly still is.

For instance, when we recently conducted a study for a fast food company, we wanted advanced anthropology graduate students to be part of the research team. In our effort to find qualified students, we sent out the word through our academic contacts. Later, on an e-mail trail which we were probably not intended to see, we noted that the subject heading, penned by a student to a fellow student, read, "Selling yourself to the devil for a few days." For the same project, someone who helps us in video editing, someone with an M.A. in anthropology and ethnographic film, refused to work with us on that job. It was not to be believed that the corporate goal was *truly* to create healthier options. Even accepting that the corporate interest was grounded in a larger financial interest in surviving changes in the cultural climate, the desire was not considered real. Clearly, once framed as the devil, it is difficult to consider any corporate actions as "good."[27] Thus when we tell people that the clients with whom we worked on these fast food projects have been among the

nicest, most thoughtful, most cuisine-interested we have come across, they find it difficult to believe. (Okay, originally it was a bit shocking to us, too.) But the first time we met in Los Angeles, they suggested we do so at a trendy Asian-French restaurant that had been recommended by their corporate head chef. The people we met there cared about food, cared about theory (yes, one had a Ph.D., we learned over dinner), and cared about their kids as well as the well-being of others' kids. The world—and people—are complex and multifaceted. This complexity may not fit our analytic (folk) models, and perhaps we cannot help but revert to oversimplification, but we also recreate the divide when we do so.

In 2002 we carried out a study for faculty and administration of the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. They were in the process of restructuring the Culture and Politics curriculum and hired us to conduct focus groups with Culture and Politics majors as a means to incorporate the student viewpoint into the process. Studies like these do sometimes feel—in the abstract, at least—somehow better, loftier, and more worthy than those on drain cleaners. As Lila Abu-Lughod has pondered in reference to the study of television, "Does the taint of lowbrow status and the apparent banality of television rub off on those who study it?"[28] Yes, it can sometimes seem, and feel, that it would be worthier or more important to study the intricacies of an elite university's curriculum than to study drain cleaning.

But in the doing, there is no question that studying drain cleaning captures and holds the analytic imagination. One need only think back to the emotion and social drama that surrounded the last time a toilet overflowed in your home, or when you stopped up one in the home of someone you barely knew, or when your shower drained slowly enough to feel the water creeping up on your ankles. Moreover, just as a study of garbage hauling leads one to issues of dynastic families and to study television viewing is to look into the very fabric of sociocultural life, stopped-up drains are not trivial issues. An overflowing toilet means one stops everything else and attends to it, and it leads not only to trauma but also to domains of established sociocultural importance.

Based on our experience, we must agree with Sid Levy that applied consumer research work is "exciting and intensely absorbing," an experiential state shared by the graduate students and anthropologists in academic positions who occasionally freelance for us. There is on-the-ground reality of engagement, curiosity, fascination, and commitment to the research goals. In the end, for us, as it is for many other practicing consumer researchers, the work is a long-intertwined explorative ethnography of contemporary life, of people's lives in and around the world of consumption and corporations. We have also found Levy's statement about living the work from "breakfast until bedtime, brooding

over methods of data-gathering and seeking penetrating insights" to be very true.[29] The current compression of corporate time schedules combined with cultural expectations of speed and productivity also assure the "until bedtime" part.[30]

Methodological, Substantive Connections

Within academic anthropology, the traditional notion of research based on in situ, face-to-face, participant observation carried out in one geographic location for a year or more, has been both challenged and upended in the face of contemporary sociocultural realities. Remaining still and focused on one place is not sufficient for understanding a world characterized by the rapid flow of people, objects, and ideas across geographic boundaries. A confluence of available digital technologies, media resources, transportation possibilities, and the like, alongside shifts in geopolitical power and concomitant assumptions, has changed the world, anthropological research, and representational strategies. Multi-sited, multi-modal, multiple vantage point research, that considers and accounts for both changes and endurances across time and space, has been called for. Anthropologists practicing in the applied world of consumer research have noted these same sociocultural realities and frequently commented on how the particular habitus of the business milieu stretches and compels one to come to grips with new forms of research, new technologies, and new representational strategies.[31]

Within business environments the social facts of flatter organizations, portable communications devices, broadband, e-mail, and other technologies have effectively put managers into the perpetual present. While a standard research cycle for product innovation, concept testing, positioning, and branding might remain the same as before, it certainly seems as if now a particular project lies dormant in the pile on the desk (as piles often do on academic desks) until it reaches the surface, at which point it must be put into action. Compression then occurs in every aspect of our work: recruiting, fieldwork, analysis, and reporting. The result is aggressive scheduling and intense, compressed time.

In response to time (and space) compression, ethnography in practice has routinely become one of multiple places, multiple vantage points, and multiple methods. In terms of multiple places, for marketers, that a "moderator," as leaders of focus groups have been traditionally called, would travel to conduct groups with "respondents" in a variety of different geographic locations for a given research project has been standard for decades. This practice, often driven not by the anthropological desire to specify the local, but rather by an inverse desire to assure that data were not "skewed" by geographic specificity when a

product or brand was a national or international one, has been carried forward in ethnographic studies.[32] In our experience, only rarely are studies undertaken to understand the particularities of one context—we instead are often looking for the aspects and insights of what is shared across a larger sociocultural and geographic terrain. In a sense we are hired to consider shared consumerscapes, brandscapes, and globalscapes.[33] Current realities of global brands as well as global product distribution also mean that the ethnographic work of corporate consumer research is often carried out "elsewhere," a traditional, if now deeply contested, standard of honor among academic anthropologists. Much of the ethnographic work currently discussed by consumer researchers—in the academic as well as the popular press—includes an international aspect.[34] Some of our favorite projects, perhaps speaking to our own anthropological predilections, have been ones that have taken us beyond the bounds of the United States. We have investigated the meanings of home in Moscow (in the early 1990s, a time of great change); the meanings of gardens and lawns in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany; refractions of the Chrysler brand in Germany, France, and Japan; the social constitution of emotions among young people in New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States; and trans-Tasman identities.

