EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Comparing Two Cultures

Compare a feature of the culture in the ethnography you're reading now to your own culture. What you compare will depend upon what the ethnographer has chosen to emphasize. There might be good material on the relationships of men and women, the composition and functioning of the family, how goods and services are produced and exchanged, how power is acquired and expressed in the community, what religious beliefs and rituals exist, or how people prevent or treat disease, handle death, entertain themselves, and so on.

Report on the similarities and differences in that area of life between your culture and the culture reported in the ethnography.

- What difficulties did you overcome to decide that some practices and ideas in the two cultures were similar or the same?
- Did you compare by sorting things in the language of your own culture, such as "quite violent/peaceful," or "wealthy/poor"?
- What would your comparison look like if you tried to describe it from the point of view of a participant in the other culture?

Exercise 2: Q-Mode and R-Mode Comparisons

This exercise provides practice in constructing a systematic comparison of multiple cases of a cultural practice in two ways: by the cultures and by the practices.

Decide what is to be compared and which cultures are to be included. Because I've provided a model already, select another calendrical ritual such as birthdays, December holidays (Christmas/Kwanzaa/Hanukkah), or New Year's Eve, which I'll use here because it has some of the same revelry I've seen in *Ati-atihan*.

Your sample of cultures will be drawn from the ethnic or subcultural diversity in class. Your instructor will help the class identify this diversity, based perhaps on data from the survey in Exercise 1, "Who Are You," in "Using This Book." Recruit five or six classmates who have various traditions to serve as informants.

Select the features of New Year's Eve commemoration events that you consider characteristic. For illustration, I might select the following:

1. Special moment is at midnight
2. Date is December 31
3. Watching television to see the ball drop in Times Square
4. Kissing other participants at the special moment
5. Drinking a toast with champagne

Query your informants as to whether their family tradition includes the feature, and file their answers into a table of raw data (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Raw Data for New Year's Eve Practices by Five Informants

	At midnight	Watch ball drop	Kiss	Champagne toast	Dec. 31	Firecrackers
Able	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Baker	Yes	No	No	Beer only	Yes	Yes
Charlie	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Delta	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Easy	No	No	No	No	No	Yes

Table 4.6 Comparison of Six New Year's Eve Practices by Five Informants (Q-mode analysis)

	Baker	Charlie	Delta	Easy
Able	3+	4	4	1
Baker		2	2	3
Charlie			6	1
Delta				1

Note: The beer toast is counted as a partial match ("+") with a champagne toast. Remember, in cultural comparison, most things are "somewhat different, somewhat similar."

Now construct the Q-mode table. You may enter in a cell the number of features in common between two informants, or you may briefly list them—a procedure that retains more data for more detailed analysis later. Your Q-mode analysis will look something like Table 4.6.

Q-mode analysis provides a systematic look at similarities among cultures (or representatives of those cultures, in this case). Which of the cultures in your study are most similar in New Year's Eve practices? Why?

Notice that you can arrange the cultures in their order of similarity to any one other culture; for Able, the order is Charlie and Delta tied, then Baker a close second and Easy a distant third. This pattern might lead to temporal questions (Chapter 5) or ecological questions (Chapter 6) to explain it. (For the mathematically inclined: notice how difficult it is to represent by a graph or three-dimensional model the cultural similarities among all five informants at once.)

Now we invert our attention from comparing whole cultures for which practices they share to comparing practices for which cultures they are in. Construct an R-mode analysis of the data in Table 4.6. This will show how the individual features of the New Year's Eve ritual are distributed over the cultures we've chosen to compare. Enter the number of cultures (informants) sharing the two traits in the cells. Your R-mode analysis will look like Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 Distribution of Six New Year's Eve Practices in Five Cultures (R-mode analysis)

	Watch ball drop	Kiss	Champagne toast	Dec. 31	Firecrackers
At midnight	2	3	1+	4	1
Watch ball drop		2	0	2	0
Kiss			1	3	0
Champagne toast				1+	0+
Dec. 31					1

Note: Again, beer toast is counted as "+" (less than a complete match with champagne toast).

