



# Anthropology for Product Management:

How can an anthropologist help me build and sell better products?

Paula Gray, Anthropologist

# My Background

- Anthropology is my *second* career
- Classically trained chef (culinary school graduate) worked at The Lodge at Pebble Beach
- Returned to school to get undergrad double major in Anthropology and Sociology
- Grad school in Applied Anthropology

# What I do....

- Study product managers around the world to inform the AIPMM
- Consult with company teams of product managers to assess and address gaps in
  - People
  - Process
  - Discipline
- Train product managers and marketers
- Conduct ethnographies and market research for companies



What is  
anthropology?



Study of  
humans within  
the *cultural*  
context

Q

What is Culture?



A

A shared set of beliefs,  
values, language,  
norms, taboos,  
traditions, customs,  
symbols



Geographic





Interests



# Demographic

Q

What does culture do?





The (internal) lens through which a person sees the world

1

Colors *everything* they  
see



2

Every thought and  
behavior is conducted  
within the cultural  
context

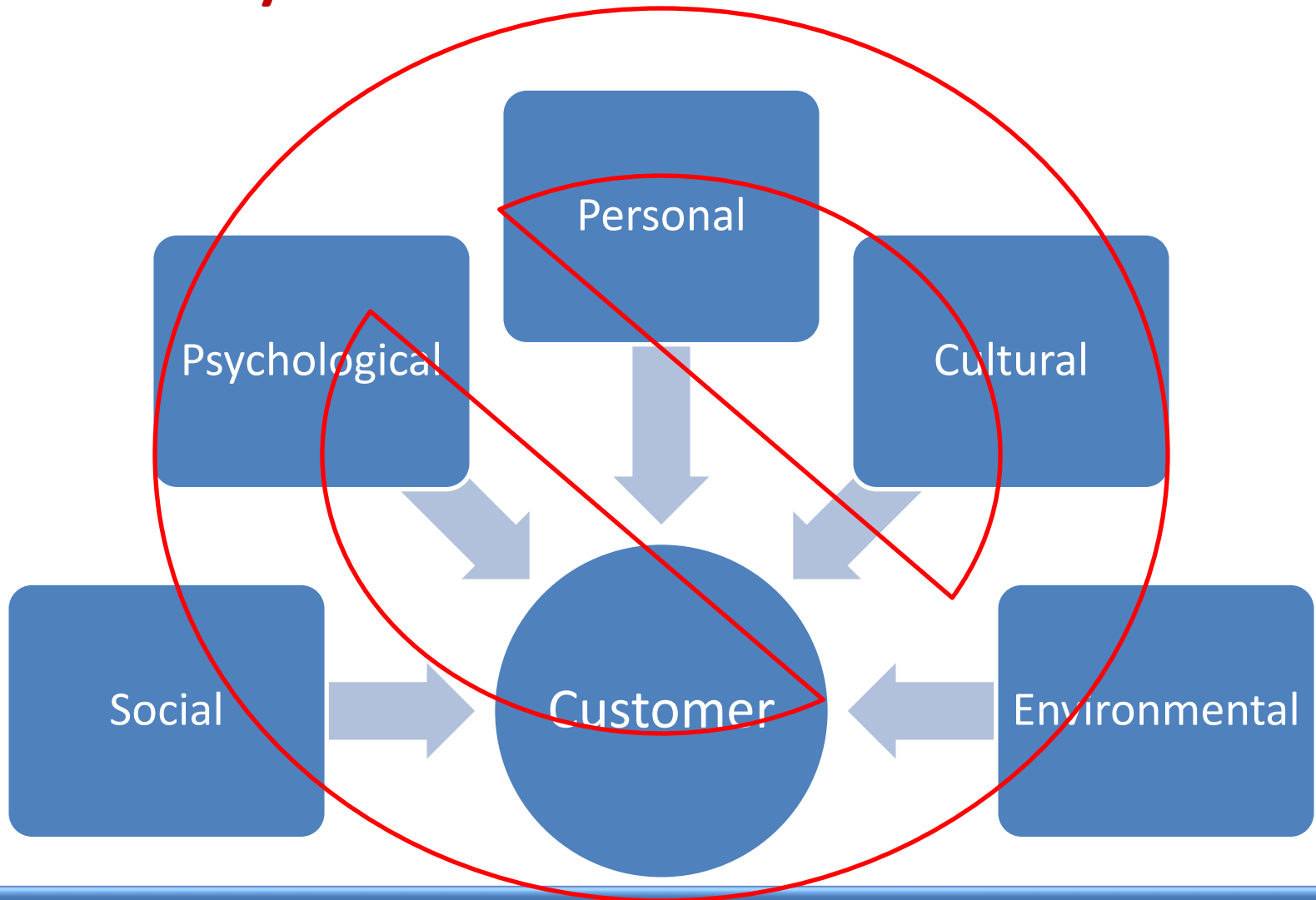
3

It's how we know  
what's "normal" "cool"  
"gross" "inappropriate"

# My Pet Peeve....



# Buyer Behavior Influences



# A More Accurate View





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Why is anthropology  
relevant to business?

