GUIDELINES FOR CRITICAL REVIEW OF A RESEARCH ARTICLE

Critical Review of a Research Article

Researchers examining mobility, group size, demography, gender relations of forager groups often come to contradictory conclusions, even when they use the same data sets. What are we to make of these contradictory findings? Learning to critically review research articles – by asking questions, like: what exactly is studied, how is it studied, and are the conclusions warranted by the findings? – will help you to evaluate the findings and formulate your own scientific understanding of forager societies.

You will write one critical review of a research article on a theoretical topic or major debate that we cover in this course. A sign up sheet with topics will be circulated in class.

You can find scholarly articles about forager societies in the databases of ISI Web of Science, Academic Search Premiere, JSTOR, AnthroSource, in the review articles from the Annual Review of Anthropology (posted on Carmen), and the reference list of Kelly’s Foraging Spectrum (1995). I encourage you to start with reading the relevant chapter in the Foraging Spectrum.

All students have to choose different research articles; there cannot be two students who review the same research article. Students have to notify the instructor immediately when they choose a research article (by email or in person). I will use the principle of first come, first served.

Your choice of research article has to be approved by the instructor at least a week in advance (see dates below). The topics and dates are:

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<th>Topic</th>
<th>Approval by</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<td>Optimal foraging</td>
<td>10/4</td>
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<td>Gender hierarchies</td>
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<td>Sexual division of labor</td>
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<td>Sharing</td>
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<td>Egalitarianism</td>
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<td>Complex forager societies</td>
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<td>Kalahari Debate</td>
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<td>11/13</td>
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Three double-spaced pages is ample for a clear, concise review. At the top of your first page you should have the full reference of the article, following the guidelines of the American Anthropological Association (AAA). For example:

Smith, E.A.
This assignment consists of three parts: summary, critique, and suggestions.

1. First, summarize the design and findings of the study in about 200 words.
2. Then, analyze and critique the following three aspects of the study:
   a. Statement of the problem and the research question(s);
   b. Methods, including data collection and sampling methods;
   c. Author’s analysis of results, conclusions, and interpretations.
3. Finally, briefly suggest how the problems identified in your analysis could have been resolved or minimized. If you were conducting the study, what would you do differently (including starting over from scratch)? This section should be brief; do not write a research proposal.

How convincing an author’s conclusions are will depend on soundness and adequacy of methodology, logic of the argument(s) the author uses, and quality and nature of the data. But how convincing you find the author’s conclusions and interpretations will also depend on your views, knowledge, and experience. For example, you may be more readily convinced of conclusions based on modeling or cross-cultural comparisons than of conclusions based on ethnographic fieldwork.

You will submit your critical review in hard copy to me on the due date (listed above) and you have to attach a hard copy of the research article to your review.

**Writing a Synthesis of the Topic for the Wiki**

Together with other students you will collaboratively write a 2,000-word synthesis or encyclopedia entry of the topic for the wiki. You will use your critical reviews as well as material from lectures, discussions, readings, films, and other sources. You will write and publish the synthesis on the wiki. I will evaluate your entry at the end of the course on November 27th. Until then you have the opportunity to continually improve your entry.

The synthesis will be evaluated in terms of coverage, accuracy, accessibility, readability, neutrality and objectivity.

An example of a description of a relevant topic (Behavioral Ecology) from Wikipedia is posted on the wiki. This is not necessarily a good example. I expect you to write a much better description.

This wiki entry will be graded on November 27.