Preface

The research described in this book began when we found ourselves sitting next to each other at a workshop dinner at the University of Michigan more than two decades ago. We talked. The patterning of shared and distinctive perspectives made the prospect of research collaboration exciting. When graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and faculty colleagues were added to the mix, a community of scholars evolved to address what we think are fundamental theoretical, empirical, and methodological issues at the interface of anthropology and psychology.

The research was and is intense. In the field, hot days of interviewing were followed by heavy nights of analysis, spiked and lightened occasionally with rotgut rum (not charged to our grants). We worked through discussions that ranged from competing definitions of culture and nuances of cultural modeling to speculating about how soon the first Jet Skis would be seen on Lake Peten Itza in the Guatemalan rain forest. We vividly recall one night of analyses when the power went out (a not infrequent occurrence). We continued in the dark, going from three to two to one computer as battery power played out. Finally, we called it quits for the night when we could no longer distinguish between the cursor and the insects landing on the computer screen.

Not everything was fun. This sort of research is expensive, and we spent an inordinate amount of time writing grant proposals. In a classroom, if you flub an experiment, you can go to the next class. In the field, you may have to wait for the next season—if you’re lucky—to get people from several countries, universities, academic disciplines, and different forest activities to coordinate schedules again. It also was not a thrill to discover that the first set of soil samples we collected was useless because the critical identifying information was put down on paper in pencil, only to become some unidentifiable fungus after being enclosed in the humid sample containers. Finally, we collected so much data that sometimes we spent a lot of time tracking down where the original data were and in what stage of analysis.
These examples are exceptions. There’s a lot to be thankful for. Our informants often found our tasks to be meaningful and engaging, but also sometimes from Mars or the Evening or Morning Star (they originally took our computers for some kind of *sastun*, a sorceress stone akin to a crystal ball). They argued with us about why you can’t just think and therefore be, but had to think about *something*, or why soldiers marched with their arms swaying in lockstep—not because they were big-brained robots but because that’s a fine way for a group to fan itself on a hot day. And they laughed and laughed, and made us laugh, whenever we stumbled with words or on a forest hike, and they always picked us up. Sometimes they became partners in the research enterprise by pointing to problems with our procedures and suggesting other avenues to pursue. Our community of scholars constantly demonstrated the excitement and value of interdisciplinary research. And as for the data—well, we couldn’t have made up results that were as intriguing as those we obtained. We are happy to share them with the reader (as they stand in 2007).

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