1

Employees and team  
members

2

Customers

3

Clients

B2B

4

\*\*\*\*(businesses don't buy products, people or a group of people do)



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Who Employs  
Anthropologists?

- Boeing
- Motorola
- Walt Disney
- Microsoft
- General Mills
- Hallmark
- Procter & Gamble
- Frito Lay
- Intel
- Citicorp
- AT&T
- Sapient
- AIPMM

Q

Why do they hire anthropologists?

# 1

Communicating in a  
globalized (cross-  
cultural) world

# 2

Avoiding  
preconceptions and  
recognizing varied  
perspectives

Understanding those  
different “lenses”



# 3

Gathering, integrating,  
synthesizing and  
analyzing data for

New Product Design

Branding

Repositioning/Line  
Extensions


Geographic targeting –  
emerging markets

# 4

Trend toward product  
pull vs push

# 5

Deeper understanding  
of the whole picture of  
a customer



*“Companies should target consumers as whole human beings who consist of minds, hearts and spirits. The point is not to overlook the spirit.”*

Philip Kotler in Marketing 3.0: From Products to Customers to the Human Spirit

Q

What is Ethnography?

A

Method by which anthropologists study a group of people

# A

Involves participant observation

Behavior in its natural environment

VS behavior in an artificial environment (focus group, lab)

Observing environment and external influences

Observing actual vs ideal behavior



# Ethnography Uncovers



1

Unarticulated needs  
Scent for cleaning  
products

# 2

Symbolic meaning of  
behaviors, products,  
brands

Harley Davidson vs  
BMW motorcycles

# 3

Beliefs and values tied to product context

Financial services  
(savings for retirement,  
credit card)

Meaning of “breakfast”  
(value associated with  
healthy)

# 4

Actual product usage  
patterns

Hand washing  
frequency

Library search



*“Close observation of the boss [the consumer], and her active participation in the process of innovation, results in a more precise definition of the key needs, the price points, the route to reach her, the business model and the cost structure. And it all starts by doing something simple – keenly watching consumers, face-to-face, knee-to-knee, and listening, with ears, eyes, heart, brain, and your intuitive sixth sense.”*

*[Citing L’Oréal’s success introducing a mascara in Japan, the CEO] “told the Financial Times, ‘We never would have seen [the potential] in a focus group.’”*

A.G. Lafley and Ram Charan in *The Game-Changer*

# Other Tools in the Anthropologist's Toolbox

- Linguistic Anthropology
  - Survey Questions, Interviews
    - Language is symbolic
    - How respondents answer is as important as what they answer
    - What is omitted offers valuable data
    - Language patterns reveal beliefs and values
      - “magic” “voodoo”

# Other Tools in the Anthropologist's Toolbox

- Analysis
  - What patterns emerge?
  - What does the data *mean*, reveal?
  - How can that inform business decisions?

# Resource Book List

- **Marketing 3.0: From Products to Customers to the Human Spirit** by Philip Kotler
- **Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action** by Simon Sinek (anthropologist) *-read cover to cover*
- **Chief Culture Officer** by Grant McCracken (anthropologist) *-read cover to cover*
- **Kiss Bow or Shake Hands** by Terri Morrison and Wayne A. Conaway *–use as a reference book*
- **Ethnography for Marketers: A Guide to Consumer Immersion** by Hy Mariampolski (anthropologist) *-read cover to cover if it applies directly, use as a reference if indirect*
- **Creating Breakthrough Ideas: The Collaboration of Anthropologists and Designers in the Product Development Industry** by Susan Squires and Bryan Byrne (anthropologists) *-read cover to cover if it applies directly, use as a reference if indirect*
- **The Culting of Brands: Turn your Customers into True Believers** by Douglas Atkin *-read cover to cover*



# Other Interesting Things...

- iPhone App:
  - CultureGPS (based on anthropologist Geert Hofstede's 5 cultural dimensions)
- Video:
  - PBS Frontline, The Persuaders  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/persuaders/>
- My paper:
  - *Business Anthropology and the Culture of Product Managers*

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Thank You!

Jeff Lash

St. Louis Product Management  
Community

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