The R-mode analysis provides an overview of the most common features of New Year's Eve and the combinations among features. In my example, four of the U.S. subcultures represented by my informants stay up until midnight on December 31 to mark the event. Three of the subcultures have kisses at that time. By the definition of culture (Chapter 1), these two features of midnight and kisses are the main features of American culture's New Year's Eve practices. Other than those two features, there aren't many widely shared features, but there are a number of alternatives that most Americans probably "know," although they don't "do" them. Silly hats and noisemakers were common in the speakeasy days (the Prohibition era of the 1920s); we see them in films. These features are part of our cultural memory but not our active repertoire.

This R-mode analysis also invites explanation of the less common cases. Firecrackers and champagne seem to be relatively uncommon. Why? How do you explain the uncommon features of your R-mode table?

The outcome of this exercise is the raw data table plus the two charts with brief explanations of what each reveals and what questions it raises.

Exercise 3: Emic and Etic Perspectives

This is an exercise in contrasting and evaluating the two points of view that anthropologists are perpetually juggling.

1. Observe someone performing an activity with which you are unfamiliar. The activity may involve just one actor, as when someone is repairing a computer, or it may involve a small group, as in a foursome in a card game, or it may involve a larger group, as when the technical theatre class strikes a set. As you observe this activity, compare the actions, utterances, and artifacts to those in other activities with which you are more familiar.

   Write a description of about 300 words that situates the activity in comparative perspective. For example, one of the objects in the activity may

resemble something else that you're familiar with, such as a golf club; or, the conversation may be reminiscent of the casual joking that you and your housemates engage in while fixing dinner; or, one of the card game moves may appear similar to one that you know from your card games.

2. Now talk to someone who performs that activity. Request that she or he "talk to me about what you were doing there," and take notes. Encourage your informant to talk, but do not steer the conversation by asking many detailed questions: allow the informant to decide what to say about the activity. In *The Professional Stranger,* Michael Agar suggests how to propel such an undirected conversation. Take notes; look interested; nod; say "uh-huh"; wait expectantly during the breaks; repeat something said, as in " . . . so you bet again after replacing some cards . . ." In this less directive interview method you will probably pick up some of the pertinent vocabulary, insider strategy, social dynamics, and the meanings that participants assign to events and objects.

   Write a 300-word description of the activity from these notes, attempting to capture as much as possible of the informant's report of events.

3. Write a 300-word commentary on the outstanding differences between your comparativist (etic) description and the participant's (emic) description. Also address these questions:

   - Which report is more accurate?
   - Which report is more useful?
   - What limitations in understanding does each description reveal?
   - Should these descriptions be combined in an ethnography of the event?
   - How best could those two descriptions be combined?

The product of this exercise is your two descriptions and commentary.

Exercise 4: Comparison of 400 Cultures

The purpose of this exercise is to interpret and evaluate a table summarizing the statistical comparison of a large cross-cultural survey.

When I was an undergraduate, my professor, Robert Textor, compiled hundreds of cultural variables from the *Ethnographic Atlas*'s recommended Standard Worldwide Sample of 400 well-documented, more-or-less unrelated societies into *A Cross-Cultural Summary* (1967), a cinder-block-sized book of computer-generated tables intended to stimulate insights and check hunches. Because I am interested in life in cold places like Newfoundland, I have chosen to explore the *Summary*'s tables separating those societies dwelling in "very harsh" environments, such as desert, tundra, or high steppe, and those that don't.

Table 4.8 Competitive Displays of Wealth, by Harshness of Natural Environment*

	Competitive Displays of Wealth		
Harshness of Natural Environment	Little or Not Emphasized	Emphasized	Total
Very harsh	15	1	16
Other than very harsh	37	36	73
Total	**52**	**37**	**89**

* $p < .004$ using two-tailed chi-square test.

