her clinical day or even meet her at home, you would need to inform her of your plan and see if she is willing and available to give you that much of her time.

2. ***Beneficence*** Researchers should protect informants against risk from harm and also from the loss of any substantial benefit that might be gained from research. Let's say, for instance, you're working with a punk rock band that has fallen on hard times. You write an exciting essay about their ups and downs. You sell it to a magazine. In this instance, you are profiting from their story. As an ethical researcher, you should either share the profits or not sell the story.

3. ***Justice*** We need to select our informants fairly, without creating undue pressure, especially for people who already experience burdens. In this country, for example, in the 1940s, the Tuskegee syphilis study used disadvantaged, rural black men to study the untreated course of a disease that is by no means confined to that population.

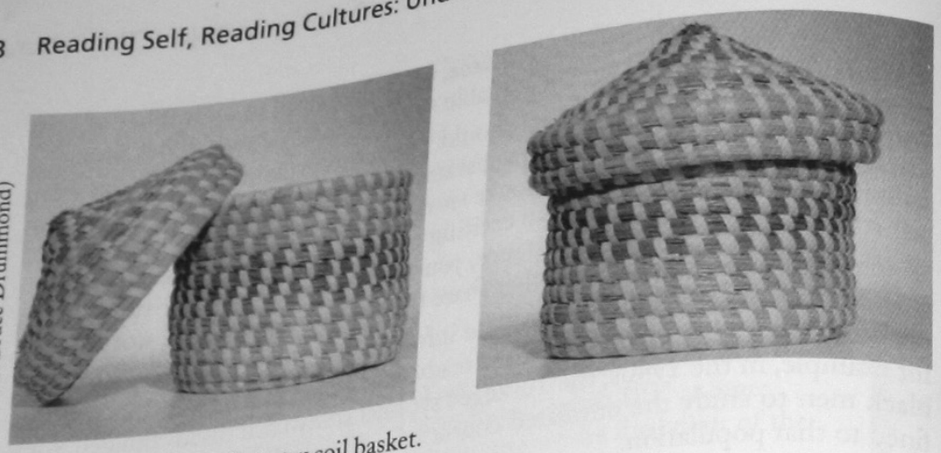
These three principles from the Belmont Report cover the ethics of research in the United States in all disciplines across research communities. Whether you're working in a lab on stem-cell research, studying the behavior of penguins, working in a soup kitchen, or writing about a punk rock band, the basic ethics are the same—respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

Reading an Object: The Cultural Artifact

As you enter the field, you should train yourself to notice material objects—**artifacts**—that represent the culture of that site. Karen's writing about the three phone calls she made to gain access to the Photo Phantasies store (see pp. 138–39) revolves around one particular artifact, the letter she sent to Ginny, the manager who finds reasons not to talk with her. She also uses artifacts—the black turtleneck, brown jeans, minimal jewelry—to explain what she calls her "standard look" and contrast it with the glamorized look that belongs, she thinks, to Photo Phantasies.

Objects are readable texts. As you read an object, your position as researcher affects your reading just as it affects the way you read a fieldsite. You can investigate the surface details of an object, research its history, or learn about people's rules and rituals for using and making the object. Researchers—folklorists and anthropologists—use the term **material culture** to refer to those personal artifacts loaded with meaning and history that people mark as special: tools, musical instruments, foods, toys, jewelry, ceremonial objects, and clothes.

Everyone wears jeans. But not all jeans convey the same cultural meanings. Some mean utility, some fashion, some status. Jeans that have been painted, beaded, patched, stone-washed, bleached, ripped, or tie-dyed by their owner (not purchased that way in a store) can be read as objects that mark the wearer's place in popular culture. But we cannot know the meaning of an object through observation alone because our eyes can deceive us and there are meanings that



(Photos: Bruce Drummond)

South Carolina Low Country coil basket.

lie beyond the surface of an object. Japanese collectors, for instance, pay thousands of dollars for old pairs of American denim jeans. To search for the meanings of any cultural artifact, we need to look at the people who create, collect, and use it. The best way to learn about the meaning and value of an artifact is to ask questions about the object and listen carefully.

As you look at the photographs of the basket above, think about the kinds of questions you might want to ask the owner or the basketmaker. How is it made? How old is it? What is it used for?

