will want to write that perspective into your study. Had Reema's boy thought or written about his insider status, education and field training, family history, and geography, he might have asked different questions and gotten different answers. Instead of leaving out personal, subjective information, fieldworkers should write it in. The subjective perspective—as opposed to the objective one—admits the researcher's presence as she goes about her fieldwork.

Horace Miner's study of the Nacirema (reprinted in Chapter 1) satirizes the so-called objective traditions of natural science that once dominated the field of anthropology by describing everyday routines such as brushing our teeth as stylized ceremonies or rituals. Today, most contemporary scientists, in both the natural and the social sciences, realize that objectivity is not possible—that the observer is part of the person or culture observed.

In fieldwork, **positioning** includes all the subjective responses that affect how the researcher sees data. Readers of ethnography sometimes wonder how this kind of research could be considered social "science" if the researcher is not offering "objective" data. In fact, fieldworkers achieve a type of objectivity through **intersubjectivity**, the method of connecting as many different perspectives on the same data as possible. These multiple sources encourage the fieldworker to interpret patterns and interrelationships among various accounts alongside the researcher's own account and to leave other interpretations open as well.

Being the researcher so influences your fieldwork that it would be deceptive *not* to include relevant background information about yourself in your study. From our own experiences as fieldworkers, we believe that as a researcher you position or situate yourself in relationship to your study in at least three ways: fixed, subjective, and textual.

Fixed Positions

Fixed positions are the personal facts that might influence how you see your data—your age, gender, class, nationality, race—factors that do not change during the course of the study but are often taken for granted and unexamined in the research process. Does it matter that you are middle-aged and studying adolescents? Or that you grew up on a kibbutz in Israel? Does being a middle-class African American affect the way you interpret the lives of homeless African Americans? How does your gender affect your perspective?

Our word *fixed* is problematic; nothing is truly "fixed." Sometimes fixed factors are subjected to change during the research process, and then that, too, demands the researcher's attention. If, for example, a male researcher looking at the play behaviors of preschool children becomes the father of a girl during his study, he may find himself looking at his fieldsite data not only through his own eyes but also through those of his infant daughter. If what originally seemed a fixed influence in the researcher's position becomes more fluid, then that process of changed perspectives would become part of the researcher's data.

Subjective Positions

Subjective positions such as life history and personal experiences may also affect your research. As we described in Chapter 1, fieldworker Renato Rosaldo found that his wife's death altered his perspective toward studying another culture. As he began to understand his grief and rage, he relied on his subjective feelings to understand the Ilongots. Living through a flood, an earthquake, or a hurricane may change your stance toward the world around you.

But it does not take disaster, death, divorce, or illness to alter our perspective. Someone who grew up in a large extended or blended family will see the eating, sleeping, and conversation patterns of groups differently than someone from a small nuclear family. What seems to be a crowded room in a small household is not a crowded room in a home with extended family. Many people who grew up in large families confess that they learned to eat quickly at family meals because they wanted to get their fair share before the food disappeared. During their thirty-year marriage, Bonnie's husband, an electronics engineer with a history of "do-it-yourself" repairs, insisted on fixing their own appliances. For four years they lived with two jury-rigged interconnected TV sets—one for the picture and one for sound. Bonnie saw them both as broken, and her husband saw them both as usable. The children just watched the two sets.

Textual Positions

Textual positions—the language choices you make to represent what you see—affect the writing of both fieldnotes and the final ethnographic report. The way that you position yourself in the field with respect to the people you study—how close or how far away you focus your research lens—determines the kind of data you'll gather, the voice you'll create in your finished text, and to some extent your credibility as a researcher.

BOX 11

Positioning Yourself

Purpose

This activity will help you uncover the assumptions, preconceptions, personal experiences, and feelings that influence you as a fieldworker by writing about them throughout your research process. In this way, you will become conscious of your positioning as a researcher.

Action

Consider a site or subculture you might choose to research: a tattoo parlor, the lobby of a nursing home, a community theater, a convenience store, a fingernail salon, a group of pheasant hunters, workers on break, an airport check-in counter. What are your reasons for choosing this subculture? Which of your own "fixed positions" may affect what you see? What "subjective positions" do you carry into your site?

Write a short commentary describing how your positions might affect what you'll see at your fieldsite. (Writing short commentaries regularly will help you understand how fixed, subjective, and textual positions affect your continuing research process.)

Response

Sokcheata Lom tried out this exercise while she was thinking about where she might study tae-kwan-do. Her writing allows her to discover that her fixed positions and her subjective positions (the personal "baggage" she carries into the research site) can affect the textual position she will take as she writes. Sokcheata reflects on how her experiences might affect her position as a researcher. At the outset of her study, she decides that joining a tae-kwon-do class will help her to become an insider.

> During my field study, I know some factors might affect my view of things: my gender, my age, and my class schedule. When people think of tae-kwon-do as a means of self-defense, they assume that men are stronger than women. So being female and trying to become an insider might influence how I construct my position. Age shouldn't be a major factor because tae-kwan-do is a subculture for all ages. But when you think of it, age does play a role. If you had started young, you would have had more time to accumulate knowledge and skill than if you had started when you were older. As I tried to work out my schedule for observing the tae-kwon-do class, I found that I had to sacrifice some of my study time to do the necessary on-site research and observation. So scheduling has become a major factor in making this field study come out well.
>
> From a subjective position, I would like to study this subculture to learn self-defense. Learning a martial art would help me have more confidence and make me feel safer. Having grown up in a violent community in Los Angeles, California, I always sense danger when I'm walking near people I don't know. And some incidents have happened on campus to fuel my fear—and to make me even more interested in learning self-defense. Learning tae-kwan-do while I do my study is a plus for me.