Within the "very harsh environment" category, I scanned the tables, examining how cultures in such places obtain sustenance, conduct puberty rituals, settle conflicts, and so on. "Competitive Displays of Wealth" looked interesting. This refers to whether or not the culture emphasizes **ostentatious consumption**—displaying possessions as a method of announcing and acquiring social status, the way we Americans might show off a BMW or a Hummer. Table 4.8 shows the data.

The results are "statistically significant," meaning that it is very unlikely that the cultures would have sorted into this table in this way just by chance; so there is something here that needs explaining. We approach this result cautiously because only 89 of the 400 cultures in the worldwide sample are compared; the other 311 have not yet been classified as to whether or not they emphasize competitive displays. Who knows whether the relationship would still hold up if we had data on another 300? But for this exercise assume that the 89 cultures are representative of the entire 400, and thus perhaps of all cultures. If that were so, what do these data suggest to you?

First, take the overview: 16 societies, or 18 percent of the 89 cultures that we are comparing, live in "very harsh" places. If environment were *not* a factor in competitive displays, then those 16 societies would be distributed between emphasizing and not emphasizing displays of wealth in roughly the same proportions as societies in other environments.

1. How are the 73 societies in "other than very harsh environments" split between emphasizing and not emphasizing displays?
2. How does that split compare to the split among the 16 societies in "very harsh environments"?
3. Does environment appear to be a factor, then, or doesn't it?
4. Suggest a reason for the results.
5. Even if the results are statistically significant, why might this table *not* give you confidence in your conclusions?
6. What would be your next step to look into this topic?

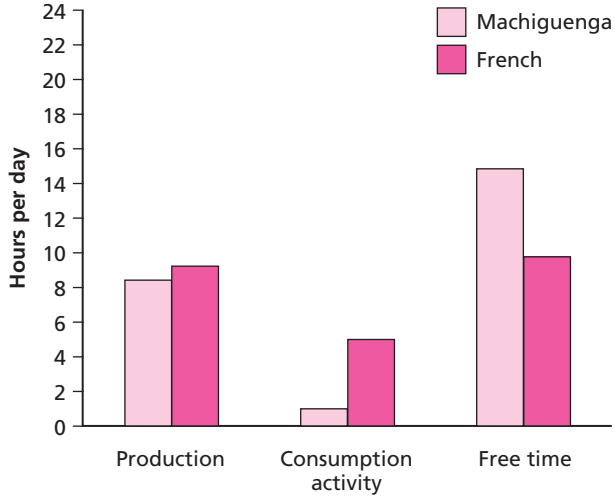

Figure 4.9
Hours per day spent, by activity type, by French and Machiguenga women. (Data from Johnson 1994.)

Exercise 5: Time Budgets—Yours and the Machiguengans'

The purpose of this exercise is to compare original field data on time management by American college students with data from France and a very different culture in South America.

Not surprisingly, our culture isn't a particularly good model of what other people are like. A comparative perspective reveals this. We Americans define affluence, for instance, as having all the right consumer items and affording all the right consumption activities, such as winter weekends in the Caribbean. There is an alternate way to conceive of affluence, which is to be satisfied with less, work less at getting and spending, and accumulate leisure time to hang out with family and friends. Small-scale societies that meet this alternate definition include, among others, the Aborigines of Australia and the Ju/'hoansi of Botswana in their traditional lifestyles (Sahlins 1972b). Allen and Orna Johnson have made a strong case that the Machiguenga of Peru are also affluent by this alternate definition (1994). The Machiguenga maintain a gardening and foraging society in Peru's Amazonian rain forest. The Johnsons kept careful records of how the Machiguenga spend their time and then compared those records to data on time use by middle class French couples in six cities. Figure 4.9 represents the portion of their results comparing married women's time use.