On the surface, it is a woven basket with a lid. But the basket holds a coiled history, a collection of stories that belongs to its makers, its sellers, and its owners. The basket itself is an artifact produced by several interconnected cultures. It is made by African American women on the coast of South Carolina, near the city of Charleston, not far from Gloria Naylor's fictional Willow Springs. The basketmakers use natural materials (coastal sweetgrass, palmetto fronds, and pine needles) found on the southeastern coast of the United States, much like the plants their ancestors knew on the western coast of Africa. These baskets come out of a strong craft tradition of using available materials to make everyday objects. It is a tradition that daughters learn from mothers, who learned it from their mothers, who learned it from their mothers. The basketmaking technique represents a long chain of informal instruction over many generations of craftswomen. And each generation—in fact, each basketmaker herself—adds her own technique and her own circumstances to what she has learned. During their years of American slavery, for example, African American women modified kitchen implements, such as spoons, to create the tools they needed to continue making baskets according to their traditional designs.

But knowing the history of this craft and even holding the basket in your hand does not speak about the object the way the maker does. When Bonnie interviewed a basketmaker in the Charleston marketplace, a middle-aged woman named Wilma, she learned more than the observable and historical details we described here. Bonnie was already positioned by knowing the history of this craft

from reading about the tradition and having heard her mentor, folklorist Burt Feintuch, lecture on exactly this topic. So when she visited Charleston, she was eager to find a basketmaker who would talk about her craft. Bonnie wanted to buy one of Wilma's baskets, one with a beautifully tight-fitting top. As they examined it together, Wilma explained the challenge of pulling the fresh sweetgrass, weaving in palmetto fronds, and keeping the pine needles fresh enough to bend. After the basket is finished, Wilma said, it is important to coil it all carefully and work it with an awl-like tool made from a spoon. Bonnie complimented her on the top. so well. "My cousin is the only person in the family who can make a tight top. My tops just float around. She's good at making tops. I'm good at selling them." This conversation contained important firsthand information about the stories that lie inside cultural objects. The information from Wilma—about her cousin, the awl-like tool made from a spoon, and the separate roles she and her cousin took—explained that the craft of basketmaking, like much folk art, is a collective endeavor that involves not only a long history of instruction but also a family of craftspeople who establish rules, determine roles, and invent new methods to carry on an old tradition. Bonnie's subjective positioning from her knowledge of folklore and her history as a basket collector affected the way she "read" Wilma's basket. And Wilma's story of her family's craft unpacked another layer of meaning and cultural knowledge.

When researchers read an artifact, they try to unpack the stories that lie inside it and to understand the interplay between tradition and creativity. Objects carry traditions of form, function, and symbol: how they are made, how they are used, and what they mean to people. But while they carry on a cultural tradition such as making pottery, cooking foods, or working with wood, objects can also show how individuals digress from tradition. Each craftsperson remakes the object in a unique way according to what materials are available, what needs it must serve, and what the craftsperson's artistic sensibility brings to it. Wilma, her cousin, and her great-grandmother each had an opportunity to put their own creative mark on the basket-weaving tradition. They were reproducing an ancestral tradition in their culture, a stable core of purpose and technique. But at the same time, each had an opportunity to remake it as her own.

BOX 13

Reading an Artifact

Purpose

The everyday objects people use inside a culture are often so utilitarian and taken for granted that the members of the culture don't recognize them as being important or symbolic of their history. An outsider is more likely to notice

them and wonder where the objects come from, what they're used for, who makes them, and why they're made the way they are. All of these facts become clues to the traditions, rituals, values, rules, and behavior of a cultural group.