Multiple eyes and minds focused on a project are likewise a routine part of consumer research practice. In applied consumer research this, too, has roots in the history of focus group rooms in which groups of commenting clients would sit behind one-way mirrors. In the practice of in situ ethnographic work, client presence has generally been incorporated into encounters either by becoming explicitly part of the encounter, or in mediated ways. For instance, in our in situ encounters, we typically have clients join as videographers, note takers, and observers. In the process, considerable emergent tensions must often be managed, as our anthropological outlook to let meanings emerge and to embrace "mistakes" and gaffes as moments of enlightenment tends to conflict with implicit (and explicit) models of expertise and efficiency (see Chapter 8). However, clients' alternate points of view often serve to enrich the impact on what we know and on how we answer the culturally framed questions with which we started. In the topics their priorities bring to the fore (and even in what they implicitly prioritize on tape in their role as videographers), we gain. Engineers specializing in research and development key into details we might not otherwise notice. Numerous ethnographic consumer researchers have noted this positive value of multiple vantage points. For instance, pointing to practices at E-Lab, an ethnographic research firm where many other currently practicing consumer research anthropologists once worked, Christina Wasson noted that the process of data analysis—which included researchers, designers,

and clients—created results that "were certainly far more robust than they would have been if only one or two of the three groups had been involved."[35] Lovejoy and Steele have discussed how the use of Microsoft's Photo Story application, in which product development team members can see photos, hear accompanying narration, and participate in an accompanying blog is helpful in bringing alive the day-to-day of nonlocal research and allows (remote) team members to pose questions during the course of the research project.[36] Erickson and Høyem have also discussed the ways that blogs have been an extremely helpful way to include clients in the research process on work undertaken with young people and technology in China.[37] Ever more frequently, research respondents are also becoming active participants in such blogs.

Routinely, the metaphorical frame of these multiple perspectives is the collaborative team.[38] In fact, from the earliest days of our practice we have undertaken ethnographic and other research projects as a collaborative team effort. This has often been a pragmatic decision undertaken out of the need to complete a large, multi-sited project quickly, but also is not without theoretical grounding.[39] The incorporation of multiple vantage points meshes with epistemological orientations current within academic anthropology, even if these are not always easily realized. As Wasson noted in her discussion of the analyses conducted at E-Lab, one of the reviewers of her article pointed to the positive contribution of multiple vantage points, noting that "such a three-way collaboration, 'even in today's age, is quite unusual' in bridging both disciplinary and organizational boundaries."[40] Notably, in academic consumer research, a team approach (even if only within the discipline) has been more often the rule, not the exception. The Consumer Behavior Odyssey project mentioned earlier is, again, a case in point. Other classic, culturally oriented studies have also been undertaken with teams: Arnould and Price's on white-river rafting, Schouten and McAlexander's ethnographic work on bikers, Sherry, Kozinets, and others on the ESPN Zone and now American Girl.[41]

Augmenting the traditional in situ, face-to-face encounter is also often a pragmatic necessity in commercial consumer research. This augmentation likewise has benefits in terms of the process and outcome of the research, and is an epistemological fit with the realities of studying contemporary sociocultural life. While we incorporate in situ, in-person encounters, we routinely go beyond them by asking participants to reflect for us through diaries, essays, or poems, whether they be verbal or photographic, still or video, before and after our encounters. More and more, methods in applied ethnographic work are also iterative—both in analytic time and in real time. For instance, in a project focused on out-of-home food consumption among twenty-somethings, we first started with annotated photo diaries and focus

groups. Half of the participants were then selected for ethnographic interviews in which our tours of Los Angeles were calibrated by food establishments (including mothers' homes). Realizing in the process that the wee hours were crucial food consumption moments, we then decided to ask our respondents to create video diaries for us of their eating events in the following week. We thereafter gathered them all for a debriefing—a bit of a party as it turned out. Life events had unfolded in the hours bracketed by the focus groups; the boy and girl friends lost and gained turned the final encounter into a palpable singles scene. Moreover, in this project, the clients were a catalyst for geographically dispersed teams, which then came together for the final analysis. The clients commissioned one consulting group to carry out ethnographic work in France, another to carry out work in China, and us to carry it out in the United States. The three consulting groups were then gathered together for a multi-day, mutual debriefing and analysis session in which multiple parties from the corporation were also present. It worked.

Finally, in terms of representational strategies, videographic and other visual representations have been exceedingly important to applied consumer research.[42] As we discuss in more detail in Chapters 9 and 10, visual media have been central to both the process and the representation of our own ethnographic work for many years. In fact, photographs and video have become central in the work of virtually all ethnographic consumer researchers. Visual representation is a *must*—in some ways this is problematic in that ethnography reduced to observation is then simply transduced to photographs and videographic representation. But, as with developments in the terrain as a whole, this emphasis has also created opportunities, and linked us with both longstanding concerns and new developments within academic anthropology and marketing.

In the End

We are, perhaps, inhabiting (yet again) a unique moment of convergence in market research, consumption theory, and anthropology. The voice of anthropologists has been felt in consumer culture theory in business schools. In anthropology, there has been an increase in the numbers of practicing anthropologists working in the fields of technology and design,[43] enhancing the status and recognition of practicing anthropologists and leading to the advent of forums like EPIC (Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference), whose mission is to explicitly bring anthropology's theoretical voice into business practices.[44] Clearly, given events and activities during the last decade, there is an underlying momentum that perhaps also propels a sense of optimism.