The Johnsons acknowledge that the Machiguenga need and want Western technology (especially steel tools) and medicine, and that comparing such dissimilar cultures in Europe and Amazonia raises many problems of assessment and definition. Their point, however, emerges clearly: economic growth has not meant more leisure time for the French (or for Americans like the Johnsons). Peoples like the Machiguenga, conventionally labeled "poor" and "uncivilized" by Westerners, may have fewer possessions than we do, but control more of their

time. The comparison holds up the mirror that I referred to earlier, challenging our view of ourselves as affluent.

Collect the Data

Compare your use of time with that of the Machiguenga Indians and the middle-class French couples. Record your activities over twenty-four hours for five to seven days, including at least one weekend day. Carry a slip of paper around with you, and a couple of times a day reconstruct what you were doing during each hour. Don't put off making the notes: people's ability to recall their own routine behavior is typically poor, which is one reason ethnographers rely on participant observation. After each twenty-four-hour period, transfer your notes to the database in Table 4.9.

After completing all the days of self-observation, conduct the following analysis. First, sort each of your activities into one of four categories: production, school, consumption, or free time.

> **Production time** is "work" or maintenance activities, such as a job, shopping, child care, cooking, bathing.
>
> **School time** is attending class, lab, and other academic events, required or otherwise, and out-of-class work such as reading, writing papers, and studying for an exam. (The Johnsons combined school time with consumption time, but since school is one of your main life responsibilities these days, we will combine it with production time for comparisons; such defining and grouping is clearly one of the difficulties of cross-cultural comparison!)
>
> **Consumption time** includes eating or "consuming" any of our culture's goods and services, such as watching TV, playing with athletic equipment, pleasure reading, going to church, and traveling.
>
> **Free time** is sleeping, resting, visiting, chatting, killing time, just "hanging," and low-key unstructured play.

Everything you have done during these days needs to fit into one of the four categories. Some discussion in class may help to reach agreement about how to handle uncertain cases, such as when you're doing two things at once (watching TV and chatting, for example; in that case, perhaps split the time spent between consumption and free time). When you have decided on a category, mark a P, an S, C, or F in that time frame on Table 4.9.

- Add up the number of hours spent each day in each of these four categories and record it in the columns in Table 4.10.
- Calculate the *average* number of hours a day you spent in each of these four categories and record it in the last column in Table 4.10.
- Add your daily average for productive and school time together for the next step.

Table 4.9 Daily Record of Activities

Date:

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Midnight							
1 AM							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							
11							
Noon							
1 PM							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							
11							

Table 4.10 Hours per Day I Spend in Production, School, Consumption, and Free Time

Activity	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Daily Average
Production								
School								
Consumption								
Free Time								

Table 4.11 Hours per Day Spent in Three Societies in Production, Consumption, and Free Time

Activity	*Machiguenga*		*French*		*U.S. Students*	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Production*	7.8	8.4	9.7	10.8		
Consumption	1.4	0.9	4.7	3.8		
Free Time	14.8	14.7	9.6	9.4		

* Includes U.S. students' school time.

- Calculate averages for production (includes school), consumption, and free time for the class men and the class women; then record these averages in the "U.S." columns in Table 4.11.

Interpret the Results

- Do U.S. students compare with the French, the Machiguenga, or do U.S. students represent a third pattern?
- Perhaps school time should be categorized as consumption time, because, after all, students are paying for the experience. How does the comparison change if you subtract student school time from the production row and add it to the consumption row in Table 4.11?
- Is there as much difference between U.S. men and women as there is in the other two cultures? What might this imply about sex roles in each of the cultures?
- The Johnsons clearly demonstrated that "economic development does not mean more free time," but do you think that the French and the Americans want free time? Perhaps instead they want consumption time, to play with their computers or to snorkle in the Bahamas. Perhaps the most interesting contrast between the Machiguenga and us is not their play versus our work, but their free time versus our recreation-by-consumption. Why does our culture prefer recreation-by-consumption to what the Johnsons call free time?

The product of this exercise is Tables 4.9–4.11 and comments on the above questions.