Action

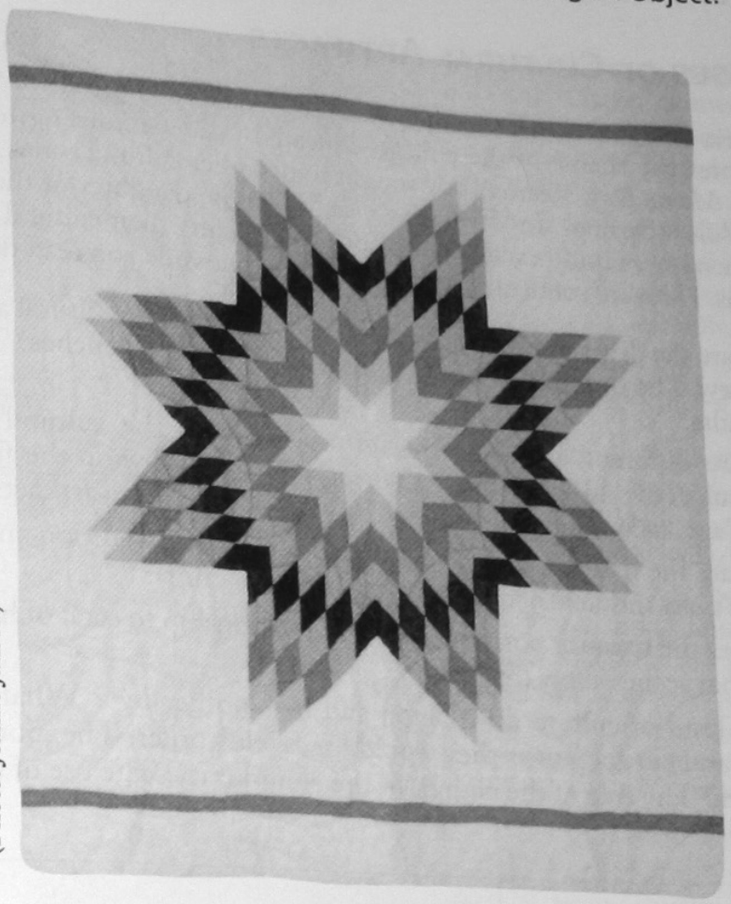
Try your fieldworker's gaze on an everyday object: a musical instrument, a tool, a piece of furniture, or an article of clothing. If you are already involved in your fieldwork, you'll probably want to choose something you've collected from your site for this exercise. Observe it. Take fieldnotes while you study it. As Professor Agassiz would have said, "Look at your fish!"

With the help of your notes, try to describe the external details of the object. Sketch it, map it, or photograph it. If you can, read about its history in the library or online, and interview either the owner or the creator. Then make an interpretation: What does it say about the person who uses it? The person who made it? How are you positioned to see the object? What did you already know? Why did you choose the object? Finally, what does the object teach about the culture from which it comes?

Response

Our colleague and student Jeanne Janson wrote about the cotton quilt made by a Lakota woman on the reservation where Jeanne taught. Her positioning among Native Americans allowed her to read this quilt in ways that an outsider might not see. The quilt maker was the grandmother of one of Jeanne's high school students who was grateful for the extra help that Jeanne had offered her grandson. This excerpt from Jeanne's written account of this quilt as an artifact shows how she reads its history and culture, its tradition and creativity:

> Even though this quilt was made on Standing Rock Indian Reservation in South Dakota, I suppose it does have much in common with the European and North American tradition of quilting. The materials and techniques used—the appliquéd scraps and the double layers of cloth with batting between—were no doubt borrowed from the European quilt tradition. But the designs the Lakota Sioux women use go back in their own culture for at least a thousand years, long before the arrival of Columbus.
>
> Originally the designs appeared in porcupine quillwork, which used either normal porcupine quills laid out and sewn into hide or flattened porcupine quills, which were dyed colors and were wound around cords to form intricate designs when the cords were sewn beside each other on the hide. When Queen Victoria made beads popular in England and they spread to North America, Native Americans took to beadwork instead of quillwork because the beads were already dyed and they were much more durable than the delicate



(Photo: Jeanne Janson)

Lakota Sioux star quilt.

porcupine quills. But the designs used for the beadwork remained the same as they had been for the porcupine quillwork.

I think the Lakotas' exposure to cotton quilts came a bit later—I'd guess the 1890s, when they were forced to stay on the reservation and use government-issue wool blankets on beds in houses instead of buffalo robes on hides in teepees. The Bureau of Indian Affairs schools taught girls how to sew the "white man's way," so that was probably where they learned how to make quilts. But the designs they use today on the quilt covers are the same star designs used in the traditional quillwork and beadwork.